

Commissioner Joe Berney touched on a range of topics during his update to Springfield City Club discussing his first year in office.



He is still adjusting, he said, to not rolling up his sleeves and getting things done. “The County Commission doesn’t do that,” he said, noting that the Commission focuses on setting policy that the Administrator and staff implement. In response to a question, he said that he believes the Commission is less partisan than in the past, and he is hopeful it will function more smoothly, and he hopes, can become a more action-oriented board.

Speaking to a packed house, he emphasized that improving housing capacity is one of his major issues. He noted that over one-half of the housing funded through County efforts this year is or will be constructed in Springfield. He wants to see more of the “missing middle” housing and noted that more attention needs to be devoted to affordable housing that is suitable for families – housing with two or three bedrooms – not small units suitable only for single individuals. Even so, he said transitional housing like the project to provide veteran’s housing in Glenwood, is critical to reducing the size of the unhoused population.

With respect to Glenwood, he said that the Commission is interested in further development in Glenwood but wants to proceed at a pace set by the Springfield Council.

The Commission continues to work on the effort to develop the Goshen area, and he noted that the Board has recently approved a study to determine how to provide sewer and water services to the Short Mountain landfill, which lies between Springfield/Eugene and Goshen.



Commissioner Berney was also asked about his decision to support a one-year suspension in the County’s dues payments to the Association of Oregon and California Counties (AOCC). That organization lobbies on behalf of counties who had previously received payments from the federal government to account t for the loss of tax revenues on land owned by the federal government and managed by the Bureau of Land Management. That funding has decline markedly in the past two decades as the Congress first converted it to more limited aid under the Secure Rural Schools Act and has, since then, whittled away at the amounts appropriated, with adverse financial consequences to most counties and cities in rural western Oregon. The dispute which led to the suspension apparently relates to disagreements over whether the AOCC is supporting the right level of harvesting.

Commissioner Berney said he agreed to support the suspension only after being assured that it would not adversely affect existing sales or harvest. The subject will come up again in this year's budget discussion, he said. Chris Cadwell, who is staff to AOC was at the meeting but did not speak. He is, however, scheduled to speak to City Club on December 19 and will probably discuss this topic further.