

## Boardman tackles housing shortage

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City and state officials are ready in Boardman to address a lack of housing for the local labor force.

Gov. John Kitzhaber in November 2011 designated the Workforce Housing and Community Development project as eligible for assistance by Oregon Solutions. The organization provides staff support and guidance to keep projects on track.

One goal in Boardman is to attract developers to build new homes, said Gary Neal, Port of Morrow general manager.

“The goal is to identify opportunities to see new rental inventory and get some duplexes or fourplexes constructed and available to rent for people moving in for jobs,” Neal said. “There’s a lot of discussion about who do you target and it’s not necessarily people that are commuting, it’s the people who haven’t moved here yet.”

Neal said discussion at the project’s first meeting focused on how to identify development opportunities and how to market rentals.

According to Oregon Solutions, a housing shortage means many people working in Boardman commute from Hermiston and Tri-Cities, Wash. Many commuters are employed at the port, home to food processors and manufacturers, millers, data centers and other businesses.

Dirk Dirksen, superintendent of the Morrow County School District, is one of two “co-convenors” appointed by Kitzhaber to the project.

“There are 1,600 employees working at just the Port of Morrow, and 31 percent of that workforce commutes over 25 miles to work,” Dirksen said. “That’s really just in a nutshell what is being looked at in regards to this workforce planning committee.”

The first step in making that happen is getting some inventory on the ground, Neal said.

“We help bring people together to work through issues and opportunities in a community’s structure for a series of meetings to accomplish a community’s goals,” said Kim Travis, Oregon Solutions project manager.

The group expects to be done with the planning portion of the project within six months and have some “solid action steps and strategies,” Travis said.

State Sen. David Nelson, R-Pendleton, is the second co-convenor appointed to the project.

The group first met in early December. The next session is scheduled in February, Travis said.