



Nov. 6, 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Our Valley group begins task of helping ease regional housing crunch

Housing Solutions Group's work is one of the final steps in 'game-changer' project

WENATCHEE — *Our Valley, Our Future* has formed a working group to develop recommendations aimed at making housing more available and affordable in the region.

The *Our Valley* Housing Solutions Group is made up of residents and stakeholders representing a broad cross section of the housing industry and community. The group has been tasked with researching local housing challenges and creating a slate of recommendations that will help spur more housing in the region in the short- and long-term.

The group met for the first time on Nov. 1.

"The Housing Solutions Group is an opportunity to develop new common-sense tools to increase housing across the entire region," said Steve Maher, *Our Valley* project coordinator. "This a complex issue and there are no easy answers. But we are convinced we can make in-roads locally by collaborating and seeking common solutions. Having such a diverse and credible group working together is a great start. Having the idea for this group originate with residents adds even more credibility."

Formation of the Housing Solutions Group is one of the final steps in *Our Valley, Our Future's* Regional Housing Approach game-changer project, which is meant to alleviate the growing housing crunch and its negative impacts on the region's quality of life and economy. *Our Valley* engaged more than 1,700 residents through a regional housing survey in July and August and another 75 residents and community leaders at a "Where Will We Live" forum in September.

The survey found residents struggling to find and afford a home in Chelan and Douglas counties, to the point where 45 percent of survey respondents said they have thought of relocating to another city. More than seven out of 10 residents labeled the housing problems as "extremely important" to the community. Another 23 percent labeled them "important."

Survey respondents cited an inadequate supply of reasonably priced homes and an inadequate supply of homes in general as the greatest challenges to buying a home today. An inadequate supply of rental units, follow by the poor quality of available rental units, were cited as the greatest challenges faced by renters.

Financial experts advise people not to spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing (either mortgage or rent), but more than 46 percent of survey respondents said they are spending more than that

amount.

The *Our Valley* survey found residents favoring a diverse range of housing options to solve the challenges, as well as a collaborative approach to the problem, with citizens, government, the housing industry and nonprofits all being seen as having a key role.

A Greater Wenatchee Urban Housing Study, conducted in 2016 by the cities of Wenatchee and East Wenatchee, found housing affordability a major issue in the community, along with the lack of market-rate housing and multifamily housing.

Construction of homes and apartments has remained largely stagnant in recent years, even as demand has grown. In July of this year, there were 156 homes for sale in the Greater Wenatchee Area, down from the 450 homes listed in July 2012. Meanwhile, the rental vacancy rate in the Greater Wenatchee Area was at 0.5 percent in July and at 1 percent in the Leavenworth.

Since 2012, the median home sales price has risen by 38 percent in the Greater Wenatchee Area and by 48 percent in the Leavenworth area. In July, the market rate was approximately \$1,200 a month (not including fees) for a one-bedroom apartment in the Greater Wenatchee Area and approximately \$1,800 a month (not including fees) for a two-bedroom apartment.

Community leaders have said the housing crunch is making it hard for employers to fill positions, has forced families to double up in homes, and has led to a slowdown in real estate activity.

There is no timeline yet for when the *Our Valley* Housing Solutions Group will deliver its recommendations to policy makers and the overall community. But Maher said *Our Valley, Our Future* anticipates the work taking at least three to four months.

Members of the Housing Solutions Group include (in alphabetical order):

- **Randy Agnew**, Rock Island mayor
- **John Alt**, Entiat councilman
- **Duff Bangs**, Wenatchee architect
- **Cori Bautista**, Banner Bank loan officer
- **Ace Bollinger**, Wenatchee-area home builder, City of Wenatchee Planning Commission member
- **Sally Brawley**, City of East Wenatchee Planning Commission member, Eastmont Metropolitan Parks executive director
- **JoEllen Colson**, Confluence Health vice president for human resources
- **Glen DeVries**, Wenatchee community development director, former Douglas County planner
- **Jake Davison**, American Family Insurance agent in Wenatchee
- **Sam Dilly**, Wenatchee-area landlord, Chelan County PUD project manager
- **Carly Faul**, Central Washington Home Builders Association executive officer
- **Mae Hamilton**, Wenatchee Realtor
- **Steve King**, City of Wenatchee economic development director

- **Andrea Kunz**, Pioneer Middle School teacher
- **Mike Leeds**, First American Title account manager in Wenatchee
- **Hank Lewis**, Chelan County planning director
- **R.J. Lott**, City of Entiat community development director
- **Alicia McRae**, Housing Authority of Chelan County and Wenatchee executive director
- **Amy Moubray**, Cashmere Valley Bank mortgage loan originator
- **Thom Nees**, Serve Wenatchee Valley executive director
- **Greg Olson**, Numerica Credit Union loan officer
- **Chris Phillippi**, Wenatchee developer, orchardist
- **Rani Sampson**, Wenatchee attorney
- **Clint Strand**, Leavenworth resident
- **Pete Teigen**, Leavenworth resident, Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board natural resource coordinator
- **Scott Tiedeman**, Wenatchee High School history teacher
- **Laurel Turner**, Women's Resource Center of NCW executive director
- **Brian Vincent**, Co-owner of Pacific Appraisal Associates, Leavenworth resident
- **Jamie Wallace**, NCW Association of Realtors past president
- **Cory Wray**, Wenatchee developer

The Regional Housing Approach game-changer is one of more than 150 projects in the *Our Valley* Action Plan, which was released in November 2016. All the grassroots projects were identified by residents as ones that will improve their quality of life, build resiliency in the face of change, and shape the community's future.

For more on *Our Valley, Our Future*: www.ourvalleyourfuture.org.

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