

HOUSING: Hermiston growth has outpaced development of new housing

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Mabbott said the next step would be a deeper analysis of those parcels, looking for barriers such as lack of infrastructure or regulatory roadblocks. That information could help build an inventory of "shovel-ready" residential lands in the county and highlight trends for the work group to focus on.

The land inventory shows Hermiston and Pendleton virtually tied at 5,510 and 5,509 residential parcels, respectively. Only 522 of Pendleton's parcels remain undeveloped compared to 915 of Hermiston's.

Numbers only tell a piece of the story, however. Not all land is created equal, as Pendleton community development director Tim Simons well knows. Many of Pendleton's remaining residential lots are on a steep grade with bedrock just below the surface. Modern engineering makes building homes on those plots possible, but not necessarily cost effective.

"You can build on it, it's just going to cost you a pretty penny," Simons said.

He said that bare land also tends to cost more to begin with because sellers place a premium on the fact that the property has a "view."

If developers are looking for flatter, sandier land in the Pendleton area, they will mostly find it outside of Pendleton's urban growth boundary, which means it is also outside of the reach of city water and sewer and other services. The state won't let Pendleton extend its tightly drawn urban growth boundary, however, until it infills more of its residential parcels inside the boundary — parcels developers see as too expensive.

"It's frustrating for us, and frustrating for the community," Simons said. "We're between a rock and a hard place."

Hermiston's residential lands tend to be easier to build on, at least from a physics standpoint. The city is flatter and doesn't have as much bedrock to contend with.

"We have nice, sloping hills," city planning director Clint Spencer said.

Hermiston is still facing a housing crunch of its own, however, thanks to booming growth that has outpaced development of new housing. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows more than half of Hermiston's workers commute to their jobs from outside the city.

Spencer said the price of bare land in Hermiston has been driven upward due to demand, making it more difficult for developers to create projects that pencil out financially.

"Bare land cost is entirely a market-based issue," he said. "There is nothing we can do to impact the selling price."

What the city can do, however, is make sure its own codes aren't driving costs even higher. The planning department is just beginning a project to adjust city codes to reduce setbacks and other regulations that are discouraging residential development.

Housing shortages aren't just a problem for Umatilla County's larger cities. The county's land inventory shows Ukiah has 43 undeveloped residential parcels, but city recorder Donna Neumann said only two of them are for sale.

"We don't have enough housing," she said. "We have some folks who want to move up here and can't find a lot."

She said the city doesn't have the money to give financial incentives, and doesn't own property it could offer for residential development. If Umatilla County is looking to help cities find solutions to their housing shortages, she said, it's possible Ukiah could benefit.

On the county level, 407 of the 570 undeveloped residential parcels in the unincorporated parts of the county lie around the Hermiston/Umatilla/Stanford area. Mabbott said some of that is prime farmland, however,

"You can build on it, it's just going to cost you a pretty penny."

— **Tim Simons**, Pendleton community development director, on remaining lots that are on a steep grade with bedrock below

and it would not necessarily serve the county well to try to encourage growers to turn those fields into a housing development.

She said it makes more sense for the county to focus on helping cities encourage residential development in their urban growth boundaries than to spend a lot of resources trying to increase housing development in the unincorporated areas.

"Each piece requires a well and a septic system and a road, and that's not cost effective," she said. "It's available, and it's an option, but it's probably not the best place for us to focus our resources."

Possible next steps for the work group Mabbott is putting together includes helping cities to update their Goal 10 Housing Chapter in their comprehensive plans, hosting a work session with Oregon Housing and Community Services staff, developing a list of "shovel ready" residential lands, identifying barriers and costs for new roads or traffic signals needed to support new residential development, analyzing the condition of current housing stock, conducting and audit of zoning codes and holding a recruiting event for housing developers.

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SCHOOL: All 250 sixth-graders will participate in Outdoor School

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Schulze, who teaches science at Sunridge and used to help coordinate Outdoor School for the district, described it as a seminal experience for middle schoolers.

"It's the one thing they remember," he said.

About 20 students from Pendleton High School, many of them Outdoor School alums, serve as camp counselors along with the teachers who accompany their class. Everyone wears a homemade wooden name tag, and are split up into groups named after animals — such as the owls, or the bears, or the eagles.

Launched in 1971, Pendleton is home to the longest continuously run Outdoor School in Eastern Oregon, but it hasn't always been smooth sailing. The program has nearly been eliminated at least three times, the last coming in 2011 when the district was forced to cut 21 teaching positions and lop 10 days off the school year.

The community united to save Outdoor School, with parents and businesses nearly doubling their fundraising goal of \$15,000. Now the program is back in the district budget, costing around \$22,000 per year including food, transportation and teacher stipends.

"You get the feeling people would give their right arm to help Outdoor School," Schulze said.

Voters also approved a ballot initiative last year that calls for \$20 million in lottery funds to pay for Outdoor School for 50,000 students statewide, though the Legislature may delay that funding as it works to pass a balanced state budget.

Regardless of where the money comes from, Schulze said the program is a worthy investment.

"These experiences can awaken something in kids they don't forget," he said.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Sunridge science teacher Chris Schulze gives instructions to a group of sixth-graders during outdoor school Thursday at the Kiwanis Camp.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
John Dadoly, with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, talks about groundwater with a group of students Thursday east of Pendleton.

All 250 sixth-graders from Sunridge will participate in Outdoor School during May, arriving on a Wednesday and staying at the camp through Friday. The curriculum includes field studies, where students learn about things like plants, wildlife and water quality. Buck Creek serves as the backdrop, flowing into the South Fork Umatilla River as it cuts through the dense, green forest.

Other activities include art projects and trying new recreation activities, like

boating or archery. By Friday, the kids will be ready to tackle Buck Mountain, a steep mile-long hike that provides a panoramic view at the top.

"A lot of kids, they never see that. They never experience the top of a mountain," Schulze said.

Jones-Hoisington said the camp is like a big sleepover with her friends and classmates. The activities teach them about teamwork as well as nature, and why it is important to protect the environment, she added.

"In the future possibly, we won't even have forests," Jones-Hoisington said. "The trees give us air, and protect the animals living here."

John Summerfield, a social studies teacher at Sunridge, has been helping to coordinate Outdoor School for 10 years. He remembers the program as a sixth-grader himself, attending school in the Gresham-Barlow School District, where they stayed at Camp Howard along the Sandy River.

"Kids are out in nature, getting a great experience and a variety of different opportunities to appreciate the outdoors," Summerfield said. "This is a sixth-grade rite of passage."

Taking a moment to admire the surroundings, Schulze said there is nowhere else kids would want to be to learn.

"Most kids would rather be active and outside, touching things." A room with four walls does not always suit them."

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EASTERN OREGON FORUM *Presents*

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THE COST IS FREE TO MEMBERS AND STUDENTS; FOR ALL OTHERS THE COST IS \$6.00 AT THE DOOR



Stuart Roberts joined the Pendleton Police Department in 1994 and became chief in 2003. He graduated from Pendleton High School, Western Oregon University and the FBI National Academy. He is a past president of the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police and is on the policy board for the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards & Training. In November 2016 he was awarded the Public Service Award from the Oregon Peace Officers Association for his work on a regional school security initiative, which included evaluations of facilities, training of staff and development of threat assessments and collaborations with law enforcement.



Paul Kemp is a founding board member of Gun Owners for Responsible Ownership. He has worked in the consulting engineering industry in Portland for 30 years and has volunteered for a variety of nonprofits including Camp Namanu, Habitat for Humanity, Big Brother and the Trauma Intervention Program. Paul enjoys the outdoors skiing, climbing, sea kayaking, rafting, canoeing, fishing, hiking, backpacking and hunting. He grew up hunting with his dad, uncles and grandfather in Michigan and enjoys hunting and target shooting with his son. His first trip to Pendleton was in 1979 while working for the U.S. Forest Service as a firefighter in the Blue Mountains.



John Turner retired as the president of Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton, Oregon on June 30th, 2013 after serving as president for the previous nine years. He retired from the U.S. Marine Corps as a colonel with 28 years of active service on June 4, 2003. He has been married to his wife, Gail, for 36 years. John holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Oklahoma and a master's degree in international affairs from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He was a Federal Executive Fellow in the strategic studies program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and taught at the University of Nebraska in the naval science and history departments. John is now serving as the Pendleton City Mayor.

For more information about the EO Forum, please contact: Karen Parker at 541-966-3177.

The EO Forum is a collaborative effort among leaders from Blue Mountain Community College, InterMountain Education Service District; the East Oregonian; American Association of University Women; and Harriet Isom; a former United States ambassador who also serves on the committee. This EO Forum program is offered as part of Blue Mountain Community College's annual Arts and Culture Festival. For more information on the festival go to www.bluecc.edu.