

Housing

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would make a profit if relisted in the current market.

Franklin said low interest rates continue to attract more buyers, especially when a loan is penciled out by 15 or 30 years with a fixed rate.

Eastern Oregon demand Franklin said his inventory is currently down by around 75% of what he normally carries.

"That's why we're trying to promote more people who want to sell because, if they want to, now is a good time to start," Franklin said.

The trend is also happening in other parts of Eastern Oregon.

"We have super-low inventory. This is the lowest I can remember," John Howard, the owner of John Howard Real Estate & Associates in Baker City, La Grande and Pendleton, told the La Grande Observer.

Franklin, who used to work in Baker County, said it is



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

This 1,398 square foot Craftsman-style home on Elk View Drive is under contract by East Oregon Realty.

experiencing the same boom.

Cates said land sales have been increasing as well, giving people the option to construct a new home. Also a property manager, she said rental opportunities are rarer than homes to buy in Grant County.

New construction

Franklin said additional housing is desperately needed.

He said he is trying to get builders to construct homes, but that has been difficult because of high prices on materials.

The National Association of Home Builders reported that spikes in softwood lumber prices at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic caused the price of an average, new single-family home to increase by nearly \$16,000. Statistics from the NAHB

showed that the price of lumber was almost \$500 per thousand board feet on June 19. The price steadily rose until it peaked on Sept. 11 to just over \$900.

The price of lumber fell again to a low of \$500 in late October, but now the price of lumber is nearly \$900 again, as of Jan. 29.

The information is sourced each week using the Random

Lengths Framing Lumber Composite, which is comprised using prices from the highest volume-producing regions of the U.S. and Canada.

Real estate sales drastically increased in 2020, but the amount of new residential homes being built has remained about the same, according to Shannon Springer, Grant County planning director.

"I know Realtors are busy right now, and we have talked to lots of people, but that lag between talking to people and getting something built is sometimes pretty substantial," Springer said.

In 2019, there were 14 site-built dwelling permits that were new and 10 manufactured home placing permits, she said. In 2020, there were 11 site-built dwelling permits including one duplex and eight manufactured dwelling permits.

Springer said builders must also line up contractors for the work.

"It's so much easier to buy something and make a few

upgrades or fix-ups than to start from scratch," Springer said. "There's a lot of moving pieces."

Why now? Buyers wanting peace, quiet, less traffic and less people make up a majority of the people Cates worked with during the last year.

"That's a lot of what buyers are looking for when they call me," Cates said. "From Portland, Boise and all around, they just want a quiet community to lay back."

Franklin said people are moving into the county from all around the west side of the nation thanks to the efforts from everybody to promote the area, but the development of future businesses in the county is also generating excitement for interested buyers.

"With the Dollar General going in and the city working on their developments and the chamber promoting Grant County and the possibility of Prairie Wood (reopening), I feel better about the direction we're going right now than I have probably since I moved here," Franklin said.

Hospital

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their work cut out for them, but they're up for the job."

Brooks said the changes would not happen overnight.

In a hospital work session in October, Brooks said she was a board member when the hospital district originally hired the management firm Brim and Associates 30 years ago and that the hospital "got a lot of good out of Brim."

Brim merged with Province Healthcare in 1995 and moved its headquarters to Tennessee. Since then, the company has gone through three other mergers and a rebranding to HealthTechS3 in 2015.

According to the district's



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

From left, Blue Mountain Hospital District board member Doty Parsons, board chair Amy Kreger and CEO Derek Daly at a board meeting.

annual expense trend, from July 2019 to June 2020, the district paid Health TechS3 \$961,717.

Daly said in the work session that independent hospitals are still in many circumstances contracting for other

services. He said one example is Harney County Hospital, which is very similar to Blue Mountain Hospital and closely connected to St. Charles Health System because of its electronic medical records program.

Idaho

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can't even get a seat at the table for discussion. ... We have no say."

A political scientist's view

Boise State University's Ross Burkhart, a political science professor, said moving the border would be a "steep order."

He said the state legislatures in Oregon, Idaho and California would have to agree with the border changes, and then the group would have to get the approval of the U.S. Congress.

Burkhart said, if the proposal ever were to make it to Congress, the members would likely take their cues from the California, Oregon and Idaho delegations.

"I would imagine that there would be differences of opinion depending upon the delegation itself, so there's just a whole lot of moving parts here to imagine that this gets to the reality that all these parts would have to operate in sync," he said. "And that is a lot to ask."

Burkhart also pointed out that political winds shift over time. He said voters elected a "fair number" of Democratic legislators to Idaho's Legislature not too long ago.

"To draw boundaries where you are imagining



Eagle file photo

Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane



Eagle file photo

Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale

that the likely perceived ideology of that region is going to remain consistent and especially remain consistent across these new boundaries is a lot to ask," he said.

He said this leads him to think the motivations are born out of political grievances and frustration with so much political power residing in Salem with the Democrats.

"Trying to solve this problem with a secessionist movement is dicey because things can change politically and have changed politically," Burkhart said.

State lawmakers' views

State Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, said he does not want to spend time thinking about the process until someone can explain to him whether adjusting the borders can legally be done.

Owens said, however, rural and frontier Oregon is not always well represented in Salem.

"We need to figure out how we can have a stronger voice and how we can make the concerns of our constituents voiced," he said.

He said he supports any opportunity where rural Oregonians are heard.

State Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, said while moving to a conservative state like Idaho would be great, the likelihood of success is very low.

"A better way to fix it," he said, "would be to remove the frustration level that our citizenry have on this side of the state and get the state legislature and the state governor to recognize us and support us instead of running over us."



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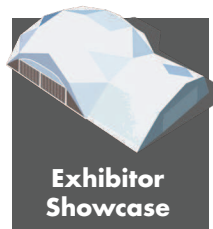
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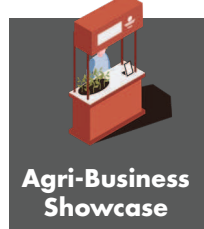
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