

HOUSING HAPPENINGS

A Word from the Vice President ~

FIRST STEP EXPANSION PROJECT



The First Step Florence Board is excited to develop our north Florence property in conjunction with Hope Community Corporation (<https://hopehomesoregon.org/>). Hope Homes is a cool non-profit based in Eugene and associated with Saint Vincent de Paul. Their mission is to build quality, affordable manufactured homes to help Oregon's housing crisis. The goals of our two non-profits are similar, it's a match that was meant to be!

You may ask, why manufactured homes? Because these homes are awesome! We have toured the Hope Homes factory and found their homes to be of high quality and livability. They have 2x6 exterior walls for increased structural strength and insulation. The exterior siding and trim are fiber cement board for durability, low maintenance and fire resistance. They are energy efficient, certified by NEEM+ (Northwest Energy Efficient Manufactured Homes). These homes will provide safety, comfort and a sense of dignity for many families struggling with housing for years to come. They are a substantial improvement from the recreational vehicles that we have used as transitional housing. At \$75,000 for a two bedroom, 728 square foot home, they are economical. Stick built tiny homes would be much more expensive, and we aim to be good stewards of our limited finances.

The two-bed,
one bath, 728
square feet
Sunset Model
will be
delivered onto
a concrete
foundation.



Hope Homes collaborates with the Lane Education Service District, providing hands-on vocational training for high school students. Training is provided in trades such as welding, carpentry, electrical, plumbing, and manufacturing. Youth gain experience and skills that can lead to stable and needed jobs. Hope Homes clearly has a heart for strengthening families and communities. That's what First Step Florence strives toward; our goals overlap.

First Step continues to work with Architects Without Borders (<https://www.awboregon.org/>), another non-profit from Portland. They are helping us with site planning and development, and will guide us through the permitting process with the City of Florence. We are grateful for their energy and expertise. Our property is partially excavated. Water, sewer and electricity are in place, we can't wait to get started.

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Expansion cont...

Melanie, our participant advisor, maintains a waiting list of families needing help with transitional housing. Unfortunately, there is a constant need for our services. We need more capacity to help housing insecure families in western Lane County. While we do not currently have funding to start this project, we are very hopeful and confident that First Step will be funded.

We have multiple grant applications pending that would jump start us, and we have started a capital campaign to transform our dreams.

We can't do this alone, we need your help. If you would like to help with this project, please contact Sandy at 541-590-2325 or sandy@firststepflorence.org

Paul Pearson



Board President Insights

March 1, 2026 is a milestone day for me, but not much will change for First Step. You may have heard the rumors that I am retiring. It is true, March 1. After 10 and a half years of service, I am retiring from my position as pastor of the Presbyterian Community Church. It is time.

Norma and I are not moving out of Florence, or backing out of any of our commitments to First Step or the people of Florence. I will continue to serve as the President of the First Step Board and will have more time and energy to devote to our upcoming expansion. There are some exciting things in the works.

I am grateful that you, and the First Step Board, allow me to be a part of this important work.

As always if you have questions or suggestions for how we can better serve Florence please let me know.

Greg. 804.908.9663

Platinum
Transparency
2024

Candid.

From the desk of Sandy Craft,
Community Development. . .



Platinum
Transparency
2025

Candid.

The First Step board has enthusiastically adopted Sandy's creation of a capital campaign for 2026: **"Building With Compassion"**, to raise the funds needed to build on the First Step property. A large USDA Rural Development grant specifically for housing units and capacity building on the property is still pending, yet the Board and Staff are moving full speed ahead to build at the site. This February we move into phase two - First Step is no longer a pilot program - but a viable/successful nonprofit operating in the city of Florence. With the USDA grant application hanging in the balance during the long government shut down, we are all very hopeful we will get good news very soon. We so appreciate each one of our donors and will continue to need your support for the good work of First Step. Thank you for any and all of your contributions. Every bit helps take us to another step and achieve the mission and goals of First Step!

We had a good success rate with grants in 2025, especially considering the competitive climate for private funding due to federal funding cuts. The funds raised to date have been to support direct services to our residents i.e., our staffing and program costs. A grant from the M.J. Murdock Trust to hire a full-time Program Director was awarded to First Step in January. For seven years First Step has been operating on a very frugal, shoestring budget, with one half time and one quarter time staff, and hundreds of hours of volunteer work from board members and volunteers. The Program Director will have more dedicated grant writing/fundraising, and administration time as we grow the program to serve more unhoused families and help them become self-sufficient and successful.



New Beginnings in the First Step Temporary Housing Program

There is new energy and excitement in our community this month!

A family of five recently moved into one of our folding homes. They're settling in, setting financial goals and working hard toward their next big step - saving enough to move into a permanent home.

We also have a heartwarming celebration to share: another family in the program just welcomed a new baby! Both mom and baby are doing well. The family shared how thankful they are to have a safe, comfortable place to call home as they start this new chapter together.

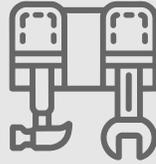
And even more uplifting news, one of our program families has achieved their ultimate goal - moving into permanent housing! We're so proud of their hard work and perseverance, and we wish them all the best as they begin this new journey.

With their success, we now have space to welcome another family in need of temporary housing.

Moments like these remind us what our program is all about - providing stability, hope, and a path forward for families as they build brighter futures.

- Melanie, FSF Participant Advocate





Building with Compassion
 Gala June 13th. Dig out your
 work boots and tool belts
 for this exciting event!

Join us for the Pancake
 Dinner Feb. 6th 
 and mark your calendars for
 the

*Building with
 Compassion*



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To make donations:

www.florencefirststep.org

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 and on instagram @ fsfhousing

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