

# It's time to do something about housing in Wallowa County

Everybody complains about the weather, but nobody does anything about it. Up until last week, that famous saying often incorrectly attributed to Mark Twain, was true about housing in Wallowa County.

**EDITORIAL**

*Voice of the Chieftain*

A gathering at Josephy Center to discuss housing, most notably the lack of it, was convened. It may be the nucleus of a seed that will help beleaguered county residents looking for housing.

The latest push came as part of a series of goals for the coming year proffered by Wallowa County Rotary President Stephen Kliewer. In his inaugural address to the club, Kliewer said he hoped to capture and bring to bear the same community spirit that built the Joseph Park Playground earlier this year. Everyone participated. Everyone did something. Even small things mattered.

The Chieftain took Kliewer's cue and began preparing a series of stories outlining the housing issues and possible solutions. The series begins on Page 1 of this edition.

Most challenging seems to be the shortage of rental housing, not necessarily for the disadvantaged but for those who would like to work an ordinary 9-to-5 job and afford to live here. Any business or organization that hires is limited to the pool of individuals already here or must assist in finding housing for anyone hired from outside.

Businesses in the county often rank the lack of adequate rental housing for their employees at the top of their list of concerns for keeping the doors open, much less growing and expanding.

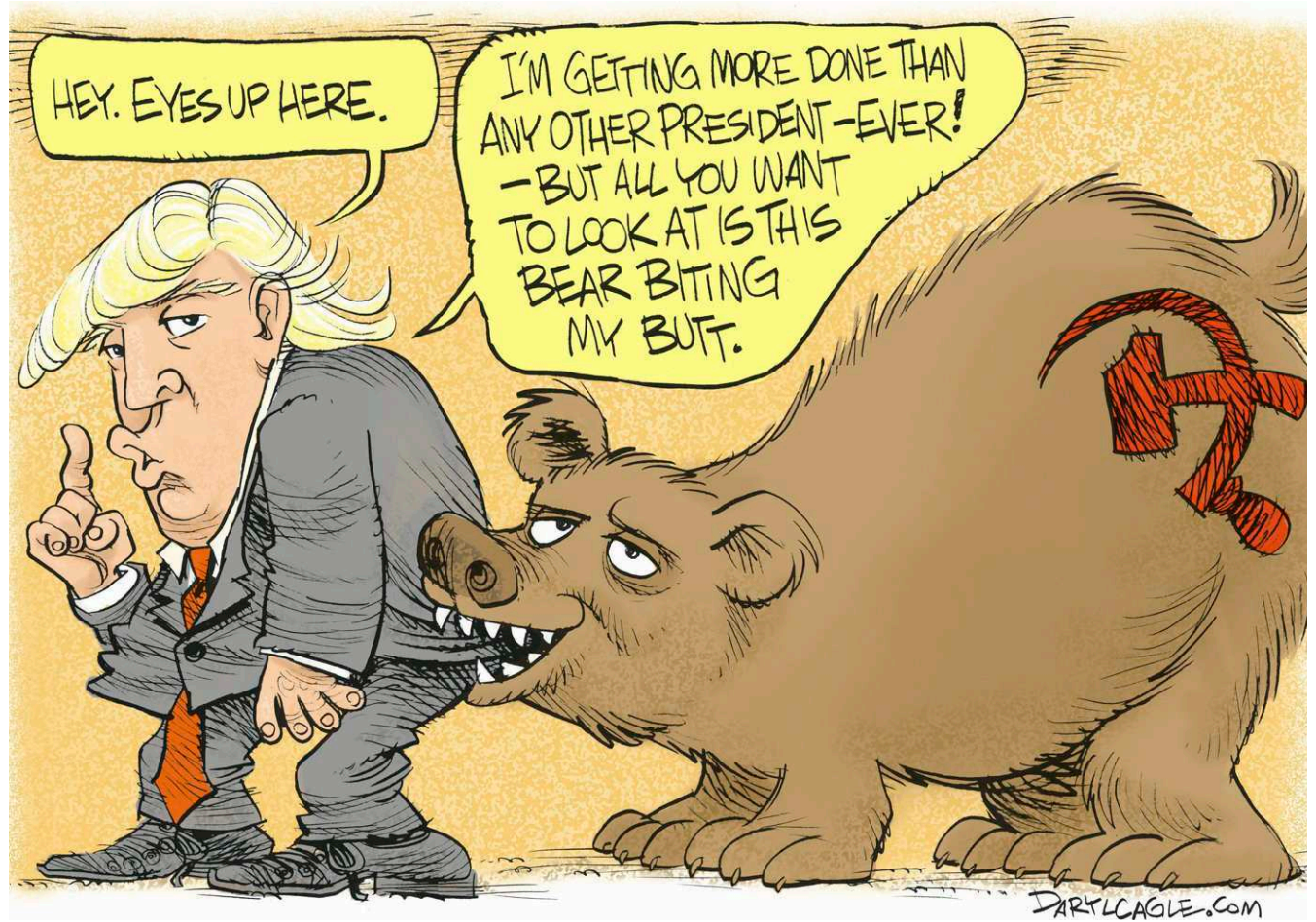
Theories abound as to the cause of the shortage, and those will be examined in depth in the weeks to come. But a greater emphasis needs to be focused on how to alleviate the shortage. There is no single wave-of-the-wand solution. It's going to involve new ways of thinking and innovation.

Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results was Einstein's definition of insanity. Weighty issues that surround the housing crunch in the county will not be solved by status quo thinking. Some eggs are going to have to be broken. Sacred cows will have to be slaughtered. Thinking outside the box is going to be the order of the day not simply a cliché.

No one is suggesting that double-digit growth rates would be ideal for Wallowa County. Mostly what those involved seem to have in mind is adequately taking care of people who are already here and making incremental sustained growth possible.

That makes a lot of sense.

Oh, it was essayist and author Charles Dudley Warner, a friend of Mark Twain's, who actually provided us the saying about the weather and no one doing anything about it.



## Russian election meddling is serious

There is no way that a brief column could begin to capture all the intrigue that has developed during the past year regarding Russian attempts to interfere in our election or undue Russian influence on President Trump and his administration.

Suffice to say that while new and stunning details emerge almost daily, a review of the highlights of the past year might offer a better perspective and some relief from the numbness that ordinary citizens might now be feeling about this saga.

Last July, after about 30,000 emails of the Clinton campaign were released, the FBI and U.S. intelligence agencies determined that the hacking had been the result of a Russian cyber-attack.

During the fall campaign, the Clinton emails became a major issue, but it wasn't until after the election that the main focus of government investigation and national news shifted to an inquiry into how much Russia had attempted to engage in an organized campaign of social media propaganda and even attempts to hack into the U.S. election itself.

Ultimately, all U.S. intelligence agencies agreed that Russia had interfered in our election with the intent of helping the Trump campaign, although they held back from concluding that Russian operation had altered the result of the election itself.

The Russia story became more controversial in December after a dossier prepared by former British MI6 agent Christopher Steele for one of Trump's Republican presidential primary rivals was sent to



**POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

John McColgan

Sen. John McCain, who passed the document on to the FBI.

Questions and claims raised in this dossier, as well as meetings between then national security adviser Michael Flynn and Russian diplomats, led both houses of Congress to launch formal investigations into Russian meddling in our election.

Unbeknown to most of us until those hearings, the FBI had been conducting an investigation into these matters as early as July 2016. After it was revealed that Attorney General Jeff Sessions had met several times with Russian officials during the campaign, Sessions recused himself from the Russia investigation. Later, acting on a recommendation from assistant Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, Sessions concurred that FBI Director Comey had mishandled the Clinton email investigation, and President Trump fired Comey on that basis.

Then Trump added gas to the fire when he told Russian diplomats, in a meeting attended by the Russian press but excluded to the American press, that Comey was "a real nut job," and that pressure on Trump regarding Russia was now relieved.

But the Russia investigation goes on,

in the House and the Senate, and now in a separate investigation led by another former FBI Director, Special Counsel Robert Mueller. New details have emerged of a meeting held in June 2016 in which Russian lawyers and agents offered to provide dirt on Hillary Clinton to an enthusiastic Donald Trump Jr., Jared Kushner, and Trump campaign Chair Paul Manafort.

Considering that Kushner ran the social media campaign for Trump, and that Manafort has revealed that he earned \$17 million helping a pro-Russia faction of the Ukrainian government to massage its media message during the Obama years, it becomes harder every day to believe Trump's assertions that no one in his campaign or administration colluded with the Russians as they interfered in our election.

All patriotic Americans should hope that Congress and Mueller will continue their investigations until they get to the bottom of this sordid mess. This inquiry will necessitate careful inspection not only of contacts, but also of whatever money trail might exist between Russian oligarchs and Trump's business enterprises.

Only a thorough investigation can reveal whether criminal cases can be made on charges that might include money laundering, racketeering, perjury, obstruction of justice, collusion, conspiracy or even treason.

For the sake of our republic, these investigations need to follow the evidence and follow the money — wherever that leads.

## Library discussion takes many paths

In researching last week's story on the progress made by the group examining the idea to form a library district in Wallowa County, I spent some time looking at how the issue played out in Josephine County. It was the latest to approve formation of a library district in Oregon back in May.

I spent time primarily looking at how the newspaper covered the campaign and also at the district formation process itself. It was a very enlightening quest.

The newspaper in Grants Pass gave a ton of ink to the proposal and supported it editorially. It also published a passel of letters in support of the idea and a few opposed.

I'm guessing that was a function of what was submitted rather than the newspaper purposely excluding letters that didn't agree with the newspaper's position. We would do the same here at the Chieftain.

The letters were rather uninspired, I thought, regurgitating in succession the reasons why voters should support a library district. Reading them, I imagined Ben Stein's voice in my head from his role in "Ferris Bueller's Day Off."

I seriously doubt anyone vociferously opposed to the district would have been persuaded to change his or her vote after reading the letters.



**WAHL TO WALL**

Paul Wahl

The sample ballot published by the county was an interesting document. It included seven arguments in favor and four against.

A group of three pediatricians wrote one of the "pro" statements, reminding voters that 59 percent of the children in the county came from families that lived at the poverty rate.

Libraries are an equalizer, they pointed out, giving everyone the same shot at information.

Another was penned by a retired educator, who pointed out the benefits of libraries having computers for children to use to connect to online information sources.

An argument in favor from the chamber of commerce pointed out an American Library Association statistic that for every taxpayer dollar spent for public libraries, the local economy generates as much as \$10.80.

Arguments opposed slammed the plan for cherry picking precincts to include in the district where supporters believed they

had the best chance of winning. It is a noncontiguous district, which is a bit of an odd approach. Anyone living outside the district will have to purchase a library card that is likely to cost as much as that household would have paid in taxes had it been included in the district.

That seems like a bookkeeping and logistical nightmare but was apparently necessary to win approval. This was not the first time this idea had been placed before voters in Josephine County.

Other opposition arguments pointed out that a taxing district "never goes away" and contended that some property owners might sacrifice their homes on the altar of library services. Opponents pointed out that supporters included only the precincts in the district that had supported it in previous elections, thus guaranteeing a "yes" vote.

It will be interesting to see how the issues play out in Wallowa County. When the county announced earlier this year it was planning to jettison the county library system, supporters came out in full force to protest.

The best idea is to capture, foster and sustain that overwhelming support over the two-year period it will take to get the proposal on the ballot and up and running if it's approved. Their work is cut out for them.

## Listen to the elk, to the land, to each other

Well, Dallas McCrae got one thing right in his recent letter to the editor: He'd be laughed at.

It's disturbing that the go-to solution to the problem of overpopulated elk is to build a wall or a giant game fence, as the case may be. Is he serious? Sadly, I think he is. A game fence, at least eight feet high, along the Hwy. 82 corridor and lower Wallowa Valley? Kinda sounds like Trump's border wall, which, no doubt, is the inspiration for this idea.

The game fence is part and parcel of a problematic habit of thinking ... namely that we can solve an issue by isolating it without any ill effects.

Worst, many unintended consequences

## LETTERS to the EDITOR

are entirely foreseeable. Who couldn't see that putting dams up and down the former Columbia River, now Columbia Reservoir System, would all but wipe out salmon runs? The answers are right there staring us in the face. The simple alternative solutions don't require massive expenditures of resources, only a change in perception and attitude.

Thus, I offer another even easier fix than a fence. Listen to the land, to each other. Listen to the keystone species of wolves, salmon and beaver. Listen to the elk themselves.

Wolves, it turns out, are quite good at driving elk — entire herds of elk — off land. It is what they excel at and have

excelled at for gosh hundreds of years. They know much more than we do about the oxymoronic pretense of "managing" wildlife.

Garik Asplund  
Joseph

## Thanks for the good memories in column

I was raised in Enterprise and graduate from high school in 1950. I love reading your column "Out of the Past." I read recently that 70 years ago, my dad was elected president of the Lion's Club.

Brought back beautiful memories. Thanks for the journey back in time.

Rodger Dalglish  
Portland

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