

Coordination of affordable housing efforts in Central Oregon DRAFT v5

The lack of safe and affordable housing in Central Oregon has become more than just a question of access and availability – it has become an economic development barrier, and in many instances, a public health crisis. The lack of workforce housing (for low to moderate income families) is limiting the ability of people to come to the region and accept jobs they have been offered – or requiring them to live in outlying communities and commute to Bend or Redmond – and is also becoming a barrier for businesses seeking to relocate to or expand in Central Oregon. Low-income families in all three counties struggle to find affordable housing with rental vacancies often hovering around 1%. Homelessness persists and is becoming more widespread, while in many instances, it remains relatively invisible (i.e. youth and seniors are typically less public with their situation). Given all we know about the importance of housing to health, the current housing environment in this region is widening and exacerbating inequities and health disparities that impact people with fewer financial and support resources. This is particularly true for individuals and families often trapped in a cycle of crisis and housing instability due to growing poverty, trauma, violence, mental illness, addiction or other chronic health conditions.

The housing continuum can be thought of as stretching from homeless (literally a complete lack of shelter and/or without sufficient resources to obtain adequate shelter) to homeownership. There is a strong correlation between income/assets and the likelihood of where an individual and/or household appears along the continuum. There are several key areas of the housing continuum (although there is also some overlap): 1) Emergency shelter, 2) Supportive housing, 3) Rental housing, and 4) Homeownership:

- **Emergency Shelter** - any facility with overnight sleeping accommodations, the primary purpose of which is to provide temporary shelter for the homeless in general or for specific populations of the homeless. May provide additional services depending upon length of stay and capacity to deliver assistance.
- **Supportive housing** – is a combination of often deeply subsidized housing and “wrap-around” services to accommodate people with special needs or who have been recently homeless or are at risk of homelessness. This form of housing can be both transitional and permanent and is meant to bridge the gap from homelessness to more stable/permanent housing by providing low/no-barrier housing and offering structure, supervision, support (e.g. for addictions and mental health), life skills, and in some cases, education and training.
- **Rental housing** - is available to many households on the open market, but additional support is needed to make it available and affordable across multiple income levels. Market rent is often too expensive for many residents so additional support from the government or other sources, or policies that allow housing to be built at a lower cost, is needed to maintain and create rental housing that is affordable to the local workforce.
- **Homeownership** - can provide families with increased housing stability and financial security, but additional support is often needed to help low and moderate income residents move into this category. Again, this support can take the form of direct subsidies or policies that allow housing to be built at a lower cost with the savings passed on to the purchaser.

We believe these different housing elements are linked (i.e. building a house for affordable homeownership may allow someone living in a rental unit to purchase it, thereby freeing up space in the rental market for someone living in supportive housing to make the step up the housing continuum. Similarly, building an affordable rental unit may allow someone living in a shelter to move out into more stable housing.

There are currently six groups that are working on some aspect of the affordable housing issue in Central Oregon:

Workgroup	Duration, Purpose/focus, Participants, Resources/capacity,
Collaborative Housing Workgroup (Bend 2030)	New group (launched summer 2016), focus on policies and tools for increasing workforce housing (80%-175% of AMI) in Bend, very strong private/public sector and building industry participation, relatively well funded and has hired consultants
Homeless Leadership Coalition (HLC)	Been in existence over 15 years, tri-county focus (although most participants are from Deschutes County), participants are providers of shelter and services for the homeless and those at-risk of homelessness, oversees the federal Continuum of Care grant and the Point in Time shelter count, extensive networking and information sharing resource, volunteer/no staff
COHC – Housing Workgroup	New group (launched spring 2016), focus is tri-county, goal is to explore policies and mobilize support/advocacy to increase the supply of affordable housing (homeless shelter up through workforce housing), sees housing through a health lens, volunteer/no staff
Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC)	This group will focus on tri-county workforce housing needs with emphasis on housing market research and best practice policies and regulations, sees housing through an economic development lens, comprised of local cities and counties, non-profits, and private developers, can play an advocacy role, would be able to bring staff/resources to the table
City of Bend Affordable Housing Committee	Initially formed to help oversee the process of allocating federal CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) funds, has expanded to oversee the allocation of the City’s Affordable Housing Fee funds
City of Redmond Housing and Community Development Committee	Initially formed to help oversee the process of allocating federal CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) funds, has expanded role to include education of elected officials and the broader community

Representatives of the first four of these workgroups met on October 18 to explore whether there were ways to collaborate and share resources while minimizing duplication. We are optimistic about this joint approach! Some of the efforts focus on different portions of the housing continuum and some of the efforts are tri-county while others focus solely on Bend. But, all felt that the ideas around policies and regulations that might be suggested in Bend could also be presented as options to other Central Oregon communities, and vice versa, plus we recognized the value in working together on advocacy and outreach/engagement.

Next steps:

- Spell out proposed roles and responsibilities and get buy-in from the respective workgroups
 - ✚ Allow the Collaborative Housing Workgroup and COIC to take the lead on workforce housing (research, policies, etc.). The former can continue to focus on Bend while COIC can share findings and possible solutions with the other Central Oregon communities and bring potential ideas from surrounding communities back to the Collaborative Housing Workgroup.
 - ✚ Allow HLC and COHC-Housing Workgroup to focus their attention on the far end of the housing continuum (i.e. homeless, emergency shelter, Housing First, very-low and low-income households) with respect to policy and funding opportunities
 - ✚ HLC, COHC-Housing Workgroup and COIC would work to coordinate advocacy and outreach where needed. This can include joint efforts to collect both quantitative data and qualitative information (for stories) and get volunteers willing to testify and write letters
- Ask the Collaborative Housing Workgroup to consider broadening the scope of research to better understand who lives in our cities and what types of housing they will need (consider creating a document similar to one put out by Metro that puts occupations and salaries to the types of housing that would be affordable to them)
- Bring data reps from all work groups together (including 211) to share resources and ideas
- Bring outreach/awareness reps from all groups together to develop stories to help shape public opinion
- Ask COHC-Housing Workgroup if willing to provide advocacy for workforce housing options
- Reach out to the respective affordable housing committees at the City of Bend and City of Redmond to make them aware of these new resources
- Explore potential joint grant opportunities (Meyer Memorial Trust, RHIR, etc.)