



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The Aspens Apartments in Hermiston consist of 48 family-sized apartment units that are part of the Umatilla County Housing Authority's 364 low-income units in the county.

HOUSING: Hermiston changed its residential standards to encourage more homebuilding

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Equipment and Threemile Farms, for stepping up to help employees in the area find housing.

"When I moved here in 1989 I couldn't find a place to live. ... We've had that problem here continuously ever since," he said.

It's a region-wide problem.

Stan Stradley, Umatilla County Housing Authority director, said vacancy rates for apartments in Umatilla County are at about 1.4 percent, and waiting lists for subsidized housing grow longer every year. The housing authority manages 364 low-income units in Umatilla County and also distributes Section 8 housing vouchers. Stradley said as the quality of housing stock gets worse and landlords decline to fix problems, fewer apartments in the area meet HUD standards for vouchers.

New apartments in Boardman will likely draw in some people who have been commuting, freeing up some more rentals in places like Hermiston.

"Any housing will help relieve some of the overcrowding," Stradley said.

The housing authority purchased a 12-acre piece of land north of Stanfield for a 40-unit rent-subsidized housing project to help with shortages there, but its grant application to the state for money to build the project has been unsuccessful three times. The authority plans to submit another application in January, but Stradley said it is hard to get funding because much of it goes to Portland-area projects, and other cities around the state are also low on affordable housing.

"For the most part everyone's feeling the crunch," he said.

Last week the state and county hosted a joint meeting in Hermiston to get input on an Oregon Statewide Housing Plan being put together.

Government housing assistance programs are based on percentages of median income, which in Umatilla County is \$58,100 for 2017. Stradley said the data the federal government uses to calculate median income is usually a few years old, so minimum wage increases or new family-wage jobs take



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A model home stands on property that is part of the Virginia's Place development in Umatilla.

a few years to affect housing eligibility. The HUD website states that Umatilla County's 2017 median income was calculated using U.S. Census data from 2010 to 2014.

Mark Morgan, Hermiston's assistant city manager, said he has worked with apartment developers who have looked at building more units in Hermiston, but part of the problem is that the land, labor and material costs of construction are so high that to pay for it the complex would have to charge more than most people are willing to pay for a rental in Hermiston. Home prices have gone up in the last couple of years, but for a long time if rent went up by very much people would realize they could be putting that money toward a mortgage payment instead.

"You kind of bump up against that threshold," he said.

It doesn't cost developers that much more to build a complex in Portland or Bend instead, but they can charge hundreds of dollars more per month for each unit after it's built. And while some companies are focused on benefits like cheap utilities, Morgan said at least one company in the last couple of years decided to build in Pasco instead of Hermiston because it would be easier for employees to find housing there.

Even for those who can afford to own a home, finding something that's open in the right price range can be difficult. Hermiston recently changed its standards for residential development — allowing more lot coverage and shorter setbacks — to encourage more homebuilding in the area.

City planner Clint Spencer said developers are already

taking advantage of the new rules, which allow more homes to be placed in subdivisions and therefore increase the profit margin on new developments. He said Hermiston is seeing a "mini-surge" of subdivisions, including a new one just approved for Gettman Road. Other nearby cities are also adding new housing.

"I'm actually fairly excited for where, regionally, we will be in another year," he said.

Umatilla has had some good luck in housing development lately too, with construction work just beginning on a 28-lot subdivision called Virginia's Place in McNary across Willamette Avenue from the Big River Golf Course. Another 56-lot subdivision on South Hill east of Powerline Road plans to start construction at the end of the month, according to community development director Tamra Mabbott. She said in the McNary subdivision 25 percent of the lots are already spoken for, and there are a couple more subdivisions in the area that are in planning stages.

Mabbott credited City Manager Russ Pelleberg for actively calling up contacts in the Tri-Cities and finding developers willing to put up new homes in the Umatilla area. She said it can be hard to compete with the larger profit margins that come from building on the west side of the state.

"The big challenge is to get developers to come here and build ... here in Umatilla we're just feeling fortunate that we have a couple of developers willing to come in and do something," she said.

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SMOKE: Two councilors voted against the ban

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Cook said he met with Police Chief Stuart Roberts about his previous concerns about enforcing the ordinance, which prompted tobacco ban supporters to propose a six-month education program so the ban could become more self-enforcing.

Roberts said he wanted the public to have realistic expectations about the ban, especially since some members of the public already get upset when an ordinance violation doesn't end in a citation or arrest.

George Cress, a former director of light and power for the city of Forest Grove who now lives in Pendleton, testified that he was a city employee when Forest Grove banned tobacco on all municipal property.

Although there were enforcement concerns, Cress said an educational campaign does a lot of the leg work. Additionally, health insurance rates went down as city workers stopped using tobacco on the job.

Despite receiving no public testimony in opposition to the ordinance, some councilors were still

skeptical.

Councilor Neil Brown worried that banning tobacco would lead to a slippery slope, where something like cheeseburgers, which are also unhealthy and can lead to litter, would also become the target of a ban.

Councilor Paul Chalmers made a motion to approve the ban with an initial six-month grace period on enforcement during the educational campaign and a two-year sunset provision.

Chalmers' motion was passed 6-2, with Brown and Councilor Becky Marks voting against it.

FORESTS: At the earliest the revised plans may be signed and in place by August 2018

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to re-evaluate stream conditions on grazing allotments within five years, or three years if the waters are home to threatened or endangered fish. Roberts said that is not a realistic goal, given the agency's staffing levels.

Tom Montoya, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest supervisor, said the forests are considering a longer-term implementation of the guidelines, and emphasized that livestock grazing continues to be a priority on the landscape.

"(It's about) making sure we still have a viable industry out there that is doing things continually as they have in the past, in a really responsible way," Montoya said.

Apart from grazing standards, the Eastern Oregon Counties Association is pushing to increase the pace and scale of restoration projects to improve forest health and fire resiliency. Arbitrary rules — such as regulations for cutting 21-inch-diameter trees to protect old growth forests — have "no basis in science," they argue.

The counties also do not support any new wilderness or wild and scenic river designations, and aim to maintain a road network of at least 2.5 miles of road per square mile of land, which

is the current standard in the forests. Umatilla County Commissioner Larry Givens said they need to make sure local residents "aren't kept from viable economic stability, whether it's ranching or logging."

"We all realize we can't have it one way. But we're asking for some compromise," Givens said. "Let's be reasonable here, because there is room for economic stability in these communities involved."

Givens said he was pleased that Monday's meeting included the National Marine Fisheries and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, so they could discuss the science driving the Forest Plan revision. Both agencies are responsible for providing a biological assessment of the plan to protect endangered fish and wildlife.

Peña, who will ultimately sign off on the revised plans, said it was an opportunity to ask questions and remove some of the mystique of the inter-agency consultation.

"I think there is the perception they're not out in the field," Peña said. "And I think they were kind of able to dispel that belief."

After releasing a highly controversial draft environmental impact study for the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision in 2014, the

Forest Service decided to step back and re-engage with stakeholders and the public to garner additional input. That input, Peña said, has led to two new plan alternatives which are now under consideration by the Forest Service.

"We're trying to get this right," he said. "I want this to be an improvement over what we've been managing under for the last 20 years. I think we're getting there."

Even after the final environmental impact statement is released, there is still work left to do. From there, the plans are subject to a 60-day objection period, and a 90-day resolution period to respond to objections. At the earliest, Peña said the revised plans may be signed and in place by August 2018.

Walden, who serves as Oregon's lone Republican member of Congress and has vouched for forestry reform in the House of Representatives, said he feels the Forest Plan revision is gaining some positive momentum after confronting some deeply held concerns.

"We'd all like to get this plan done. It's a 10-year plan that's taken 14 years to write," Walden said. "We have to live with it for the next decade once it gets into place. It's essential we get it right."

DACA: Arrests of immigrants have increased nearly 40 percent in just the first four months of this year

Continued from 1A

announced Sept. 5 that the Trump Administration plans to dismantle DACA in the next several months, unless Congress enacts it legislatively.

Federal agents have targeted undocumented immigrants at "sensitive locations" such as courthouses, schools, places of worship and hospitals, Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey wrote in the June 29 request.

"The president's executive orders and the steps taken by the Department of Homeland Security to implement these orders have generated new fears and uncertainties in immigrant communities across the country," Healey wrote. "Families are afraid to send their children to school. People are avoiding necessary medical treatment. Victims and witnesses are not reporting crimes or cooperating with state and

local law enforcement."

The "chilling effect" of the new policies "undercuts public health, safety and welfare," and the Trump Administration's lack of transparency surrounding enforcement is "exacerbating the fear in immigrant communities," she wrote.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services confirmed receipt of the request July 6. The agency noted that the statutory time limits for fulfilling the request could not be met because of "unusual circumstances," and said it would be necessary to extend the deadline beyond the 10 days allowed in law, because authorities would need to collect data from field offices.

The lawsuit claims federal agencies have not denied the request but have withheld details on circumstances that prevent the disclosure. They also have failed to provide contact information for their

FOIA liaisons to discuss the request or timeline for fulfilling it, according to the complaint.

The states sought the information because the federal government has intensified immigration enforcement and expanded "the scope of people targeted for enforcement," according to the complaint. For example, arrests of immigrants have increased nearly 40 percent in just the first four months of 2017, according to an ICE report.

"It is critical for ... states to understand the nature of federal immigration enforcement activities and the effects of these activities on the residents and law enforcement agencies of the respective states," the complaint states.

The other states joining in the lawsuit are Massachusetts, California, Hawaii, Iowa, Illinois, Maryland, New York, Washington and the District of Columbia.

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