

HOUSING

Continued from Page A1

every year. The housing authority manages 364 low-income units in Umatilla County and also distributes Section 8 housing vouchers. Stradley said as the quality of housing stock gets worse and landlords decline to fix problems, fewer apartments in the area meet HUD standards for vouchers.

New apartments in Boardman will likely draw in some people who have been commuting, freeing up some more rentals in places like Hermiston.

“Any housing will help relieve some of the overcrowding,” Stradley said.

The housing authority purchased a 12-acre piece of land north of Stanfield for a 40-unit rent-subsidized housing project to help with shortages there, but its grant application to the state for money to build the project has been unsuccessful three times. The authority plans to submit another application in January, but Stradley said it is hard to get funding because much of it goes to Portland-area projects, and other cities around the state are also low on affordable housing.

“For the most part everyone’s feeling the crunch,” he said.

Last week the state and county hosted a joint meeting in Hermiston to get input on an Oregon Statewide Housing Plan being put together.

Government housing assistance programs are based on percentages of median income, which in Umatilla County is \$58,100 for 2017. Stradley said the data the federal government uses to calculate median income is usually a few years old, so minimum wage increases or new family-wage jobs take a few years to affect housing eligibility. The HUD website states that Umatilla



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

Representatives of R.D. Offutt Company, BC Contracting and Boardman break ground on a new 240 unit apartment complex in Boardman.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

The Aspens Apartments in Hermiston consists of 48 family-sized apartment units that is part of the Umatilla County Housing Authority’s 364 low-income units in the county.

la County’s 2017 median income was calculated using U.S. Census data from 2010 to 2014.

Hermiston assistant city manager Mark Morgan said he has worked with apartment developers who have looked at building more units in Hermiston, but part of the problem is that the land, labor and material costs of construction are so high that to pay for it the complex would have to charge more than most people are willing to pay for a rental in Hermiston. Home prices have gone up in the last couple of years, but for a long time if rent went up by very much people would realize they could be putting that money toward a mortgage pay-

ment instead. “You kind of bump up against that threshold,” he said.

It doesn’t cost developers that much more to build a complex in Portland or Bend instead, but they can charge hundreds of dollars more per month for each unit after it’s built. And while some companies are focused on benefits like cheap utilities, Morgan said at least one company in the last couple of years decided to build in Pasco, Washington, instead of Hermiston because it would be easier for employees to find housing there.

Even for those who can afford to own a home, finding something that’s open in the right price range

can be difficult. Hermiston recently changed its standards for residential development — allowing more lot coverage and shorter setbacks — to encourage more homebuilding in the area.

City planner Clint Spencer said developers are already taking advantage of the new rules, which allow more homes to be placed in subdivisions and therefore increase the profit margin on new developments. He said Hermiston is seeing a “mini-surge” of subdivisions, including a new one just approved for Gettman Road. Other nearby cities are also adding new housing.

“I’m actually fairly excited for where, regionally, we will be in another year,” he said.

Umatilla has had some good luck in housing development lately too, with construction work just beginning on a 28-lot subdivision called Virginia’s Place in McNary across Willamette Avenue from the golf course. Another 56-lot subdivision on South Hill east of Powerline Road plans to start construction at the end of the month, according to community development director Tamra Mabbott. She said in the McNary subdivision 25 percent of the lots are already spoken for, and there are a couple more subdivisions in the area that are in planning stages.

Mabbott credited city manager Russ Pelleberg for actively calling up contacts in the Tri-Cities and finding developers willing to put up new homes in the Umatilla area. She said it can be hard to compete with the larger profit margins that come from building on the west side of the state.

“The big challenge is to get developers to come here and build ... here in Umatilla we’re just feeling fortunate that we have a couple of developers willing to come in and do something,” she said.

BY THE WAY

BTW

Continued from Page A1

uated based primarily on violent crime and property crimes. The highest ranking local town, which came in fifth, was **Umatilla** (violent crimes, 2.42 per 1,000 and property crimes, 11.96 per 1,000). Also ranking in the top 10 was **Boardman**, who placed ninth (violent crimes, 5.96 per 1,000 and

property crimes, 14.92 per 1,000). For the full list, visit www.safewise.com/blog/safest-cities-oregon.

You can submit items for our weekly *By The Way* column by emailing your tips to editor@hermistonherald.com or share them on social media using the hashtag #HHBTW. Follow the *Hermiston Herald* on Twitter at @HermistonHerald.

Inaugural natural resource class includes Echo man

Sam Taylor of Echo was selected as one of 30 natural resource professionals from throughout the state in the inaugural class for the REAL (Resource Education & Ag Leadership) Oregon program.

Other Umatilla County participants include Bob Waldher of Athena and Tom Demianew of Pendleton. The individuals were selected from a large pool of applicants and reflect a diversity of resource producers, agri-businesses, advocacy organizations and government agencies.

Bill Buhrig, with Simplot Food Group and REAL Oregon board chair, said the response to the program has been overwhelming. He said the more than 30 applicants exceeded expectations and are a good indicator that the program is long overdue. Oregon, Buhrig said, is modeling its program after a similar program in Idaho.

REAL Oregon is a col-

laboration of industry and other groups throughout the state that have recognized the importance of developing and grooming natural resource leaders now and in the future. In addition to networking opportunities and learning more about the state, the program will bring current and future leaders together from agriculture, fishing and forestry sectors in a series of five statewide sessions starting in November.

Class 1 includes 10 individuals directly involved in production agriculture, three in timber production and forestry, 11 from agri-businesses or natural resource organizations and six from local, state and federal agencies. The inaugural class will conclude in March 2018 and recruitment for Class 2 will be underway in the coming months. For more information, visit www.realoregon.net.

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