

Tax incentives available for housing developers

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

A housing report compiled by city of Hermiston staff has found tax incentives for subsidized housing but few options for incentivizing developers to build market rate homes.

“All of those are really targeted toward affordable housing,” City Manager Byron Smith said, adding that the city needs housing “of all types.”

One option in the report presented to the city council last week is the New Market Tax Credit, which offers a federal tax credit to investors for certain types of projects in low-income census tracts. The credit is mostly for commercial development, but is available for mixed-used projects where less than 80% of the gross rental income is from residential units.

Another federal tax credit is the Opportunity Zone credit, which applies to one of Hermiston’s census tracts west of Highway 395 between Orchard Avenue and South Punkin Center. It allows developers to defer capital gains taxes on certain developments, including residential, in low-income neighborhoods.

The city could declare a portion of town a Vertical Housing Development Zone, allowing a partial property tax abatement on multi-story, mixed-use projects in the zone, if all of the residential units in the project are for low-income residents. The report written by Hermiston City Planner Clint Spencer stated the criteria involved made it a “chal-



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Subsidized housing is under construction on Southeast Fifth Street in Hermiston. Most tax incentives for housing are for low-income options.

lenge to think of a property that might benefit from this designation.”

The state also allows some property tax abatements for affordable apartment projects in places the city has declared a “transit-oriented development” zone. Properties within one-quarter mile of one of the stops for Hermiston’s HART bus system would be eligible to be included in a zone.

“This is an intriguing possibility for Hermiston,” Spencer wrote. “There is considerable residential land within a quarter-mile of a bus stop. It may be worth doing a targeted parcel inventory to determine if/where parcels which are

of sufficient size, vacant, and properly zoned exist.”

The city could also slowly increase property taxes to newly annexed properties over 10 years instead of asking property owners to pay the full rate starting their first year inside city limits. That option could provide incentive to developers building just outside the city limits.

The city council asked staff to compile the incentives report earlier this year as part of the city’s ongoing efforts to increase housing availability. Other efforts have included changes in zoning and reducing some requirements for rules, such as lot coverage.

City Councilor Jackie

Myers said the city’s efforts to build and improve infrastructure in town can also help incentivize developers. For example, the new water tower and water mains the city is installing in the northeast part of the city will provide the water pressure developers need to build housing on acres that were previously too cost-prohibitive to develop.

Several new housing projects have been announced in Hermiston this year, including a subsidized apartment complex under construction off of Southeast Fifth and Sixth streets and subdivisions off of Theater Lane and Elm Avenue.

Health educator coming to Umatilla County

By **JESSICA POLLARD**
STAFF WRITER

The Umatilla County Public Health Department will start looking for applicants to fill a new health educator position.

The full-time health educator position was approved by county commissioners last week.

The work will involve local health data analysis, communicable disease investigations and education on the prevention of communicable diseases, such as sexually transmitted infections and measles.

“We have a fair amount of communicable diseases in our community,” said Public Health Department Deputy Director Alisha Southwick. “We’ve had positions like this before, but it will be a little different. This is going to be a full-time person, whose focus is on education and epidemiology.”

She said that in the past, nurses and environmental health staff have been responsible for disease investigations in addition to regular duties, while it’s a primary

focus for the health educator.

The educational component of the job will initially focus on educating and providing consultations to health care providers about diseases. But Southwick said that possibly over time, the person might be involved with schools or other public facilities.

Southwick said the department plans on posting the job in the next few weeks, and hopes to hire someone as soon as possible.

The position will be funded using modernization grant money from the Oregon Health Authority, which became available this month.

“I think the most exciting thing about this is that it’s made possible through this modernization grant,” Southwick said.

The funds total \$202,425, and are part of a \$15 million OHA investment approved by the Oregon Legislature this year.

Of that money, \$7 million was distributed among Oregon counties to help increase equity, leadership, epidemiology and communicable disease control for the biennium.

Legacy Financial opens Hermiston office

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

Financial planning services are available at the newly opened Legacy Financial office in Hermiston.

Legacy Financial is based in Woodburn, but brokers Robert Rhoades, Stan Milne and Laura Dix will take turns visiting the Hermiston branch four days a week to advise clients.


They are independent brokers through LPL Financial, and bought the Hermiston business from former LPL brokers Bruce Jones and Tom Nichols, who are retiring. They purchased the building at 285 E. Hurlburt Ave. from Jones and

Nichols, and will also retain the same phone number at 541-567-3100.

Rhoades said so far the transition has been going well as they meet with the former brokers’ clients. He said Woodburn and Hermiston are similar in many ways, and they have experience forming relationships in small towns. They’re not “downtown Portland” brokers, he said.


“We want to get involved in the community,” he said.

He said their specialty is working with people who are retired or close to retirement. He has 25 years of experience in the business, Milne has 35 and Dix has 10.




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