

Housing from 1A

In October, the City of Florence submitted a request for information letter to the governor's office about a new Workforce Housing Initiative.

"They are trying to take tools that are already in the state's toolbox, that already exist and are already funded, plus some new additional things," said Reynolds. "That could be money, resources or support so they can come and help fill the gap so they can incentivize workforce housing."

Reynolds defined "workforce housing" as different for every community. In Florence, it would be a request for more affordable housing, especially for lower income families.

In its submission, Florence noted that the state's timing is aligned with the city's current plans and goals to address the housing needs of the community, including a projected demand of 510 housing units in the next five years.

The request for information also included "opportunities" — or places where the city has already begun to develop plans. Some of these include:

- Establishing a goal to provide workforce housing
- Creating the Housing and Economic Opportunities Project (HEOP) Committee
- Engaging with local and regional non-profit and for-profit housing developers that have expressed interest in investing in workforce housing developments
- Considering amending the Florence Comprehensive Plan policies to eliminate barriers to workforce and affordable housing developments
- Reviewing local policies and regulations regarding short-term rentals and how they impact the long-term rental market
- Identifying a number of sites that are vacant and zoned for workforce housing developments, especially near the city center, and looking for ways to secure future sites
- Refining its housing development feasibility model to determine and bridge funding gaps for specific projects
- Focusing on economic development to bring momentum and growth.

"The City is now considering ways to promote workforce housing development in conjunction with business expansion proposals by major employers, such as Peace Harbor Hospital, the Siuslaw School District, Lane County Community College and various tourism and recreation oriented businesses," the submission stated.

Other partnerships have been with economic drivers in the area, from the Regional

"Is Coastal Living in Jeopardy?"

This 10-part series covers the current housing and employment crisis facing the Siuslaw region. Through in-depth interviews with government officials, volunteer organizations, property managers and employers, the series examines the problems facing the region, the solutions that the community is working on and what the community can do to help.

All parts of the series are available online at thesiuslawnews.com, or in print by request.

Series List

- Nov. 15: SOS
- Nov. 22: State of housing
- Nov. 29: How we got here
- Dec. 6: Time to step up

Upcoming topics include employment, volunteerism, economic development and the future of industry in the region.



Accelerator and Innovation Network (RAIN), South Coast Development Council, Siuslaw Vision 2025 and Florence Area Chamber of Commerce.

Letters of support came from Siuslaw Outreach Services, Siuslaw Elementary School, investors working to develop Florence-area businesses and PeaceHealth Peace Harbor Medical Center.

As mayor, Henry thanked the governor for addressing the need for housing and offering Florence the chance to apply.

"The lack of adequate workforce housing is holding Florence back from its potential growth. One thing that I have learned is simply, if we are not growing, we are dying. That is why this initiative is so imperative. I support all efforts related to bringing more workforce housing to our great city, and feel it is essential for our growth and prosperity. Thank you for offering assistance in creating a path forward to address this very serious issue," he wrote.

In his town hall, Bozievich said that 73 percent of his listeners were aware of the housing crisis.

"I'm surprised at how many people were unaware," he said of the remaining 27 percent. The five county commissioners sit on the board of Housing and Community Services Agency of Lane County (HACSA), since it serves as the housing authority in Lane County and administers funding from the Oregon Department of Housing and Urban Development.

HACSA reports that approximately one third of all Lane County residents are housing burdened because they spend more than 50 percent of their income on housing.

Bozievich thinks Oregon has one solution: Senate Bill 1051.

SB 1051 requires cities with population greater than 5,000 or counties with population greater than 25,000 to review and decide on applications for certain housing developments containing affordable housing

units within 100 days. It became effective Aug. 15, 2017.

"In the short term, SB 1051 opens us up to accessory dwelling units," Bozievich said. "This could double the housing stock in western Lane County very quickly with affordable options."

Florence Planning Director Wendy FarleyCampbell has definite plans for accessory dwelling units in the Florence area.

"A lot of our current houses are smaller homes on bigger lots, and some of those have been rezoned where they could have at least two dwellings on the same lot. That is an opportunity. If we could get some implementation of some of the code that we've done would be nice," she said.

Creating more population density would help keep buildable land available for people who want to build multi-family housing.

One form of multi-family housing that may be unfamiliar to people is cottage housing, where multiple units, often unattached, share a common outdoor space. These units can range from so-called "tiny homes" to more standard, 1,100-square-foot buildings.

"I personally have three senior friends whose spouses have passed away and they would move into this style of living tomorrow if they were available," FarleyCampbell said. "One of them is living paycheck to paycheck wishing she had some place to move to. She doesn't want to leave Florence, she doesn't want to go live with her daughter. She wants to stay with her friends. But she has no place to go. That's what she wants — some little place without the yardwork or maintenance. Not an apartment."

She said that updates to the city's codes would encourage such alternative spaces, especially as they could be affordable options not only for Florence's established, often senior, population, but also for couples or young families.

"They're congregated around an area so you have a built community, or neighborhood if you will, that's on a microscale, like a block. They have shared common spaces. If they want to garden or dink around, there is usually a place to grow some carrots or roses or whatever they want to do. They can still have the ability to do that, but a lot of the areas are common and have a landscaper. Two of the women I mentioned are already paying HOA-type fees for those services, so that wouldn't be a change for them. They just want a smaller, more manageable house size," FarleyCampbell said.

One group looking to initiate this cottage program is the Neighborhood Economic Development Corporation (NEDCO). All it would take is some available land — NEDCO's current model is to use donated land — that could be zoned multifamily. From there, the nonprofit agency would build one- to two-bedroom cottages for low-income housing.

Alternative methods may be a way to get outside investment for Florence's housing.

According to Farley Campbell, several developers have looked into the community, but balked for various reasons.

"There were some Portland developers who said they could build something, but they would need to charge \$1,200 rents. We went, 'There's no one here who could pay \$1,200 in rent — not enough people,'" she said. "Usually demand drives price. If there was more housing available and less demand, that usually makes prices drop. One thing we could do would be to improve the quality of jobs we've got so that people make more money to afford the rents. If we improve our economic position, that can't hurt."

HEOP is currently looking at financial barriers within the existing city code, and possible ways to improve the process

and make it more affordable.

Besides continued new construction, land owners have other options to replenish the housing stock: repair, maintain and update their existing housing units.

"The council made this a goal because of the issues with a lot of the housing stock. We need to do something about that. Some of the policies the council will be looking at will be creating incentives for owners of those to demo and build up those lots, and to infill so there is suitable housing for people locally," FarleyCampbell said.

She said incentives could help encourage someone to knock down a building with mold growing up the walls and redevelop the property, hopefully with greater density.

Much of FarleyCampbell's information comes from recent surveys conducted by the City of Florence, HEOP and professional housing economist consultants the FCS Group.

HEOP held its fourth and last meeting yesterday for the FCS Group to go over final findings on the Buildable Land Analysis, Housing Needs Analysis, Employment Needs Analysis and Policy Considerations undertaken since April. These recommendations will then be taken to the Florence City Council and Planning Commission to implement necessary changes to Florence City Code.

Reynolds said one of those topics will be the addition of accessory dwelling units.

"We have to figure out what that means for our community," Reynolds said. "This housing code process will be very similar to the process we went through with marijuana to implement local rules and regulations for a statewide mandated item. That was a process that went really well. There was a lot of good communication, and a lot of coordination with the council and planning commission, and with the community in listening to concerns. This is just yet another big item that

impacts daily lives, and they will be working through that."

HEOP is looking at several components of current city code, including City of Florence's rates, especially for building permits and system development charges (SDC).

As far as FarleyCampbell can tell, the city's costs are reasonable, and could be a draw for people to bring new developments to the city.

"For a residential permit, we can get you out the door in 10 days. For that same exact work in Lane County, it will be months. Our building permit process, per se, is not bad," she said.

She said people who want to build an addition to a current house pay less than \$500 for a permit. People who want to build a home pay \$2-2,500.

"That includes permits for all your inspections for electrical and plumbing. What is the high part of the permit — I don't think it's too high — is the systems development fee. Those aren't permitting fees, it's an additional fee that has nothing to do with permits," she said.

SDCs are a charge for water, sewer, storm water and roads that the developer pays into the system.

"You're building a new structure, you're getting hooked up to sewer or the water, having a street built in front of you, the streetlights are there. You haven't needed to do any of that," FarleyCampbell said. "Somebody put those in, and they were put in with SDCs that somebody else paid years ago. You're paying yours for the people down the line, for whatever system improvements need to be done.

"It's a cost of doing business, and businesses can be \$30,000. It's not some little amount. It's a big price. For a house, the SDC is just over \$12,000 for brand-new construction."

Compared to the price of a septic tank in the county, which can cost \$20,000, she doesn't think that number is too high.

For land owners who want to rebuild a house, those SDCs were already paid with the original construction.

With the changing housing market landscape, some cities are looking to revise their SDC process.

"Florence may consider varying SDCs by home size, as a way to lower the cost of delivering more affordable housing," the letter to the governor continued. "Newport recently changed its SDC methodology from a single fee per single family home (similar to Florence's current SDC method) to a variable SDC that takes into account home size."

Until new developments come in, there are things people can do now to alleviate some of the stress of Florence's housing crisis.

FarleyCampbell said, "At City Hall, there's a list of information we provide at the counter here for people with questions on housing."

Much of the information details the rights of the renter and landlord and some basic information on some of the subsidized housing resources in the state and Lane County.

"We have some answers for them to some degree about HACSA and other housing resources locally — which there are not a lot. It's all lottery, too. Maybe you'll get some help, but you're competing with everyone else in the county," she said.

The big thing is that people need to be self-advocates who know their rights.

People also need to find the resources that can provide housing vouchers or direct them to low-cost housing. In the Florence area, Oregon Housing and Community Services indicates there are nine low-cost housing sites, with a varying number of units (egov.hcs.state.or.us/reser/APS/LowCostHousing.jsp). Using those links, people can be in contact with owners and managers of the properties.

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