

Re-Building Sustainably in the Rogue Valley

Focus on Affordable Housing

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Background

Certainly affordable housing is urgent here. Oregon ranks 46th among all the states in affordable housing. Grants Pass ranks number 3 among worst towns in the US for affordable housing. Jackson County just lost 2600 residences to fire. The Rogue Valley, and all of Southern Oregon, has a confluence of very low vacancy rates, endemic poverty, a scarcity of jobs available, a weak economy that is neither resilient nor re-localized, and a history of very little support for housing of poor, disabled and houseless residents. Only 15% of Josephine County's land is able to grow crops. Jackson County has more cropland, however most of the total farmable land is in grapes or cannabis or hemp. When a crisis develops, we have far from enough food crops to feed the people who live here, so using the arable land to "plant housing sprawl and all that go with that, illustrates the dilemma we face. Asphalt and concrete are "the earth's last crop".

Coming Water Wars

We are in a mega-drought. How long it will last we do not know. The pressures of accommodating agricultural food crops, taking in the many residents who keep coming here and want to live here, and serving the many competing needs for a dwindling water supply plus providing ecologically for the preservation of fish and streams is a complex problem. Water is intertwined with housing.

A Population Trained to Send Their Money to Wall Street Strips us of Investment Funds

The population is well-trained to shop at Wall Street owned stores where the money goes away and never returns here, as well as putting their money in money center banks rather than local credit unions. People have little understanding of the concept of money cycling and keeping the money local by shopping and saving locally. Estimates are that as much as \$2 billion dollars leaves southern Oregon yearly and only one percent comes back as investment here. That ratio helps explain an anemic local economy. No wonder we can't afford to rebuild a resilient economy and housing.

What Kind of Housing Do We Need and Supporting Fairness in Access?

The lack of arable agricultural lands seems to dictate that we must be very land-thrifty. We do not need sprawl or more "executive homes /starter castles" for the wealthy. People move here to get away from sprawl and congestion. We need multi-family and infill as well as a 21st century re-think of public transportation. Some barriers to multi-family are that many developers can't get a good return on large multi-family projects, as well as public perceptions that affordable multi-family will bring in crime. However, building owner occupied multi-family projects with onsite owners are more fundable and onsite owners keeps crime down.

Here is a good story about crime. During the Carter administration there was an experiment in east coast public housing. The government went to the residents of public housing projects and asked them, "would you like to own your apartment?" Big YES answer. So they restructured

the projects and residents took on a mortgage payment about the size of their previous rent. Amazingly, crime in those areas went down more than 90%. It turns out when people had an investment in their home they worked hard to keep it safe and in good shape. This also addressed the economic need of a largely BIPOC population to be able to invest in their own economic future. This suggests that we need to develop multi-family condominiums that people can own. Small, affordable condo units could be supported by being sited in clusters, not unlike co-housing projects. Live-work, small business incubator projects can be clustered with public transit served villages within our cities and towns. This type of development can reduce the need to get in cars and the associated congestion.

How Do We Pay for It?

In Massachusetts the state has begun issuing Green Infrastructure Bonds. Green state or municipal bonds can be used for many purposes. They can jump start projects that will be partially built by investors. They have a long payback period, like a home mortgage, which reduces the impact on government budgets. Those bonds are also very attractive to pension funds as an investment because they are stable and have a low history of default. I have experience in the pension industry and I know the investment community is interested in partnering. Consortiums of government, builders, unions, investors and local planning departments and others like transit and school agencies can work together to site projects that work. We could be the communities that people want to live, work and invest in.