

Oregonians see homelessness as top issue

BY ANNA DEL SAVIO

Oregon Capital Bureau

When Oregon's legislative leaders unveiled a plan to address homelessness last month, they stressed that it is not just a Portland, or even an "urban," problem.

"Those who are unhoused and unsheltered are as diverse as our community itself," said Rep. Jason Kropf, a Democrat whose Central Oregon district is flanked by the Deschutes National Forest and includes much of Bend.

The regional concern on display in the capitol last month reflected the views of Oregon residents, most of whom — regardless of zip code — want local leaders to make responding to homelessness their No. 1 priority.

More than three quarters of Multnomah County residents and other urban Oregonians said it was very important or urgent for leaders in their communities to make addressing homelessness their top priority, a recent survey from the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center found.

"Getting the economy back is an important first step. Getting people with addictions and mental health issues treated is the next step," one Multnomah County resident stated.

But even in rural and suburban areas, at least 60% of residents surveyed in November identified homelessness as a topic of high priority.

Most Oregonians identified mental illness, substance abuse or a lack of affordable housing as the top reasons why people become homeless.

Erin Bunday, who lives in Klamath Falls, said she believed high rental costs were driving homelessness in her Southern Oregon community.

"I have several friends here who are 'career women' and parents, who have often had to stay with friends, family or in run-down hotels, which spends all their income, making saving for a home impossible," Bunday said.

Bunday used to volunteer with the Habitat for Humanity program in Bend, where she lived before the bank she worked at shut down. Briefly homeless, she and her son moved to Klamath Falls in 2013.



Dean Guernsey/The (Bend) Bulletin

City contractors with Central Oregon Biosolutions gather personal items while dismantling a homeless camp on NE Second Street in Bend on Monday, March 14, 2022.

"In Bend, programs like NeighborImpact and Habitat were able to include families in the home buying or building process, allowing them to really work and work towards that goal," Bunday said. "I don't see that here."

Klamath County's Habitat program shut down in 2014, and while there still are some services for people experiencing homelessness in her community, Bunday said it's tough "when an individual wants to shower, to get to a job, to make their income, but doesn't have a home base or regular meal, laundry. I've seen many people quickly give up."

Like many Oregonians, Michelle McDaniel is frustrated that more hasn't been done.

"It seems like they keep talking about (solving homelessness) and they aren't actually doing it," said McDaniel, who lives on the small Central Oregon Coast community of Otis. "Then they talk about studies about it."

McDaniel said high rent costs and destructive wildfires were forcing people out of their homes.

Close to 300 structures in Otis were destroyed in the Echo Mountain Complex fire in September 2020 — accounting for a small fraction of the Oregon homes lost to 2020 wildfires.

McDaniel said she's "lost faith in Oregon's leadership" in response to the housing crisis.

McDaniel moved to Portland from California in 2015 with decades of experience in property management. Vacancies were snapped up quickly at the rental properties she managed in Portland, despite continually increasing rents.

"People are getting hit with huge increases. People are upset and they say they're going to move, and then they look around and they see that everything is just as high and they're stuck," McDaniel said. "As far as trying to buy a home, it's almost impossible for the average person."

She eventually left Portland, disheartened and exhausted by how difficult the rental market made it for people to survive.

Otis is located just outside Lincoln City, where the local economy is largely driven by tourism.

"The people that work here in this town, primarily house-keeping, hotel workers, people who work in the restaurant industry — they cannot afford to live here, so they drive in from other towns," McDaniel said.

The lawmakers who highlighted their \$400 million package to ease homelessness and promote low-cost housing were careful not to claim victory.

"I want to make clear these investments will not solve every problem overnight," said Rep. Julie Fahey (D-Eugene). "But Oregonians have immediate needs right now."

More Oregonians now see homelessness as an urgent issue

Overall, 70% of Oregonians surveyed in November said it was very important or urgent for leaders to make homelessness their top priority. Asked a similar question in an October 2020 survey by Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, 50% of residents answered very important or urgent.

While seven out of 10 Oregonians believed ending homelessness should be a top

About the survey

The statewide survey on attitudes about homelessness was conducted by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center online between Nov. 8 and 15, 2021. The survey reached 1,200 Oregonians who were at least age 18. The margin of error ranges from 1.7 to 2.8 percentage points for the full sample. You can see more details about this survey, and others, at oregonvbc.org/blog/.

The Oregon Values and Beliefs Center is committed to the highest level of public opinion research. To help obtain that, the nonprofit is building a large research panel of Oregonians to ensure that all voices are represented in discussions of public policy in a valid and statistically reliable way.

Selected panelists earn points for their participation, which can be redeemed for cash or donated to a charity. To learn more visit oregonvbc.org/about-the-panel/.

priority for leaders, only six in 10 agreed that with the right policies and resources, homelessness could be solved in their communities.

Rural Oregonians were slightly more pessimistic than urban and suburban residents. Some respondents favored a harsher approach, forcing homeless people off the streets and into shelters. Others said that while a few people may refuse help, the right policies and resources could get most people into homes.

"Homelessness and lack of affordable housing are problems that we could fix if we had the compassion, understanding and political will," one Multnomah County respondent said.

With local and state elections approaching in May, homelessness is likely to become a key issue throughout the state. And, the survey said, those seeking office are likely to face tough questions as fewer than 12% of Oregonians are satisfied with the homelessness services where they live.

Local Briefing

Tickets on sale for Powder Valley halibut feed

NORTH POWDER — Tickets are on sale for the 20th-annual Alaskan halibut dinner, a fundraiser for the girls basketball and volleyball programs at Powder Valley High School.

The event is set for May 7 in the Powder Valley gym. There will be four sessions: 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.; 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.; 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$30 per plate and include halibut, baked potato, coleslaw, bread, dessert and drink. Tickets for a hot dog, chips, cookie and drink meal are \$5.

For tickets or more information, call North Powder Charter School, 541-898-2244, extension 8821, Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The office will be closed for spring break from March 18-28.

Time to remove decorations at Mount Hope Cemetery

Baker City's cemetery and parks contractor, HnT Lawn Care Inc., will soon be doing the spring clean up at Mount Hope Cemetery.

That includes removing deteriorated decorations, flowers and floral designs, as well as thatching, edging, fertilizing, and weed spraying, weather permitting. This work is scheduled for April 1-15.

The city is asking residents to remove decorative items from graves and headstones prior to April 1. Items that aren't removed will be collected by the contractor and stored until Nov. 1, 2022. Items that conform to the city's cemetery rules can be placed on graves starting April 16. A copy of the rules is available on the city's website, www.bakercity.com.

More information is available by calling the city at 541-524-2047.

Public hearing April 6 on nuisance ordinance for Unity

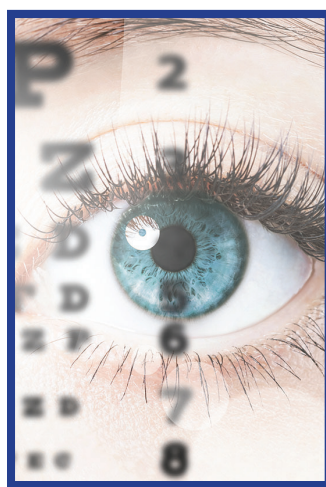
The Baker County Board of Commissioners will have a public hearing at 9:05 a.m. on April 6 to solicit comments on a proposed nuisance ordinance for the city of Unity. The public hearing will be at the Baker County Courthouse, 1995 Third St. in Baker City. Copies are available at the Unity Post Office, the Baker City/County Planning Department in the Courthouse, or at www.bakercounty.org/planning/unity.html.

Written testimony can be given at the meeting or emailed earlier. The hearing will be broadcast online at www.bakercounty.org/online/meetings.html. More information is available by calling Tara Micka at 541-523-8219 or by email, tandrews@bakercounty.org.

Saint Alphonsus Auxiliary offers \$1,500 scholarship

Saint Alphonsus Auxiliary-Baker City is offering a \$1,500 scholarship to a college student who is enrolled in a health care profession course, is a graduate of a high school in Baker County or current Baker County resident, and who will be at least a sophomore in the fall of 2022. Applications are available at the front desk at Saint Alphonsus Medical Center-Baker City, 3325 Pocahontas Road, or from a member of the Auxiliary Scholarship Committee — Peggy Payton, 541-519-8118, Marilyn Bloom, 541-523-2750, or Marilyn Delfatti, 541-523-4598. Applications are due by May 15, and the recipient will be notified by June 15.

Auxiliary members assist at the annual blood draw and other hospital events, and they attend the gift shop at the Baker City hospital. New members are always welcome. More information is available by calling Payton, at the number above, or Laura Huggins at 541-524-7732.



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