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Round-Up still on as cases climb

Rapidly replicating delta variant's impact not equal across Oregon

By **BRYCE DOLE AND GARY A. WARNER**
EO Media Group

PENDLETON — Umatilla County officials said they personally will not take any action to prevent the Pendleton Round-Up from happening. But with cases rising at greater rates than almost anywhere else in Oregon, they voiced concerns about the state stepping in.

Joe Fiumara, director of Umatilla County Public Health, said he is sure there is a point the state would act if the county did not, but he does not know what that point is.

"I don't know what it would take for them to do that, but rising case numbers I think do put Round-Up at risk," he said.

Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer also said he's fearful the Round-Up could be at risk of being shut down if cases continue to climb, but added he's "cautiously optimistic" it will happen.

"You won't see the commissioners shutting that down," Shafer said, referring to Round-Up. "No way."

He said the economic and social benefits of the event are why it's essential the Round-Up continues as planned.

"It's part of our heritage," Shafer said. "I think it's too important to shut that down."

The county has reported more than 400 COVID-19 cases since the state and county lifted nearly all pandemic restrictions and effectively reopened on June 30, according to state data. It has consistently reported daily case counts that rank among the highest in Oregon, rivaling even Portland metro counties.

The county on Thursday, July 22, reported the highest daily total in the state with 48 new confirmed and presumptive cases. The Oregon Health Authority the same

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New housing projects begin

Pendleton housing market tight with just 10 homes for sale

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — At \$1,500, the monthly rent for Larry Lehman's home was nearly double the median gross rent for the city of Pendleton.

Nevertheless, when he put the three-bedroom house on the market a few weeks ago, he received more than 40 inquiries about the home. Many of the inquiries he received pleaded with Lehman to choose them for the home, which he had begun renting out eight years ago after downsizing to a condominium. Despite all the calls and messages, Lehman ultimately rented the house to the granddaughter of a woman he met at the real estate office.

Lehman isn't just any Pendleton landlord, but a former city manager who oversaw city government from 1993 to 2011.

"We've always been told about our housing shortage," he said. "But not at this level."

Pendleton suffers from the same problem facing cities of all sizes around the country: More people want to live in Pendleton than there are houses for them to live in. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than half of Pendleton workers don't reside in the community, a fact city officials have used to argue that more people would live in town if the housing market weren't so tight. Housing construction has shown signs of life in recent years following an extended period of stagnation, but 2021 is starting to show larger breakthroughs on the horizon.

On Wednesday, July 21, local officials and stakeholders held a groundbreaking for Wildflower Apartments, an affordable housing development on Southwest 18th Street, near Olney Cemetery. An apartment complex had been planned at the site for years under a previous developer, but the project stalled as the developer sought multiple changes to his incentive deal with the city. In 2020, the city brokered a deal with Chrisman Development of Enterprise to buy the property and continue the project.

At the ceremony, Mayor John Turner reminded the audience the project was as much replacement as it was addition, a development the state is sponsoring to offer victims of the 2020 Umatilla River floods replacement housing. Roberto Franco, the assistant director of resources and production for Oregon Housing and Community Services, told the roughly three dozen people assembled for the groundbreaking that the development also could help newcomers to Pendleton.

"They can establish their roots in this community as well," Franco said.



A group of local officials and stakeholders break ground Wednesday, July 21, 2021, on the 80-unit Wildflower Apartments affordable housing complex in Pendleton.



Pendleton Mayor John Turner speaks Wednesday, July 21, 2021, during a groundbreaking for the new Wildflower Apartments, an 80-unit affordable housing development on Southwest 18th Street in Pendleton.

"WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN TOLD ABOUT OUR HOUSING SHORTAGE. BUT NOT AT THIS LEVEL."

Larry Lehman, former Pendleton city manager

After the ceremony, developer Doug Chrisman said he expected Wildflower — an 80-unit complex comprised of two- and three-bedroom units — to start housing tenants by the end of 2022.

Across town, the nonprofit Horizon Project is proceeding with South Hill Commons, a 70-unit affordable apartment complex on the east side of South

Hill. Having already acquired an option on 3.5 acres of land from the city, Horizon recently secured funding for the development. In an interview, Horizon CEO Terri Silvis said her organization still has a number of steps it has to undertake before it can begin construction, but she hopes South Hill Commons will break ground in 2022.

While both projects were announced years ago and haven't broken ground, Turner said in an interview the 200-unit Westgate Apartments and a 33-unit complex at the old U.S. Forest Service building at Southwest Hailey Avenue still are working with the city to move those projects forward.

If every one of these projects comes to fruition, it could mean nearly 400 new rentals in Pendleton on top of any other projects the city isn't involved in. But the for-sale market also is strapped for new inventory.

Jef Farley, a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker Farley Co., said Pendleton has only about 10 houses available for sale in what's considered a market that heavily favors sellers.

Whether it's familial connections to Pendleton or urban flight, Farley said there's a strong desire from people outside the area to move in.

"That's the first time in my career that I've been able to say that," he said.

Turner said local developer Dusty Pace is looking to build new "executive-style" homes south of Southwest 18th Street and the city is continuing to talk with other, unnamed developers about single-family housing developments.

Despite all the new housing possibilities, both concrete and potential, Turner said he doesn't know whether they will be enough to meet demand and make Pendleton's housing market more accessible and affordable.

The Pendleton City Council is reanalyzing its goals, but Turner said the plan is to keep its goal of issuing 50 housing permits per year, which the city has averaged the past four years, in place until at least the end of the year.

Beacon of the Sentinels rises over Pendleton

New art installation is near Highway 11 and Southeast Court Avenue

By **BEN LONERGAN**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — As Johnny Blagg and Charles Denight watched the installation of the Beacon of the Sentinels on Tuesday, July 20, in Pendleton, they reflected on the years of work that led to its creation.

"It feels just terrific to have people showing up to look at it," said Denight, a member of the Pendleton Arts Committee. "It's a strange feeling because at

the same time you're excited but you're also relieved it's done."

The new art installation and park, rising from the site of a disused fountain near the intersection of Highway 11 and Southeast Court Avenue in Pendleton, began as a much more humble project in 2018.

Then, Blagg, an Air Force veteran and a member of Pendleton Veterans of Foreign Wars went to the



People explore the new Beacon of the Sentinels art installation at the Pendleton Military Tribute during its unveiling Wednesday, July 21, 2021.

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