

Joseph poised to ban short-term residential rentals

January vote likely on new ordinance to clarify rules

By Steve Tool

Wallowa County Chieftain

The Joseph City Council crept nearer to a resolution on residential vacation rentals after two hours of attempting to hammer out details for a new city ordinance at a Dec. 9 council/community workshop. It was the continuation of a discussion from the Council's Dec. 4 meeting.

The council is addressing the issue because several Joseph homeowners have inquired about the possibility of creating vacation rentals within residential zones inside city limits.

According to Joseph Mayor Dennis Sands, an existing ordinance forbids the practice, but contains some gray areas because it was written before the advent of vacation rental websites such as FlipKey.

A dozen interested parties on both sides attended. The issue is not the regulation of legally recognized hotels or bed and breakfasts, but rather the practice of buying homes in residential zones and renting them to tourists on an overnight or weekly basis.

Sands and four council members attended, along with City Recorder Donna Warnock. Sands requested no comment from the public until the end of the session, when speakers would be given three minutes to air their position.

Councilor Teresa Sajonia said that while she sympathized with both sides of the issue, the Dec. 4 testimony of Corey Lewis regarding the difficulty of working citizens to find affordable Joseph rentals convinced her that the city should not allow rentals in residential zones within the city limits.

"If we find more people doing vacation rentals we'll lose our locals, we'll lose our kids," she said. "I think the effects will be huge if we go ahead and allow it."

Councilor Sharon Newell, who also is a deputy sheriff, echoed Sajonia's sentiments and said neither Joseph or the Sheriff's Office have the resources to monitor rentals and their guests.

"The money we would make from this on the hotel tax wouldn't nearly compensate us for what we'd put up with," she said.

Councilor Pearl Sturm stated she was against the practice as well, but wondered if shutting down current rentals wouldn't invite lawsuits.

Councilor Tyler Evans said he thought the city's current laws were unclear as to whether the practice was allowed to start with, and he also didn't think the other council members understood the city attorney's recent draft ordinance regarding the rentals. He added that current rentals should be ordinance regulated whether the council voted for an outright ban or not.

"If you issue permits, you can track it," Evans said. "You can tax it and you can manage the system. ... I think people who are transients staying here are going to spend more on average than people who live here (on a long-term basis)."

Evans also did not buy the suggestion that vacation rentals had a major impact on available rentals for full-time residents.

Joseph resident Kathy Siebe surprised many in attendance when she said she had renovated a Joseph residence to use as a vacation rental — with the permission of City Hall. She said the city told her at the time that no ordinance barred the practice and that she would be "grandfathered" in if the

city banned vacation rentals. No one on the council questioned her version of events.

The vast majority of Joseph residents who testified were against vacation rentals on the premise that it destroyed the city's sense of community.

La Grande resident Jeff Whitaker announced that he had retained Enterprise attorney Zachary Hostetter to represent his interests in attempting to convert a long-term rental near the rodeo grounds into a vacation rental. The property is zoned Industrial/R-1 (residential). Whitaker said he did not ask permission from the Council because he thought it was "probably workable."

While Whitaker said he originally didn't intend to pursue legal action, he said had considered his rental a home-based business much like that of a home-based mechanic or Pampered Chef dealer.

"If you're going to go down on or hit Airbnb or these (vacation rentals), you better hit everybody — make sure everyone understands the rules that you have to have a conditional-use permit," Whitaker said.

Whitaker also argued that his vacation rental didn't change the neighborhood dynamic in that people were just living there and that as no exchange of money took place on the property, it didn't qualify as a business.

Following the meeting, Sands said he thought the majority of the Council and residents were in favor of banning vacation rentals while granting Siebe a conditional-use permit because of her unusual circumstances. The council is expected to vote on an ordinance during their January meeting, the date of which is yet to be determined.

Brown outlines plan for state

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

PORTLAND — Gov. Kate Brown outlined a three-part blueprint for the state Monday to fix government, grow the economy and invest in education.

Brown unveiled her goals during a keynote address at the annual Oregon Business Leadership Summit.

As part of her goal to increase government transparency and accountability, Brown plans to base agency funding on reaching specific outcomes, specifically in education, health care and public safety.

She said the plan for outcome-based budgeting is "one of the most important things" she would do as governor.

"State government must demonstrate to Oregonians that they are getting the best return for their taxpayer dollars, that their agencies are being run efficiently and effectively," Brown said.

Outcome-based budgeting would be similar to a funding model developed for public universities in which a portion of state funding is tied to student completion of a degree or certificate, she said.

"This has spurred universities to invest in critical supports that engage and empower our highest-need students to overcome barriers and complete their college degrees," she said.

The announcement follows her call for independent reviews of the Department of Human Services and the Department of Energy. The Department of Human Services is under scrutiny for its slow response to reported problems at state-licensed foster care facilities. A probe into the Department of Energy centers on allegations that regulators bent rules in its tax incentive program for renewable energy projects.

The governor said she also would propose legislation in February to enhance government transparency but gave no details on what the proposal



EO Media Group file photo
Gov. Kate Brown on Monday released a blueprint three-part blueprint for the state Monday to fix government, grow the economy and invest in education.

would entail.

She announced in November that she would create a new public records advocate, modeled after a role in other states such as Washington. The advocate serves as a liaison to assist the public in narrowing records requests and helping agencies to comply with public records law.

Brown declared her support for the Oregon Business Plan's goal of adding at least 25,000 jobs annually to the state economy.

To that end, she said she plans to propose legislation in February to expand the Office of Small Business Advocate. The office provides assistance to small business owners and helps them cut down time spent mired in bureaucratic red tape. Brown established the office when she served as secretary of state, before an ethics scandal forced Gov.

John Kitzhaber to resign and elevated her to the state's highest office.

Supporting existing businesses is important because 70 percent of job growth stems from expansion of those companies, Brown said.

She said government also would assist in boosting the economy by continuing to seek out trade opportunities in growing Asian markets.

The governor suggested the state needs to invest more in education but provided no plan to meet that need. The question grows more difficult to answer as the state faces mounting costs associated with the Public Employees Retirement System, as speakers at the summit pointed out.

Earlier Monday, Brown announced the addition of a new education innovation officer position to her administration

to help boost the state's dismal high school graduation rate.

"The position will assist me, my education team and the Legislature in dedicating resources to increase the number of students who graduate from high school," Brown said from prepared comments.

"There is no question that our education system must be accountable to better student outcomes, including increasing our high school graduation rate," Brown said.

"But accountability also means ensuring that, as a state we are empowering the best and most effective practices in our classrooms that support student success," she said.

The administration has yet to complete a job description for the position and to post the job, said Brown spokeswoman Kristen Granger. She gave no timeline for hiring.

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Student of the Week

Rylee Goller
Wallowa High School

Rylee Goller is a freshman at Wallowa High School. She is the daughter of Curtis and Linda Goller. Rylee strives for excellence with her academics which is demonstrated through her 4.0 cumulative GPA. She is always a positive contribution to any classroom. Rylee is a natural leader through athletics playing varsity for both volleyball and basketball. She also demonstrates her leadership through student body government as freshman class Treasurer and FFA as the Greenhand Treasurer.

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The drawing will be held December 24th and the WINNER will be notified that day. All participants will be highlighted in the December 30th issue of the Chieftain.

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If you have any questions, please call Cheryl at 541-426-4567