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Local News

Evictions lead to planned rally

By Myles Murphy
Ashland Daily Tidings

Local affordable housing activists will join with Lower Pines Mobile Home Park residents to ask city leaders for assistance and justice in response to eviction notices posted this week.

"There's been a huge response already," Oregon Action Director Rich Rohde said Friday, after day after Lower Pines tenants learned they were being evicted.

"Clearly, first and foremost, we have to have protection for the residents," Rohde said. "There needs to be relocation help and compensation for residents thrown out of their homes."

"Our concern has to be, as a community what can we do to help them?" Ashland Mayor Alan DeBoer said. "We need to find someplace for them to live."

Rohde agrees, but plans to take it a step further when supporters descend on Tuesday's Ashland City Council meeting to speak out in the public forum.

"We will ask the city to stop doing business with these developers," Rohde said. "Every time they bring a development to the city hoping to make a lot of money, we're going to be there to remind people what happened with the Lower Pines."

Lower Pines property owner Greg Adams of Adams Group LLC announced this week he was no longer negotiating with the Rogue Valley Community Development Corporation to sell the trailer park property for construction of a low income housing development. The plan had been to build a collection of affordable units, make them available to the residents and help pay relocation costs.

RVCDC started negotiating with owners Adams and Chris Galpin of Galpin LLC in April 2002 about buying the land to build a low income housing project. The plan was to create about 17 affordable housing units on the site. The units were intended for rent by residents who make up to \$17,000 a year - 60 percent of the area mean income.

Present trailer park residents were to have first crack at the new dwellings, along with assistance with moving in.

"Quite truthfully, I was shocked the park hadn't been purchased," DeBoer said. "I think the owners of the property have done everything they could to bend over backwards."

Earlier, in February 2001, PremierWest Bank of Medford considered buying the site across Ashland Street from Wendy's Old Fashioned Hamburgers and building a bank surrounded by a plaza on the site. The issue drew the attention of social justice organizations Oregon Action, based in Medford, and Peace House of Ashland, two groups concerned with the loss of affordable housing in Ashland.

The bank backed out of the deal, partly because of the controversy surrounding the possible eviction of residents and the loss of affordable housing in the city.

According to a 2002 Oregon Action study, there are 221 mobile home spaces within the city limits and another 51 spaces outside - but still within Ashland's urban growth boundary. The average rent is \$241 per month.

Meanwhile, more than \$168,000 in grants promised RVCDC by the city for the now-defunct project will still be used by that organization to create affordable housing in the city, according to city staff.

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"We intentionally made it flexible when we granted the award," Assistant Planner Brandon Goldman said. "The important thing is to get the affordable housing units on the ground."

Since announcing an end to talks with RVCDC, Adams has expressed an interest in assisting some residents with relocation efforts.

DeBoer paid a visit to the park less than a week ago, and visited with some residents incognito, looking into the situation for himself.

"Some really nice people invited me in their house and we had a great discussion," DeBoer said. "At first they didn't have a clue I was the mayor."

While he was impressed by hospitality of the residents, DeBoer was not pleased with the state of the park.

"I was there because I had a concerned lady call me about one of the tenants there," DeBoer said. "The housing conditions there are not livable and I have huge concerns about someone dying in a fire there.

"If I owned that park I would close it," DeBoer said, adding that he plans to contact other government agencies and aid organizations to find help for the evicted Ashlanders.

Lower Pines supporters and other interested people are invited to meet at 6 p.m. Tuesday for pizza and discussion of the issue at the Ashland Congregational Church, 717 Siskiyou Blvd., before heading over to the 7 p.m. city council meeting at the Ashland Civic Center Council Chambers, 1175 E. Main St.

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