

**Housing:**

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“We know that our region continues to add employment, and so we feel that the best way to ensure housing remains affordable is to continue providing adequate supply,” he said.

Hermiston does not need to focus too much on traditional “affordable housing,” Morgan said. Developers in Hermiston can build single family homes all day long because the market demand is there and the prices allow for the turn of a profit. Hermiston’s greatest housing need is market-rate rentals.

That need “serves a very critical role in community-building,” he said, but it is not being filled.

“Specifically, I think about the folks who we are attracting to the community to fill new jobs being created here,” he said. “I’m thinking about nurses, teachers, etc., who are in their 20s, straight out of college. On paper, the single most important metric that most affordable housing programs look at for eligibility is income, and on paper these folks in their 20s have incomes that disqualify them for ‘affordable housing,’ but meanwhile they’re drowning in student loan debt and have negative net worth.”

These people, Morgan said, have incomes that would “otherwise qualify them to make a mortgage payment.” Still, they are a stage of life wherein they cannot buy a home. With only site-built homes for sale and income-restricted rental housing — for which they do not qualify — available, people with new jobs in Hermiston have to live elsewhere. Often, Morgan said, they will move to Kennewick and endure a daily commute.

“Inevitably, that person making the commute will find a significant other in Kennewick, decide that they don’t really like commuting an hour every day, take the first job they can get in Tri-Cities and then make all of their significant life investments there,” Morgan said.

They will buy a home, vehicles and other goods in the Tri-Cities. This means that Hermiston is missing out, Morgan said, on what new people could mean to the town’s economy and to its community.

**Weather:**

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damage.

“We’re hopeful that Mother Nature will play nice,” he said. “But we know that in past years we know she’s played not-so-nice.”

Regardless of the historical severity of the recent spate of winter weather, the inclement conditions shut down schools and services across the region.

West Umatilla County school districts — Hermiston, Umatilla, Stanfield and Echo — resisted closure, but all Morrow County schools and most east side districts canceled classes Jan. 3, the first day back from winter break. The closed K-12 schools were joined by Blue Mountain Community College, which canceled in-person classes on all of its campuses, and all state offices in Umatilla County outside of courts.

Even if residents wanted to travel to these closed places, they might have a hard time finding a way to get there.

ODOT closed Interstate 84 east of Pendleton along with Highway 11 between Pendleton and Milton-Freewater at various points of the day. Both Roberts and ODOT spokesperson Tom Strandberg encouraged residents to stay home, traveling only if necessary.

Strandberg said there were points on the evening of Jan. 2 where ODOT had to call off plows because road visibility meant the plows were moving too slow to effectively remove snow and ice. Even with so many roads closed he discouraged residents from going around road closure barriers, an issue that has happened in the past.

“We just want people to be safe,” he said.

Although heavy precipitation and warmer temperatures



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald  
**Snow drifts cover Helix Highway, Monday, Jan. 3, 2022, near its intersection with Adams Road in rural Umatilla County.**



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald  
**An Oregon Department of Transportation truck Monday, Jan. 3, 2022, blocks Highway 11 near its intersection with Highway 331. State and county roads were closed in much of Eastern Oregon due to winter weather.**

created conditions for significant flooding in the county in 2019 and 2020, Roberts said. ing minor street flooding at this point, but conditions could

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