

Morrow County looks at housing options

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

Morrow County is providing a growing number of jobs in the region, but at the end of the workday, the majority of those people go back to their homes somewhere else.

That may be slowly starting to change.

Morrow County Planning Director Carla McLane said the county is looking seriously at how to house the many people who work in the county but don't live there.

"The commute pattern is out of sync with the housing pattern," she said. "As the port has grown, we haven't seen the residential part of Morrow County keep pace with that."

In the last two months, the Morrow County Planning Commission has approved permits for new housing and rental units in the area, and will launch a committee to study the developable land in the county next month.

At a meeting on last week, the commission approved a request for the Ruggs Ranch, near Heppner, to use the facility as a guest lodge all year, and approved a land partition for a non-farm dwelling unit, also near Heppner. In July, the commission approved a permit for the Gala Springs Subdivision, comprised of 14 two-acre



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

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lots west of Boardman that will be used for residential development.

McLane said when that parcel was up for approval at last month's planning commission meeting, some people were concerned about the impact it would have on other residents in the area.

"There were a number of people testifying with concerns about the water table, 14 new septic systems," she said, adding that the area is already designated for high nitrates. "They don't want to say no to development, but they want to be conscientious of how to balance it."

She said the planning commission acknowledged those were concerns that may need to be addressed

down the road, but seven of the nine commissioners voted in favor of the development.

McLane said there has been some growth in the northern part of the county, both in and out of city limits.

"I've been here 17 years and have probably seen half a dozen subdivisions approved and built," she said.

But she added that many of those subdivisions are reaching full capacity now.

"I think (Gala Springs) will begin to meet this next set of demands," she said.

She said they have not yet found a developer for the land, and that it's unlikely there will be any construction on the site

until spring.

A 120-unit apartment complex being built in Boardman, McLane said, may soon pave the way for more housing within city limits.

"Depending on how quickly that fills up, they have another phase planned, another 120 units," she said.

McLane said as the north end of the county has attracted business, the south end has struggled, both with jobs and with housing.

"The demographic of south county — it's an aging population," she said. She noted that the area saw a lot of foreclosures between 2007 and 2009, and there has been a push to get those homes back on the market.

Neighborhood watch group formed in Heppner

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
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More than 200 Morrow County residents showed up at a meeting last week to talk about crime in the city of Heppner, and potential solutions to the concerns many community members have.

The complaints have ranged from a perceived increase in criminal mischief and vandalism to drug use, to an influx of people that are not working or attempting to get jobs.

The meeting was organized by county commissioner Melissa Lindsay, the City of Heppner and the Heppner Chamber of Commerce.

Lindsay said there had been a growing conversation in several different circles about those issues. She added that there were also two parks in Heppner that were vandalized recently.

"For me, instead of everyone talking and complaining, let's come together and find a solution," she said.

Community members agreed to form two groups — a neighborhood watch group and a community pride organization.

Both Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack and Undersheriff John Bowles were at the meeting.

Bowles said he hadn't noticed any major spikes in the number of calls the sher-

iff's office gets for property crime.

"Criminal mischief is basically vandalism calls," he said. "I don't see those increasing at all."

The sheriff's office compiled data from 2015 to 2018, looking at calls from January to August in each of those four years. In 2015 there were 19 criminal mischief calls, dipping to four in 2016, and holding at 15 calls in 2017 and 2018.

Calls for juvenile complaints were similarly irregular, with 17 in 2015, 16 in 2016, 46 in 2017 and 29 in 2018.

"We really encourage people to call and report, so we're seeing a lot more people calling," Bowles said.

He said he doesn't attribute problems in the community to any one specific group, though he did say a couple of groups of teens have been contacted multiple times about vandalism.

Community members agreed to start two groups they feel will address their concerns: a neighborhood watch group and a community pride group.

The neighborhood watch will be similar to those in many communities, with residents serving as the facilitators.

Lindsay said those groups are starting to be organized.

"Citizens want to step up, and help put more eyes on more places," Lindsay said.

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