

## **Housing emergency declared in Grants Pass**

GRANTS PASS (AP) — Rural Josephine County has joined much larger West Coast communities in declaring a housing emergency.

The Josephine County Board of Commissioners took the action this week, hoping to free up state assistance and suspend some state rules, the Daily Courier reported . The board asked Oregon Gov. Kate Brown to declare a two-year emergency.

A housing crunch caused by a rising population and meager apartment construction has sent vacancy rates plummeting and rents soaring. The growing city of Grants Pass has seen an average of just 10 new apartments added per year over the past decade, the Daily Courier found.

A 2015 study by the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies found that 50 percent or more of households in Josephine County were rent-burdened, meaning they pay at least a third of their monthly income on rents and housing expenses.

"It's not just for face value and to get some notoriety," Commission Chairman Simon Hare said of the declaration. "It really is going to be, hopefully, used to galvanize the state into making some legislative adjustments to our cumbersome land-use process."

Hare supports a change to allow accessory dwelling units, secondary residences better known as mother-in-law apartments. Such dwellings might be a converted garage, an add-on or a new structure.

Commissioners also bemoaned the cost of new construction — costs made higher by government mandates, including energy efficiency rules and new state solar power rules.

A study by the Daily Courier found that fewer than 100 apartment units have been built in the county seat of Grants Pass over the past 10 years. During that same period, more than 1,000 homes have been built — and quickly sold to investors and retirees from outside the area.

Homes in the Grants Pass area that rented for \$800 or \$900 a month six years ago are now \$1,200 to \$1,600. The National Low-Income Housing Council estimates that to be at 30 percent of monthly income, rents in the county would need to be \$536.