

Turnkey

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After an emotional — and at times hostile — public meeting Wednesday in the Trowbridge Pavilion at the Grant County Fairgrounds, those in attendance voted down the project 75-50.

The plan

Community Counseling Solutions CEO Kimberly Lindsay told the audience that the Oregon Community Foundation would provide \$1.8 million to purchase the Dreamers Lodge hotel in John Day. Additionally, she said, the grant would provide \$110,000 for startup operations, \$39,000 for renovations and \$36,000 for deferred maintenance.

According to the foundation's website, the Oregon Legislature allocated a total of \$65 million for Project Turnkey for the purpose of acquiring motels or hotels for use as non-congregate shelter for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in November. Two discrete funds were provided by the state: one totaling \$30 million to be awarded in counties and tribal communities impacted by the 2020 wildfires and one totaling \$35 million for the remaining 28 counties in the state.

Grant County probation officer Mike McManus said during a public presentation Friday that the referring entities would be the Grant County Probation Office, Community Counseling Solutions, Families First and Veterans Services.

Rhiannon Bauman with Families First said the target population would be Grant County residents on parole or probation, or those who lost their jobs due to the pandemic. In addition, there are homeless veterans coming out of drug and alcohol treatment, she said.

The need

Bauman said the community lost 43 homes during the 2015 Canyon Creek Fire.

"Think of how amazing transitional housing would have been for those people," she said.

Bauman said 45% of Grant County residents live below the poverty line, and from 2019 to 2020, the county saw a 30% increase in people



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

Grant County resident Tyler Gifford speaks at a community meeting May 19 about a Project Turnkey grant to convert a local hotel into transitional housing.

going into residential alcohol or drug treatment.

She people returning to the county have no housing or support when they get out of residential treatment.

Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley, who before being elected in November served as the county's probation office director, told the audience Wednesday that there's been a need for transitional housing in the county for a long time.

He said the community expects people coming out of prison to succeed, but society does not give them the tools to do so.

"I hear a large consensus being said, 'Well, just let them live under a bridge,'" he said. "Than I get these phone calls to come deal with this guy under the bridge because they are tired of him being in this area."

He told the audience that it is a "catch 22" because people who get released from prison come back to where they committed their crime. McKinley said last year Grant County released 12 people from prison and institution settings into the community.

"It happens every year, whether you know it or not," he said. "We put them in motels. We put them in rentals. We put them in other places until they can get a job and get back on their feet and get back to being productive."

An audience member heckled McKinley and told him that was a lie. He said people he spoke to in North Salem, where similar projects were started, told him not all criminals go back to the places where they had committed their crimes. He said they go

back to where they are comfortable. McKinley told him that was not "how it works." Other members asked him why. McKinley told them that is what the law requires.

"They have to be here," he said. "That's a requirement of their parole."

Community Counseling Solutions Substance Abuse Prevention Coordinator Lisa Wiegum said local government did not spearhead the project at the start of Wednesday's meeting.

Transparency and timelines

One point of criticism the organizers faced Wednesday was a lack of transparency about the project. Many in the audience asked why they were just hearing about the plans within the last month.

Megan Loeb, program officer for the Oregon Community Foundation, said part of the reason why the timeline was so rushed was because of the urgency of need for shelter and housing through this pandemic. She noted that nearly half of the shelter beds in the state are "congregate models," typically church halls that are usually staffed by volunteers.

Nate Conklin, an outreach specialist with the Fletcher Group, said during a May 12 county court session that McManus and Bauman first spoke about the need for recovery housing in October. He said the group met with a grant coordinator in January, formed a steering committee in March and received preliminary approval for the project in late April.

He told the court that on April 23 the steering committee held a business owners informational meeting and said the feedback was "overwhelmingly positive."

However, Heather Swank told the project organizers that other businesses, such as Mosier's Furniture across the street from Dreamers Lodge, were not informed of the project.

"You're not informing people," she said. "You're not keeping people informed. That is wrong. Absolutely wrong. And shame on every one of you."

Weigum said the deadline to sign the documents for the grant would be June 15.

"I know this timeline is uncomfortable for you," she said. "It's uncomfortable for us as well."



Contributed photo

From left, local foster family Analisha, Isaac, Sandra, Leland, Gabriel, Julianna and Dale Smucker.

Foster

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"Preston was 5 months old, and we had not had children yet, so we had an insta-baby," Lynn said. "I was a little nervous about the learning curve, but it was fine, and it worked out."

The couple said taking in the brothers has been a joy, and it was great to keep them together.

"They need foster parents of all types, and there's always a need for people," Jason said.

Another local couple, Leland and Sandra Smucker, said this fall will mark their fifth year as foster parents. Sandra said her family, which consists of five kids, started fostering when acquaintances needed a place for their children. The Smucker family decided to take in the kids and become emergency certified foster parents to watch over three teenage kids.

With eight kids in the household, it provided challenges for the family, but they worked together to establish ground rules and spend time talking with the foster kids.

"Just seeing how the consistency of a stable home life

FOSTER OPPORTUNITIES

Tammie Blessing, the Department of Human Service's resource family retention and recruitment champion for District 13 and 14, said if parents are interested in fostering, they can call 1-800-331-0503. DHS also contracted and partnered with Every Child, a nonprofit organization to work on recruitment and retention efforts for fosters.

Every Child developed a website, everychildoregon.org/foster-care, where people interested in fostering can submit their information and learn more about the different foster opportunities and ways to help.

DHS then reaches out to the family to get an idea as to what would be the best fostering opportunity for the family.

"When children are needing to foster care, the first thing DHS does is seek out other relatives and family members who may be able to foster," Blessing said. "The first effort is to try and keep children in their family unit, or with non-relatives that children have a relationship with. Then we go to what we call a general applicant family."

and love helps turn a child's life around and give them a new way to respond to situations has been rewarding," Leland said. "It's never been a quick transition, but over time, we've seen a lot of good things happen."

After fostering the three kids, the family decided to continue fostering and currently have two foster babies.

The Smuckers said their own children have played a vital part of the foster experience

and bring the family together. Sandra said their children learned a lot from the experience.

"A stable home life and love from a whole family for these children hurting makes a huge difference in their lives, even if it's for a short time," Sandra said. "There's a lot of hard times and times for praying and leaning on the Lord for strength, but it's worth it because it brought our family closer together."

Election

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At Dayville School District 16J, Babette Larson and Tina Rhoda won their elections.

At Long Creek School District 17, Marsiellette Watson won her election for position 3.

Other positions

In the Grant County Transportation District, Bryan Nelson, Jim Jerome, Peggy Neal all won one of the available three at-large positions.

In the John Day Rural Fire

District, Bryan Nelson and Kirk Ausland won one of the two at-large positions available for four-year terms. Dale Stennett won his election for a two-year unexpired term.

Willis Kimball and Daniel Koming won their bids for an at-large position available in the Mt. Vernon Rural Fire District.

Lori Hire won an at-large position in the Prairie Rural Fire District.

Lisa Weigum, Kimberly Hernandez and Rich Lallatin won their elections for a spot in the John Day-Canyon City Parks and Recreation District.

Nancy Moore and Sue

Cannon won at-large positions in the Dayville Cemetery District.

Dick Galbreath won an at-large position in the Fox Cemetery District.

Jacqueline Burnette and Valores Hall won their elections for at-large positions in the Long Creek Cemetery District.

Dorman Gregory and Ben Lindley won their elections for at-large positions in the Mid-County Cemetery District.

Marlene Woodley won her election for an at-large position in the Prairie Cemetery District.

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