

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS - SOUTH DESCHUTES COUNTY



Newberry Regional
PARTNERSHIP



2023 FOCUS GROUP REPORT

DECEMBER 6-7, 2023 – FINAL REPORT

DCG RESEARCH

www.DCGresearch.com



PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Newberry Regional Partnership is a team of public and private citizens that have come together to develop a long-range plan for growth in South Deschutes County. The Partnership’s mission is to foster community engagement for collaborative discussions that will lead to a community-developed action plan dealing with the effects of growth in the South County area.

The Partnership does not advocate for any special interest or take public policy positions. On the contrary, the focus is community collaboration. The goal: Engage the community in helping to influence growth and change over time.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

STEP ONE – QUANTITATIVE STUDY – DCG Research (DCG) was retained to create and conduct a community survey (June 6 to July 18, 2023) via social media and online. The study population was composed of residents that live in Sunriver, La Pine, and other areas in South Deschutes County including parts of Lake and Klamath Counties that use La Pine-Sunriver for services.

STEP TWO – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS – After reviewing survey results, the Partnership conducted nine community meetings to discuss matters of interest and/or concern to the broader community that were revealed in the survey. Sessions notes are available: <https://coicruralcommunity.org/projects/newberry/>

STEP THREE – QUALITATIVE STUDY (FOCUS GROUPS) – Following the Engagement Sessions, four topic-specific focus groups were conducted, Dec 6-7, 2023, in three locations (La Pine, Sunriver, and Three Rivers).

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I. METHODS

Focus Groups are a powerful qualitative research tool. While results cannot be projected to a larger population in the way that surveys (polling) allow, using a guided discussion with a relatively small group of participants can produce greater insights than if each one were interviewed separately. Focus Groups reflect a moment in time (i.e., opinions at the time of the session), so they may change due to future events or education.

Four sessions were held, one hour each, using a traditional focus group format. Sessions were audio recorded to ensure accurate comment review. However, recordings were not intended for publication or to provide a comprehensive verbatim of all comments.

- Session #1 – Education – 4:00 PM, Dec 6 – Midstate Electric Conference Room**
- Session #2 – Economic Development – 5:30 PM, Dec 6, Midstate Electric Conference Room**
- Session #3 – Public Safety – 3:00 PM, Dec 7, Three Rivers Community Center**
- Session #4 – Health – 5:30 PM, Dec 7, Habitat for Humanity Conference Room**

Focus Groups are ideal for exploring feelings and opinions, not necessarily factual information. A moderator focuses on making participants feel welcomed and valued; therefore, no effort was made to educate or correct comments expressed. Because discussions are driven by opinion, DCG Research cautions that sharing this report can lead to misinformation.

II. ATTENDEES / QUESTIONS

Potential focus group attendees were solicited via the community survey and in the Community Engagement Sessions. Partnership committee members were also encouraged to invite community members they knew to attend a session.

All potential participants completed a questionnaire asking: (1) Where they live, (2) How long they have lived in the area, and (3) Their approximate age. The research goal was to make sure sessions had a cross-section of the community. A total of 55 people were selected as potential focus groups attendees.

The groups selected reflected a cross-section of the the study population. All had interest in the topic presented. Most were also active in their communities. While the Engagement Sessions featured speakers with policy and leadership roles, these sessions focused on hearing from the general public. Therefore, DCG screened out attendees that were involved in policy making. Of course, agencies have an excellent opportunity to take these focus group opinions and turn them into action plans for education.

Focus Group questions were developed by DCG in collaboration with Partnership committee members. Each session began with three common questions about access to news and community communications. Then the moderator led the group into a series of subject-specific questions. In several cases, the discussion moved in a direction requiring additional (unscripted) questions.

III. KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM SESSIONS

OPENING QUESTIONS – ALL SESSIONS

How do you learn about what's happening in your community?



If there were an online digital newspaper focused on South Deschutes County, would you be willing to pay to receive it? How much?



If you had to describe to family or friends why you like where you live, what one word would you use?

OPENING QUESTIONS – KEY TAKEAWAYS

NEWS SOURCE - In all sessions, most participants were active in their community, therefore they tended to rely primarily on face-to-face connections for local information. Facebook was the most mentioned media, more important than print or television, but participants expressed concerns about media inaccuracy, especially Facebook.

INTEREST IN A DIGITAL NEWSPAPER - Younger participants (Generation X) had some interest in a local digital newspaper, depending on who was responsible for it. However, older participants (Baby Boomers and Seniors) had little interest in digital media, preferring print and TV news sources. All participants thought the publication could have an “agenda” that would limit their interest.

Very few participants expressed any interest in paying for local news access. If they were willing to pay, it would be modest (\$1 to \$5 a month). In fact, few participants subscribed to any current news outlets (only Bend Bulletin, Apple TV, and New York Times were mentioned). In general, participants expressed a lack of interest in being informed. This thought supports national research of news.(1)

ONE WORD DESCRIPTION - When asked to give one word to express why they like living where they do: People, Community, Tranquility (peace and quiet) and Nature (being close to the outdoors) were the most common answers. Protecting these values would be important in the proposed long-range plan.

(1) According to a Pew Research Center analysis, Americans are following the news less closely than they were a few years ago. In 2016, 51% of U.S. adults said they followed the news **all or most of the time**. But that share fell to 38% in 2022. In turn, a rising share of Americans say they follow the news **only now and then**. While 12% of adults said this in 2016, that figure increased to 19% by 2022. And while 5% of adults said in 2016 that they **hardly ever** follow the news, 9% said the same last year.

In another PEW Study, a majority of U.S. adults (86%) say they often or sometimes get news from a smartphone, computer, or tablet, including 56% who say they do so often. When asked which of these platforms they prefer to get news on, nearly six-in-ten Americans say they prefer a digital device (58%), more than say they prefer TV (27%). Even fewer Americans prefer radio (6%) or print (5%).

EDUCATION

When you hear someone say we need quality education,
how do you define a quality education?



What would you do to get more people involved
in supporting students and teachers in La Pine?
Especially those who had negative experiences
with the school district?



Whose responsibility is it to make sure students
get a good education?



How would you encourage business leaders to volunteer
at the school to help students start thinking about career paths?



What do you think are the major hurdles
regarding education in La Pine?

EDUCATION SESSION – KEY TAKEAWAYS

LACK OF RESOURCES - Quality education was defined as having equal access, equitable distribution of resources, and having involved parents, and well-paid teachers. A major discussion theme was the lack of educational resources and the inequality of financial support from tax supported funding. Most participants believed that the School District doesn't invest in South Deschutes at the same level as Bend (one participant jokingly mentioned that the District doesn't even know how to spell La Pine). Participants expressed resentment that support for affluent communities is greater than for lower income communities; the group cited many examples of how the District doesn't appear to care about education equally in rural communities.

GETTING BUSINESSES INVOLVED - The group shared some interesting views about getting more local businesses involved. Because of the small business community, the same businesses are often targeted, again and again, for financial support. It was thought that more businesses would be willing to donate time, not money, but needed to be asked to be involved with in-school programs. Some participants believed that some teachers may be reluctant to give up limited class time to outsiders. Involving more retired seniors appears to be an untapped resource.

RESPONSIBILITY - While the lack of parenting commitment and skills, primarily driven by low-income family challenges, was a central concern. Having a parent organization (PTA) at all schools was recommended as a critical tool to increasing parent involvement.

A recurring concern, in all sessions, was the perceived inequality of tax supported resources being dedicated to South Deschutes County. This was most often mentioned with regard to education and healthcare.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

What do you think is key to preserving a small-town community feel and your community's unique identity?



What businesses do you think La Pine needs?



Would you like to see a larger downtown area in La Pine?



South Deschutes County has been named a top 10 travel destination in the Pacific Northwest. Is this something favorable or unfavorable to you? Why?



Why is it difficult to get affordable housing in your area?



If you were developing a long-range plan for economic growth in South Deschutes County what would be your number one priority?

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – KEY TAKEAWAYS

SMALL-TOWN DEFINITION - The community survey revealed that maintaining a small-town atmosphere in South Deschutes is extremely important to residents. But what makes a small town? A low key (relaxed) lifestyle and a vibrant, volunteering community was a central thought expressed. Communities need to be welcoming to all (some participants believed this was not always the case for newcomers), and people helping each other (sense of community) appeared to be other key elements to keeping a small-town vibe.

DOWNTOWN - The importance of having a larger, more defined downtown area (participants believed La Pine was lacking this), with better shopping opportunities are also keys to creating a small-town atmosphere. While more businesses are needed, especially childcare, the group believed that a long-range plan must focus on increasing locally owned retailers with some big box retailers for essential items. Better health care options and more competitive and better grocery stores were also a concern.

TOURISM – While participants acknowledged that tourism is an important economic driver, they expressed concerns about the downside: absentee owners of rentals (Airbnb, VRBO), demand on local city resources, lack of lodging choices, and the need for more things to do (not just outdoor adventures) so people don't just drive through.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING - Participants believed that the key to affordable housing is to have more local, family wage jobs. But they also cited that the high cost of land is difficult to address. A central concern was that they did not want the area to become just a Bend bedroom community due to the lack of family wage jobs in South Deschutes County.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT - Some participants were critical of La Pine's industrial development efforts. They believe that a city must ensure adequate water supplies and other infrastructure components within industrial areas. Participants were concerned that new businesses were required to pay for all improvements with high system development fees. Many participants expressed anger that new businesses may be required to pay for infrastructure that should be paid for by city, state, and county government.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Have you had a positive or negative experience with local law enforcement?



Some property owners are proactive in wildfire prevention, others are not. Why is this?



Some people say rental owners are less concerned about wildfires. What could be done to change this?



If you were looking for advice and help on making your property more fire safe, to whom would you turn?



If you were developing a long-range plan for public safety in South Deschutes County, what would be your number one priority?

PUBLIC SAFETY KEY TAKEAWAYS

LAW ENFORCEMENT - While the survey revealed that residents were very (30%) or somewhat pleased (34%) with law enforcement, many participants showed frustration with their interaction with officers/deputies. Participants did state that they had positive interactions with law enforcement, especially in Sunriver, but many commented on their frustration over slow response times. They acknowledged that limited staffing was the core problem, they perceived a negative attitude from officers and deputies that they don't seem to be concerned about South Deschutes issues.

As expressed in other sessions, anger and resentment were common when participants talked about the lack of resource investments in South Deschutes. Shooting and hunting on public lands close to neighborhoods, 4th of July fireworks, kids having open fires in parks, speeding on rural roads endangering school kids, and lack of road signage were all cited as examples of residents requesting law enforcement support which were, for the most part, ignored.

FIRE PREVENTION - Getting owners (local, absentee, rental) more involved in wildfire prevention would appear to require more pro-active efforts by government. Apathy and people living in their own "me bubble" were cited as reasons for lack of interest. Some participants thought that if you made it a pocketbook issue, obtaining home insurance, all owners would be more pro-active in fire prevention.

Regular community briefings/meetings with fire officials, personal inspection of properties by fire departments, and better awareness of grants for property clearing were all cited as underutilized tools for fire awareness. The important role of an active HOA in creating Firewise communities was mentioned often. Outlying areas, not in established communities, were considered a major issue due to low-income residents and a "me bubble" isolation attitude. While there are numerous fire prevention resources (as presented in the Community Engagement Sessions), only a few were mentioned. Most participants did not know where to get help. The proposed long-range plan must address this awareness challenge.

LONG-RANGE PRIORITIES - Need for evacuation signs on all roads, expanding fire barriers, an increase in community meetings for fire education, completing a public safety inventory, and investing in more in infrastructure (roads, signage) were all considered important elements for a plan. One participant felt very strongly that the county needs to deal with the environmental impact of high nitrate levels in this area.

HEALTH

What organizations are doing the best job at providing health services to your community?



What would be your top recommendations for improving health services in your area?



Do you think access to health care is a challenge in your community?



Is the move to telehealth in rural communities good or bad?



Do you have to go through an online portal (MyChart) and what do you think of it?



What is your biggest frustration with the health care system?



If you were developing a long-range plan for health care in South Deschutes County what would be your number one priority?

HEALTH SESSION KEY TAKEAWAYS

BEST LOCAL PROVIDERS - The La Pine Community Health Center was the leading provider mentioned as doing the “best job.” This was due to their perceived community focus. Providing gas vouchers for travel to Bend, diapers, having a more personal approach (“they know me”), plus greater flexibility were all cited. St. Charles was also named as doing a good job, although some expressed concern that their large, corporate approach prevented them from providing more care.

BIGGEST NEED - Participants were excited about the Community Health Center’s new building. They believe this will significantly improve the availability of local services. The top healthcare recommendation, by all participants, was the need for a small (12-bed) hospital and more local specialists. These should certainly be a part of a long-range plan.

ACCESS CHALLENGES - Everyone stated that healthcare access is a major concern. Many expressed frustration on the fractured nature of care today that requires numerous trips to out of town specialists. A lack of public transportation to/from Bend, especially for seniors and low-income families, was considered to be a failure of state, county, and local government support for South Deschutes. Access, getting timely appointments, and transportation challenges were all cited as the biggest frustrations with the healthcare system.

TELEHEALTH - On balance, it was considered a good addition for rural communities, but no one thought it should be used as a diagnostic tool. Most participants were adamant that it should not take the place of face-to-face interaction. The use of online portals was acceptable for routine questions, but very limiting for more complex care issues.

LONG-RANGE PRIORITIES - Participants believed that a long-range plan must include the building of a hospital and adding more local specialists, especially for addictions and recovery, mental health, and pediatrics. Some participants were also concerned about the lack of support for the special needs community, and the growing homeless population. Although not as visible as it is in urban areas (tent cities), with rapid area growth, several participants believe the plan needs to address homelessness before it becomes a major problem.

IV. NOTES AND QUOTES

OPENING QUESTIONS – ALL SESSIONS

How do you learn about what's happening in your community?

- Networking/talking to people/face-to-face interactions
- Volunteering at schools
- Through working in the community
- Sunriver Scene (monthly publication)
- Facebook
- Bend Bulletin, NPR, Apple TV, Central Oregon Daily News (TV)
- Chamber of Commerce and City of La Pine websites
- Nextdoor (social media)
- School newsletters
- Involvement with local boards
- Meetings
- Word of mouth
- I talk to Kathy DeBone – she is involved in every things
- Social media (Facebook)
- Listening, I am involved in community groups
- La Pine Chamber is a good for information
- Local newspaper (Sunriver and Bend)
- Mostly from Facebook, plus Next Door

If there was an online digital newspaper focused on South Deschutes County, would you be willing to pay to receive it? How much?

“If you have to pay, I’m out.”

- Would depend on who produced it, i.e., need to respect source
- Would love to see one but wouldn't pay for it
- No – if a topic interests me, I'd research it myself
- No (am anti-digital, not interested, would read but wouldn't pay)
- Would pay if newspaper was of good quality
- Would pay \$1/month
- Depends on focus – if it is about schools, sports, and local events I would support it
- My wife tells me what is happening, she is seems connected
- If focuses on local issues, might pay for it
- Not a big fan of journalism because it is opinionated

**If you had to describe to family or friends why you like where you live,
what one word would you use?**

***“Love being away from hustle and bustle... and having a
access to outdoor options.”***

“This is home.”

- Location
- Quiet/peaceful
- Wilderness/outdoors/scenery/nature
- Retirement
- Community
- Small-town feel
- Community engagement
- People
- Location (inc. proximity to Mr. Bachelor)
- Serenity
- Family – I live here because daughter is here
- Neighbors – We support each other
- Community – Living away from Bend, need community support
- Lifestyle – Water access, outdoor activities
- Peaceful – Love the outdoors
- Outdoors – It is all around us and very accessible

EDUCATION NOTES AND QUOTES

GROUP DYNAMICS – Excellent. This was a strong group because of participant backgrounds: A mother that home schools three children, parents of current and past students, a local retired teacher, and past volunteers/educators of various school systems.

NAME	RESIDENCE	TIME IN THE COMMUNITY	AGE GROUP
Participant 1	La Pine	0-5 Years	Millennial (Born 1980-1995)
Participant 2	Sunriver	0-5 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)
Participant 3	Three Rivers	6-10 Years	Millennial (Born 1980-1995)
Participant 4	Sunriver	6-10 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)
Participant 5	Three Rivers	6-10 Years	Generation X (Born 1965-1979)
Participant 6	Three Rivers	0-5 Years	Millennial (Born 1980-1995)
Participant 7	La Pine	0-5 Years	Generation X (Born 1965-1979)
Participant 8	Whispering Pines	More than 20 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)

When you hear someone say we need quality education, how do you define a quality education?

*“So much more happens in Bend schools.”
“Not enough going on here in La Pine.”*

“In La Pine kids fall through the cracks all the time.”

- Equal access to advanced/special programs
- Customized for each student
- Equitable (comparisons made to after-school programs in La Pine versus Three Rivers & Bend: 7 at LPHS and 42 at Summit High School)
- Active community involvement (including parents and local businesses)
- Communication between parents and educators
- Caring
- Recruitment of high-quality teachers and educators

What would you do to get more people involved in supporting students and teachers in La Pine?

Especially those who had negative experiences with the school district?

- Need to spend more money to upgrade facilities (comparison made between new \$40k playground built for school in Bend; playgrounds in La Pine are 20-40 years old)
- Allocate more resources for less advantaged students
- More career guidance (intern programs, college prep, trade schools)
- Hire administrators who are invested in the community
- Reduce emphasis on quality standards
- Use more volunteers (e.g., seniors) in the schools, call upon churches, have “greeters” at front entrance)
- Have seniors meet with younger students
- Have a parent organization in each elementary school

Whose responsibility is it to make sure students get a good education?

“First and foremost, it’s the parents’ job.”

“Education starts at home.”

“When parents can give time and money, students will prosper.”

- Parents – they need to be involved more
- Government – disseminate information about educational resources

How would you encourage business leaders to volunteer at the school to help students start thinking about career paths.

- Ask local businesses for their time instead of their money
- Involve school administrators and teachers in organizing career events, and inviting local businesses to participate
- Make career events interactive
- Hold events during the school day, so transportation won’t be an issue

What do you think are the major hurdles regarding education in La Pine?

“Need to start reading to children at age three or four.”

“Problems are too big, and a lot of people are giving up.”

“People don’t care, including those who don’t have kids.”

- Lack of transportation options (e.g., few bike lanes; kids walking on Burgess and/or U.S. 97 to and from school)
- Lack of community involvement
- Lack of family support for children
- More expensive to operate in La Pine (e.g., paying for electricians, who often come from Bend to service schools)
- Societal factors:
 - a) One participant claimed that 38% of La Pine students aren’t there in June, due to mobility of working parents; rate is comparable to that in inner cities.
 - b) Difference between being born in affluent circumstances versus traumatic circumstances or in poverty
 - c) Don’t see enough children being protected at brick & mortar schools.
- Magnitude of issues, they seem overwhelming
- Apathy

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NOTES AND QUOTES

GROUP DYNAMICS – Good. This was the largest Focus Group, reflecting the interest in economic development to South Deschutes residents. It was a slightly older group, but it had a good cross-section of former business owners, residents, and people with a business background.

NAME	RESIDENCE	TIME IN THE COMMUNITY	AGE GROUP
Participant 1	La Pine	6-10 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)
Participant 2	Three Rivers	More than 20 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)
Participant 3	La Pine	6-10 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)
Participant 4	La Pine	More than 20 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)
Participant 5	La Pine (Work)	0-5 Years	Generation X (Born 1965-1979)
Participant 6	Gilchrist/Crescent	15-20 Years	Millennial (Born 1980-1995)
Participant 7	La Pine	6-10 Years	Generation X (Born 1965-1979)
Participant 8	Sunriver	11-14 Years	Senior (Born 1945-1935)
Participant 9	Three Rivers	0-5 Years	Millennial (Born 1980-1995)
Participant 10	La Pine	More than 20 Years	Millennial (Born 1980-1995)
Participant 11	La Pine	More than 20 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)

What do you think is key to preserving a small-town community feel and your community's unique identity?

- Everyone helps each other; neighbors helping neighbors
 - Not being afraid to interact with each other (as society becomes more divisive)
 - Ability to find volunteers – missing/not true in La Pine
 - A sense of identity/cohesion/vibrant, more defined downtown area – missing/not true in La Pine
 - Slower pace
 - A welcoming attitude to all types of people, including those who move here – missing/ not true in La Pine
-

What businesses do you think La Pine needs?

- Major chain stores
 - Affordable childcare
 - More advanced health care, such as ER
-

Would you like to see a larger downtown area in La Pine?

- Yes, La Pine needs a defined downtown
- Need a downtown with a distinct personality
- Need more control on design and building to form a downtown

South Deschutes County has been named a top 10 travel destination in the Pacific Northwest.

Is this something favorable or unfavorable to you? Why?

- Favorable – tourism brings more money and diversity
 - Unfavorable – now many Airbnb rentals in area with high occupancy rates
 - People don't stop here; need more "fun things" to do so people congregate
-

Why is it difficult to get affordable housing in your area?

- Length of time and high costs of building permits at government levels; not making it easy
 - Land is expensive in Deschutes County
 - Cost of housing accounts for 60% of gross income in Oregon, 40% elsewhere
-

If you were developing a long-range plan for economic growth in South Deschutes County what would be your number one priority?

- Attract trade sector companies that can offer family-wage jobs
- Offer adequate health care
- Create local jobs
- Match wages of "big box stores" that pay well (e.g., \$19/hour at Walmart)
- Enhance appeal to businesses by reducing the cost and number of System Development Charges (SDCs) for sidewalks, utilities, etc.; offer tax incentives
- Ensure adequate water supplies and other infrastructure components that are not the "burden" of businesses
- Strengthen La Pine's core area so it will provide jobs
- Offer blue collar educational options such as trade schools

PUBLIC SAFETY NOTES AND QUOTES

GROUP DYNAMICS – Excellent. Because this group had representation from many different communities, the group had a strong understanding of issues facing residents that live in isolated, remote communities in South Deschutes.

NAME	RESIDENCE	TIME IN THE COMMUNITY	AGE GROUP
Participant 1	La Pine	0-5 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)
Participant 2	La Pine	More than 20 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)
Participant 3	Spring River	More than 20 Years	Senior (Born 1945-1935)
Participant 4	Sunriver	0-5 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)
Participant 5	Three Rivers	0-5 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)
Participant 6	Three Rivers	0-5 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)
Participant 7	Lazy River South	0-5 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)

Have you had a positive or negative experience with local law enforcement?

“Sunriver has 1,100 full-time residents and they have 12 officers and just got federal funding for more. We have 2,500 living in La Pine, 3,500 in Three Rivers, plus other areas have no local police service. That is a crime.”

“We feel like we have been totally ignored and this is shared by many of my Three River neighbors.”

“Three Rivers has problems with kids in our park, all summer long, building fires. We took pictures and reported, Sheriffs did nothing. No response at.”

“Pretty much all we have is the Sheriff and they just don’t have enough deputies. Again, lack of resource commitments to rural areas.”

“I live in Sunriver, police seem responsive, but we need more police departments, especially in La Pine.”

“I am a hunter, and I would never hunt or shoot near a neighborhood. Police need to be more responsive to the community in addressing this issue.”

- Negative – they would not deal with shooting/hunting on property near homes
- Sheriffs don’t seem to care about shooting on public lands
- Not enough deputies to deal with issues – response time is terrible
- Hunters seem to hunt anywhere and that is just not right
- Sunriver has only local police department, none in La Pine or Three Rivers
- Need more local police, especially in La Pine
- No real police presence in the community
- Large areas have no local police protection
- Don’t have enough road signs
- Law enforcement do coordinate well with other services
- More people moving in from urban areas, so less respect for neighbors or fire issues
- Sheriff response time to Three Rivers is very slow
- No sidewalks for kids walking to the bus – people drive too fast on rural roads
- No speed limit signs or evacuation signs in many areas

Some property owners are proactive in wildfire prevention, others are not. Why is this?

“Husband dies, she now lives alone in home with 15 acres in the middle of nowhere, she just doesn’t know what to do. Kids don’t come to visit.”

“Most compelling thing I’ve seen is when someone in the know comes out to a property and tells the owner that if there is a fire in their neighborhood, they won’t be able to defend it. That strikes home”

“I’m surprised how many people have this ‘me bubble’ around them. They simply don’t care about anything outside of their immediate world. I am shocked how many people think that way.”

- Out of area owners don’t visit enough to care
- Takes time and investment to make a Firewise community
- It is hit and miss process – lot easy if you have an HOA
- An HOA can get money - much more challenging if you don’t have one
- Plenty of fire prevention resources, people don’t know about them
- There are resources - \$700,000 in grants provided, \$500 per homeowners
- People living outside of established communities not aware of what is available
- There is a lack of information to landowners
- Sunriver has fire staff that will talk to owners about fire issues
- It takes someone with credibility coming to a property and explaining fire issues
- Many people live in a ‘Me Bubble’ that creates ignorance and a don’t care attitude
- Many don’t have the financial means – big problem
- Seniors living alone, isolated, don’t know what to do
- Live in animal migration routes, as we grow, there is increasing conflict
- Community meetings on fire issues are really helpful
- Forest fires come mostly from the west, people need to know that
- Fires often hit the same areas, year after year

Some people say rental owners are less concerned about wildfires. What could be done to change this?

“If insurance companies were more proactive in warning homeowners of what their potential losses would be, that would help.”

“Need more visits by fire officials to properties that need attention. Need to talk directly to the homeowner or renter. “

- Make them aware of potential loss (cost) of a fire – it is a checkbook issue
- Insurance companies are now refusing coverage in some areas
- Can’t create a defensible space if my neighbor doesn’t do the same
- No sure of current status, but there was a state law that allows self-evaluation of property
- Neighborhood meetings with County Forester so very help but not enough of them
- Make people aware that 80% of wildfires are caused by humans, 4th of July fireworks big issue

If you were looking for advice and help on making your property more fire safe, to whom would you turn?

- Don't know
 - I know there are resources and funds available, but don't know how to find them
 - Many people have a false sense of security, until it is too late
 - Visitors are in and out – just don't have to deal with these issues.
 - Many people visiting just don't care about wildfire issues
-

If you were developing a long-range plan for public safety in South Deschutes County, what would be your number one priority?

“Plan needs to embrace the fact that we live in a mostly rural area that is growing and we need to deal with these issues, even if it means giving something up.”

“Need more fire resources. There is a Fire Department in Sunriver and La Pine, but that's it. The plan needs to invest in infrastructure so we can protect all of us.”

“You need a plan, but you also need to communicate it. If you can't communicate it and it is not visible, with the resources to communicate it, then it is not a plan.”

“Plan needs a well thought out evacuation plan, but if no one knows about it, it is not a plan.”

- Make sure there are evacuation signs on all our roads.
- Focus on maps, safety zones, signage, and public awareness of fire issues
- Forest Service needs to continue to continue creating fire barriers
- Hold more community meetings with Fire Chief and foresters – more education
- Need a plan and need to communicate it to communities
- County resources are spent in Bend and Sisters, nothing around here
- Invest in infrastructure – better roads, more fire barriers, signage
- Need a public safety inventory, know what is not in place, and create plan to add it
- We pay Bend taxes and get nothing for it
- Need monthly meetings with County Foresters to make people aware of fire issues

RESEARCH NOTE – One of the participants could not make the Public Safety session due to a family Covid situation. He was very concerned about nitrate levels. Here are excerpts from information he provide DCG after the session: “Since Three Rivers is an unintentional community... it has grown over time in ways that are antithetical to environmental sustainability for the region. For example, many individualized septic systems are built for homes. Elevated levels of nitrates flow into the high-water table and eventually into the Deschutes because of these septic systems. This results in eutrophication.

Compare and contrast Three Rivers with Sunriver and Crosswater. Both of these communities reside directly by the Deschutes River and were designed in ways to manage water runoff. Anecdotally, you can look at the banks near Crosswater and Sunriver and compare them to the banks of the Little Deschutes and Deschutes along Three Rivers. During the grow season, you see green growth along the banks on the Three Rivers side of the Deschutes and Little Deschutes.

Another consequence of eutrophication is that high levels of algae bloom in the water. This can become toxic and reduce various populations of species in and around the river... Beyond that, evidence from the DEQ and other preliminary data on nitrate levels have emerged that compare and contrast our region with the upper and lower Deschutes near Wikiup and Bend. Preliminary evidence shows a major jump in nitrate levels specific to our region.

This issue is not exclusively a problem of nitrates. The County has auctioned off most of its lots along my side of the river. Many people clear the majority of the trees from these lots and build individual septic systems and homes. Or they clear the lot and put-up pole barns for recreational use. These decisions impact our ecosystem in various ways.

These are just a few of many important problems our area faces. Unfortunately, our region has experienced years of neglect. We need thoughtful action to remedy the problems and it has been difficult to get the county involved, until lately. I appreciate what the Newberry Regional Development group is doing!

HEALTH NOTES AND QUOTES

GROUP DYNAMICS – Very Strong. This was a smaller group due to weather, traffic (accident), and work conflicts resulting in three no-shows. However, all attendees were well versed on healthcare issues with all having firsthand experience with existing resources.

NAME	RESIDENCE	TIME IN THE COMMUNITY	AGE GROUP
Participant 1	La Pine	More than 20 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)
Participant 2	La Pine	0-5 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)
Participant 3	Three Rivers	6-10 Years	Generation X (Born 1965-1979)
Participant 4	La Pine	0-5 Years	Generation X (Born 1965-1979)
Participant 5	La Pine	More than 20 Years	Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)

What organizations are doing the best job at providing health services to your community?

“La Pine Community Health Center does a fantastic job. I am completely satisfied. They are a standalone, more focus on the community.”

“I think St. Charles is working very hard to be a part of the community, but they have a corporate agenda that limits their ability to serve.”

- La Pine Community Health Center – community focused, not corporate focus
- St. Charles Clinic – working extremely hard to be part of the community
- Health Center is more small scale, so they have greater flexibility
- New Community Health Center building will expand services we need
- Local EMT services do an excellent job with limited resources
- St. Charles tells me ‘we can’t do this or that’ – I am switching to the Health Center
- St. Charles has a definite agenda – don’t like that
- Health Center has more of a local focus, they give a lot to the community
- Health Center and St. Charles not competitors – they collaborative often
- Staff issues – 10 different providers in 12 years at the Health Center
- Federally funding makes it difficult for PCP to stay very long at Health Center
- I had Health Center provider for last 4 years, so not all staff turns over

What would be your top recommendations for improving health services in your area?

“La Pine may look like a small community, but the Post Office serves an area of 30,000 people and that is why demand for South County health care service is so critical.”

“We need more local services so older residents are not driving 30 miles in the winter just to get to a specialist. Transportation is a major issue for many residents.”

- Local Specialists – to prevent visits to Bend, especially for seniors
 - Complete new Community Health Center building it will provide more services
 - Need 12-bed hospital – been discussing this for years
 - With twice as many older residents than other communities, need better access (transportation) to care
 - Family doctor handling everything is gone - very splintered now, specialists for everything
-

Do you think access to health care is a challenge in your community?

“We have very splintered family dynamics here, grandparents raising grandchildren, so we need more family counseling.”

- Yes, you have to go to Bend, but many residents (low income/seniors) can't drive
 - Little local access to mental health and pediatric care
 - Much of mental health services are now virtual
 - Yes, need more providers to build relationships – face-to-face
 - Telehealth has its place – but can't replace human contact
 - Face-to-face relationships need be built for successful mental health care
 - A wait list of two plus years for children to get therapy
-

Is the move to telehealth in rural communities good or bad?

NOTE: Telehealth is the distribution of health-related services and information via electronic information and telecommunication technologies. It allows long-distance patient and clinician contact, care, advice, reminders, education, intervention, monitoring, and remote admissions.

“ I am trusting people with my life; I want human contact with them.”

“My son has ADHD and getting access, without driving to Bend, definitely reduce our trips to Bend.”

“If my doctor, during a routine visit, had not asked me when the last time was, we checked your thyroid, I wouldn't have discovered that I had cancer. Just can't do that with telehealth.”

- Bad, not personal, can't read body language
- Computers and smartphones are making the world become detached
- Behavioral abuse is the result of isolation
- 60/40 – 60% good for colds, minor health issues, but not good for diagnosis
- It is not a relationship building system

Do you have to go through an online portal (MyChart) and what do you think of it?

St. Charles' system (MyChart) is limiting. If you ask more than one superficial question, it can't handle it. I had five interactions and still didn't get the answer I needed."

"It has its place, but it can't be the only access point."

- Like it, very useful for routine questions
- Yes, but it is too impersonal for me
- Forget to ask a question at appointment, useful for follow up
- I was shocked how fast I got an answer back on a cancer issue
- Good experience – very fast answers

Participants believe that telehealth works as a strategic tool, but not as a replacement for face-to-face, especially for diagnostic issues. Portal systems (MyChart) are appreciated for fast response to simple questions, but not for anything complex.

What is your biggest frustration with the health care system

"I fear where this world is going because of detachment. People are becoming isolated and that brings on mental health issues, which in turn results in addictions, alcoholism, and drug use. Detachment is a big issue in rural areas."

- Getting an appointment
 - Lack of a variety services
 - Customer service
-

If you were developing a long-range plan for health care in South Deschutes County what would be your number one priority?

"As more people arrive, we are going to see a huge increase in homeless people coming in conflict with nature and neighbors."

"We have all this land, so we don't have homeless tent cities like Bend, but just because people are spread out in the forests, doesn't mean we have an enormous homeless population with major addiction and mental health issues we are not addressing."

- Better customer service
- Need a hospital (mentioned by all participants)
- La Pine lacks addictions and recovery services
- Local mental health services
- Services for the homeless – need a facility before we are overrun

- Reality - helping the homeless will require more taxes
- Better transportation to health care services
- Special needs community is very underserved – it's an after thought
- More living wage jobs so people can afford healthcare