

Northeast Oregon Housing Authority

Serving Union-Grant-Baker & Wallowa County

Mailing Address

P.O. Box 3357

Office Location

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La Grande, OR



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Northeast Oregon Housing Authority does not discriminate on the basis of disability status in the admission or access to, or treatment or employment in its federally assisted programs and activities. NEOHA Executive Director has been designated to coordinate compliance with the nondiscrimination requirements contained in the HUD regulations implementing Section 504 (24 CFR, pt 8) 11/2013

March 29, 2021

RE: Support for HB 5011

Dear Co-Chair Beyer, Co-Chair Gomberg and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sarah Parker and I am the Interim Executive Director for Northeast Oregon Housing Authority located in La Grande Oregon.

Our Housing Authority serves 4 counties consisting of Union, Baker, Grant and Wallowa which covers an area of 12,808 square miles and a combined population of 57,376.

The mission of the Northeast Oregon Housing Authority is to provide extremely low to moderate income families in our four counties safe, decent, affordable housing opportunities in economically mixed settings while fostering strong neighborhoods and forging resident and community partnerships that inspire self-reliance, growth and optimism.

Our Housing Authority is very active in our communities and have created partnerships with our Landlord's, mental health providers, community action provider, Head Start, Parole and Probation, Domestic Violence providers and many others'. Our agency has designed and implemented memorandum of understandings with our Community Partners to rapidly house the most vulnerable of our population that are homeless or on the verge of being homeless and secure safe housing, stabilize and receive any needed services while optimizing State and Federal dollars. We have also created a Housing Navigator position with grant funding that advocates and helps secure stable housing for families/or elderly disabled individuals that have high barriers and are the hardest to house.

In 2017 Union County completed a housing needs analysis and it revealed that we are 600 housing units short of meeting our counties housing needs. This includes the 38-unit Blue Springs Crossing housing complex that we completed in 2015 on ground that was donated to our agency. In 2017 our agency also received notification from the State of Oregon that Union County was in the 25th percentile of rent burdened counties in Oregon. Households who pay more than thirty percent of their gross income are considered to be rent overburdened. In Union County, a household making less than \$2,350 a month would be considered overburdened when renting an apartment at or above the median rent. Also, in 2017 48.29% of households who rent in Union County are overburdened. That mean that one out of three renters are paying over 50% of their income for rent and 5 out of 7 extremely low-income renters are paying over 50% of their income for rent.

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With all the information coming into our agency about the dire need of housing in Union County and a shortage of buildable land, our agency had to get creative with how we were going to help fill the need of affordable housing units. Unfortunately, it takes approximately 2-3 years to get a housing complex designed, funded and built once land is purchased and since we are a smaller rural housing authority we do not have staff capacity for a grant writer or a development department nor funds set aside and available to buy land and hold it in inventory until a grant and additional financing can be secured to build.

Our agency heard about the Land Acquisition program in late 2017 and decided that we needed to pursue this opportunity as a 4.79 Acres level lot, improved with curbing, water retention and utilities was coming available in 2018 and the owner was going to sell to whoever had the money first. Our agency was one of the first to apply and be awarded a loan from the Land Acquisition program for 300,000. The total site acquisition cost was \$313,400 which included architect site plan, geotechnical analysis, Level 1 environmental, ALTA survey and \$13,400 in equity contributions.

I cannot emphasize enough on how crucial this was to our agency as we would never have considered the site due to the cost and our inability to have liquid funds set aside for such a project.

The purchase of this property allowed us to apply for the Low-Income Housing Fast Track grant for a proposed 104-unit 7 building apartment complex in La Grande. To qualify for this grant you needed to have the ground already purchased and be ready to build. We have been approved for this grant and are in the final process of funding and looking to break ground June of this year with completion by spring of 2023.

Our agency currently has 100 applicants on our Blue Springs Crossing complex's waiting list, 243 applicants on our Housing Choice voucher programs waiting list and another 100 on our owned and managed properties. The community and community partners have rallied around this project and it will house Head Start which is a preschool program, and will have onsite meeting rooms for community partners to meet with residents without having to leave the complex to receive services. This complex is designed to be a community for all ages and will provide services and activities to bridge barriers and bring people together.

The building of this complex is going to fill a great need in our counties housing supply stock. Union County is currently in the process of completing another housing needs analysis and the trends that are surfacing in this current analysis are showing a steady increase from the 2017 study. Union county is also dealing with the impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic and loss of jobs which creating an even greater need for affordable housing.

It is imperative that Oregon keep the Land Acquisition program funded and I urge the legislature to add more resources to the program as this is one of the only programs that allow smaller

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agencies like ours to purchase land and build the much-needed affordable housing in our Counties. Without this funding rural counties are going to continue in a downward spiral and our homeless population will continue to rise.

I support the passage of HB 5011 so that organizations can continue to partner with OHCS and work to serve the people of Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink.

Sarah Parker
Interim Executive Director