

Working together to Build a Bright Future for McMinnville: Hammer Viewpoints for Jan. 3

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Over the summer, the city of McMinnville completed its 2019 Housing Needs Analysis, a sweeping document inventorying land available for new homes and comparing that with existing and future housing needs.

The report came to a stark conclusion about the city's urban growth boundary: "McMinnville's UGB will not accommodate all of McMinnville's housing needs. Over the planning period through 2041, McMinnville has a deficit of capacity for 1,926 dwelling units."

Despite the distance of this date, many residents are already feeling the pinch of unaffordable housing. As highlighted in the Needs Analysis, the overall lack of housing is forcing lower-income residents into a market where they are forced to compete with middle- and higher-income families for a diminishing housing supply.

We see these factors at play as older communities face gentrification pressure, serving to squeeze out our most vulnerable neighbors. Without new housing, these families have to find accommodations within existing homes, raising the number of residents per dwelling.

What's more, new housing is a primary funding source for new roads, parks and water and sewer lines. If the city fails to develop enough new homes, it will lack the resources to provide the critical infrastructure needed to accommodate an increasing population.

Since 1970, McMinnville's population has more than tripled, going from a little more than 10,000 to almost 35,000, making it the 17th largest city in Oregon. While the city's charm is inexorably tied to its small-town feel, it must ensure there is housing available for those at all rungs of the economic ladder.

Failing to do so will harm young families, older couples and those struggling to cover their costs. Additionally, stubbornly refusing to properly support our residents with housing will only lead Salem to direct top-down policies, forcing growth in a manner completely disconnected with McMinnville's unique circumstances and needs.

The good news is that with a collaborative spirit, we can come together and plan exactly how our future should look. As City Planning Director Heather Richards recently said in this paper, with planning that is “strategic, thoughtful and intentional,” we can maintain McMinnville’s “small-town charm, ideal in terms of environment, spirit and community cohesiveness, while growing into a modern city of 45,000.”

Simply put, retaining what is loved about McMinnville and planning for the future are not mutually exclusive.

Baker Creek North, currently proposed for development at the corner of Baker Creek and Hill Roads, would bring 624 housing units to the city at varying price points, while protecting more than 36 acres of farmland, wetlands and open space in perpetuity, for the benefit of the community.

Baker Creek North is the culmination of years of carefully thought out planning. Once complete, it will fit seamlessly into the McMinnville fabric.

And there is room to accommodate more communities like Baker Creek North.

Yamhill County encompasses 458,240 acres, almost 42% of which is set aside for exclusive farm use. In contrast, the city’s urban growth boundary encompasses a mere 7,552 acres — less than 2% of the county total.

By adding a mere fraction of land to the UGB for desperately needed housing, McMinnville can ensure residents are able to find homes for decades to come, meanwhile preserving the wonderful things that make it a world-class place to live.

Ezra Hammer serves as director of policy and government relations for the Home Builders Association of Metro Portland. Earlier, he worked for one of the premier land use law firms in Los Angeles, whose clients included local, regional, national and international development companies, and served as a senior planner in the city’s District 11.