

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Tip of the Hat, kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to the Umatilla County Housing Authority and their role in securing just over \$8 million for a new housing development in Stanfield.

Patriot Heights will break ground next spring at a predicted cost of \$253,000 per unit. The 12-month construction project will be built by Hayden Homes — which builds homes in Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

The funding comes from a number of sources, including low income housing tax credits, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's HOME program and the National Housing Trust Fund.

The state has been locked in a housing crisis for a long time, as illustrated by a report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition. In Oregon, a person needs to make \$21.26 an hour to afford the rent on a two-bedroom home, according to the coalition's calculations, or work 79 hours a week at the minimum wage. Thirty-nine percent of Oregonians are renters, and their average income works out to \$15.44 an hour. No wonder so many people are barely making it.

The lack of housing, though, isn't just in Oregon. It is a nationwide problem.

Oregon's "housing wage" — the

hourly pay needed to keep rent from consuming more than 30 percent of income — was 17th highest in the nation. In one-third of the states, the problem is worse. California ranked third — behind Hawaii and the District of Columbia — with a housing wage of \$32.68. Washington state was eighth, at \$26.87. That helps explain why people keep moving to Oregon even though affordable housing is hard or impossible to find: They are likely to be coming from places where the problem is even worse.

When we cover new homes being built in western Umatilla County, the prices of \$250,000 to \$350,000 are often out of reach for many residents, leaving more and more people in the growing area to fight for the same few apartments and affordable homes. The problem is that the cost of land, materials and labor make it impossible for developers to get a return on their investment with \$600 a month apartments or a \$180,000 home. The only way that kind of housing shows up in the area is with state or federal dollars subsidizing the project, as is the case with Patriot Heights. Those in the area who can go after such grants will need to continue to do so if the area is to get more affordable housing.

Umatilla, Stanfield and Echo recently got a state grant for a housing



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
A vacant parcel of land along Highway 395 in Stanfield will soon be home to a 40-home, federally funded housing development called Patriot Heights.

study to look at what's available now, what the need is and what they can do to better fill that need. We hope they find some good solutions and work to implement them.

A tip of the hat to Portland resident and outback biker Tomas Quinones who discovered 73-year-old Gregory Randolph near death in a remote region of the state recently.

Quinones was biking across the remote section of the Oregon high desert when he came upon Randolph near death after being stranded for four days. Quinones did not have cell-phone service but hit the SOS button on his GPS tracking device and began to help Randolph. Randolph was later transported by ambulance to a hospital and Quinones went on his way. Quinones' quick action and devotion to saving another life deserves the highest praise.

A kick in the pants to people who continue to disregard common sense and leave their animals in cars as the temperature climbs. At least for the foreseeable future, temperatures are going to continue to climb as we move into the last phase of summer. An animal left in a vehicle — even for a short time — can immediately be at risk of serious injury. Just last month a Medford man faced a felony charge for animal abuse after he fell asleep and left his dog inside a car. The animal did not survive.

A tip of the hat to the Hermiston School District and Good Shepherd Health Care System for their effort to provide a wellness clinic for youths during the upcoming school year. The concept is a good one, but what is best about the venture is the cooperation between the two entities to make a difference for students.



YOUR VIEWS

Recall effort taking focus away from more important issues

The editorial board rightly pointed out that the recall effort is taking time away from addressing more important issues. For every dollar and hour spent trying to recall Gov. Kate Brown, organizers could be registering voters, identifying legislative priorities for the next session, and strengthening community organizations that will represent their regional interests in Salem.

The board also rightly expressed a frustration among Eastern Oregonians that officials in Salem, especially Democrats, tend to have a tri-county skew. Oregon's vibrancy hinges on more Portlanders thinking about the opportunities and challenges facing Pendleton residents and vice versa. Our elected officials need to understand what life is like in every part of the state if they are going to craft laws that impact every corner of it.

But these two rights are paired with a wrong: The board claims this recall effort is serious but beyond spotting a few canvassers, they don't provide any evidence to suggest that this recall effort won't end up like the last — achieving nothing but misdirecting energy. Oregonians don't need a contentious recall vote to once again evidence the electoral strength of Democrats. What Oregonians need is greater participation in the political system by folks un beholden to toeing the party line and untied to advocating for only their slice of the state.

**Kevin Frazier
Tualatin**

OTHER VIEWS

Farmland loss is a national crisis, and felt mightily in West

Anyone who has taken a recent drive in America's western states can see first-hand what we at American Farmland Trust have been saying for years: Our farmland is disappearing at an alarming rate.

Between 1992 and 2012, 31 million acres of farmland and rangeland disappeared, according to research from our recently released "Farms Under Threat" analysis — the most comprehensive study ever on agricultural land loss in the U.S.

While 31 million acres may not sound like a lot, at AFT, it set off alarm bells. It represents as much agricultural land as is in the state of Iowa. And, perhaps more importantly, 11 million of those acres were our best and most productive agricultural land — land most suitable for intensive food production with the fewest environmental impacts.

In a region so important to the nation's food supply, AFT's mantra and famous bumper sticker, "No Farms No Food," is more poignant than ever. This region grows over 300 commodity crops, from apples and cherries, to potatoes, to sweet corn seed, to hops. It also has one of the fastest growing populations in the nation, and with that comes the demand for housing, shopping malls, schools, and highways — all resources that eat up farmland.

If we want to continue to enjoy the benefits of local farmland and rangeland — not just for delicious food and as a pillar of our economy, but also for the many important environmental benefits it provides — we must come together as Westerners to take action now.

This was made abundantly clear in the recent article "Western farmland continues to disappear," by Brad Carlson, in the *Capital Press*.

Let me reiterate and even illuminate important points made in Mr. Carlson's article.

The numbers coming out of Idaho, as noted in the article, and the numbers coming out of the West in terms of farmland loss are downright scary. We need local and state officials to pay attention to this and to invest in funding and tools for farmland protection.

It is also important to consider how one allows development to happen. Planning is important. Urban sprawl and low-density development are both very damaging to farmland. It is easy to recognize urban sprawl and perhaps simplest to address, compact growth strategies have worked well in communities. Low density development poses an

equal threat to farmland, but is insidious, often not recognized before it is too late. This is development that pops up in rural areas creating pockets of houses surrounded by farmland.

Not only does this kind of development chew up prime land, it makes it more difficult for farmers to farm and often leads to the disappearance of key farming services and infrastructure like equipment and seed dealers.

Investing in tools like agricultural conservation easements is also critical. Agricultural conservation easements are a way to keep working farmland and rangeland working forever — by extinguishing the development rights on a property and compensating the landowner for the value of those development rights. The land stays in production and in private ownership and can be sold or handed down to heirs — but with the promise that it will not be taken out of agriculture.

These issues get more and more critical with a massive generational transfer of land on the horizon. In Oregon alone, two-thirds of the agricultural land will change hands in the next decade or so — and the majority of those landowners don't have an identified heir or succession plan. Across the West, including in Idaho, AFT is advancing programming to help a new generation of new and beginning farmers access land.

We need to double down on protecting agricultural land in the West.

In Washington state, we're calling on the legislature to continue investing in the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, the only state source of funding for farmland protection.

In Oregon, the legislature has an opportunity to fund the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program, which would be the first state funding source for agricultural land protection and supporting a new generation of farmers.

And in Idaho, we are calling on elected leaders, especially in the Treasure Valley, to ensure good planning to protect our land base — and invest in supporting farmers and ranchers.

Perhaps it's even time to consider a funding source for agricultural conservation easements in Idaho. After all — No Farms No Food and, perhaps, even No Future!

Hannah Clark is American Farmland Trust's Pacific Northwest region director.



HANNAH CLARK
COMMENT