

PUBLIC WORKS

Questions About Future Housing Answered

Submitted By the Tribal Public Works Division

Housing. This one word brings many questions. When will the Tribe build houses? How many houses will be built? Who will live in the houses? Will there be elders' housing? Where will the houses be? What kind of houses will be built? These questions, and many more are the result of that one word, and a result of the Tribe's restoration, reservation, establishment of tribal revenues, and re-establishment of the Grand Ronde community homelands. They are very good questions, but unfortunately, the answers have many complications. In an effort to help answer some of these questions, the Public Works Division will make a presentation about housing to the tribal membership at a future General Council meeting.

Although this presentation is scheduled in the near future, this article is intended to introduce interested tribal members to tribal housing opportunities. Hopefully, this article will answer some questions. Most importantly, this article is written to help generate some tribal member input. This input is essential in determining how the tribal organization may fulfill tribal housing needs. Important information from the tribal membership could help the Tribe develop a quality housing program.

It could benefit the readers to first consider some history. Tribal member housing concerns began during the development of the Reservation Plan. Some interviewed tribal members indicated they would like to live and work in Grand Ronde if housing and jobs were available. Those interviews identified the initial housing need. The interviews also identified other needs such as health care, employment opportunities, and education to name a few. The Tribal Council became aware of these needs and began exploring opportunities to help tribal members fulfill their needs. After years of hard work, the Reservation Act was passed in 1988 that returned part of the original reservation land base to the Tribe. This land base immediately provided timber revenues to the Tribe and enabled the Tribe to pursue economic development opportunities for tribal government and members.

Since the passing of the Reservation Act, and even before that, the Restoration Act, the tribal organization has added many new programs. This addition of programs caused the Tribe to grow in personnel and services. Since the recently returned partial reservation was only timber lands, there was no place on these lands to develop any buildings. As the Tribe continued to grow, there came a need to establish a homelands base in the Grand Ronde community. The Tribe soon purchased properties in Grand Ronde and built offices on the property. This property provided office space for the tribal programs.

Today, these offices are fully utilized. Among the programs there resides the Housing Improvement Program (HIP). The HIP Program assists tribal members with improving or buying existing houses only. Funding for the program is limited and allows no potential for new housing construction. These limitations are a result of federal and tribal regulations. In order to pursue tribal housing opportunities, the Tribe is developing a tribal housing program.

Tribal housing programs are generally funded through local, state, and federal government agencies. Any combination of funding agencies could be utilized to fund tribal housing programs. Unfortunately, these agencies have their own regulations that the tribal housing program must follow. This makes the Tribe proceed with caution as the program develops. Here are some of the more common questions asked about housing:

When will the Tribe build houses?

This question depends upon one important condition that must be resolved before the Tribe can build houses. The condition is the lack of infrastructure. Today, there is a no new hook-up moratorium imposed by the local water association. This means that even if the houses are built today, the water for the homes would not be available. The Tribe is working with the local water association to resolve this issue. There are also some concerns regarding the local sewer district. The Tribe is working with the sewer district to address some of these concerns.

On the brighter side of the infrastructure issue, the Tribe is happy to report that the Bureau of Indian Affairs intends to construct a new road for the Tribe. This road will serve a new housing development. Engineering for the road is scheduled to begin this winter. It is not possible to say when the road will be completed, but the Tribe hopes to have it built within the next one to two years. These infrastructure conditions are currently a top priority in tribal development of housing and facilities. Working together, we hope to resolve some of these conditions for the benefit of the entire community.

How many houses will be built?

When the infrastructure conditions are resolved, this question will depend on funding. If funding becomes available, the Tribe intends to build ten or eleven lots and maybe some multi-family dwellings. There are many government programs available to assist with housing construction. Most of the programs have complicated regulations that must be followed before the Tribe can build houses. The Tribe must consider these funding sources, and make a determination as to which sources may best assist

the Tribe. The Tribe must also consider housing demands before an actual number of units are considered.

Who will live in the houses?

Tribal families will be given top priority as houses become available. A tribal family must demonstrate they are capable of occupying a home. This means they must be able to afford a house and be able to take care of it. The best way for the Tribe to assure these abilities requires research into tribal family backgrounds. Abilities are generally determined by developing an application process. This process is very similar to what happens when families fill out rental applications for rental units. The best looking applications will be assigned top priority when houses are available. The Tribe must determine the criteria for housing applications, and they must be available before any houses are completed. Again, it is important to note that if a family is interested in living in a tribal house, the must show ability to occupy the house.

Will there be elders' housing?

Yes. This question depends on what kind of housing is best suited for interested elders. Elders' housing is a unique type of housing structure with special needs and endless possibilities on the type of housing to set up. The Tribe intends on utilizing the recently established Elders' Committee to address this issue. Together, we hope to determine how many elders' unit to build, the size of the units, the kind of care required for each, and to carefully plan out the elders' housing development.

Where will the houses be?

The houses will be in the Grand Ronde community. Through various planning exercises, the Tribe determined areas that appear to be best suited for housing. The first specific location for a subdivision targets the twenty acre property where the tribal Alcohol and Drug program currently resides. This property lies approximately one-quarter mile north of the tribal main offices. Other properties are currently being researched for housing potential, but such properties are not specified at this time.

What kind of houses will the Tribe build?

This question depends on housing demand and affordability. The demand for housing comes from the tribal membership. The Tribe must research what kind of demands are out there. Do tribal members want single family houses with one, two, or three bedrooms? Do they want apartments, townhouses or multiplexes? What size of lots do they want to live on? As these questions are researched and answered, the Tribe must then determine how to make the housing affordable to the occupants. The Tribe must not develop expensive subdivisions with expensive houses. On the other hand, the Tribe does not want to develop cheap housing and end up with a substandard housing development. The Tribe desires to build the kind of houses that will stand the test of time, be affordable, and promote a standard of living we can all be comfortable with.

As these questions are asked of the Tribe, each individual tribal member who is interested in housing must ask themselves some important questions: Can I afford a house? How much can I spend per month to pay for a house? Can I take care of my house? The best way an individual can answer these questions is to begin with the circumstances of his/her life. Am I paying my bills on time? What are my current payments in comparison to what I am paid? Am I getting ahead financially? Do I enjoy working on my house and yard? We all must start planning for tomorrow's houses, today.

This article was intended to be short and just an introduction into tribal housing opportunities. A few questions and issues were brought forth for readers to consider. The Public Works Division sincerely hopes the readers understand some of the complications of tribal housing opportunities. There are also other issues to consider. One concluding remark to keep in mind: We must work together to make housing and all other tribal activities successful. Success depends on careful planning, design, development, and upkeep of all houses, facilities and even programs. Most important of all, success takes time.

This is an example of what a subdivision in Grand Ronde might look like.

