



# Bitterroot Star

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## County hears pitch for Senior Housing Cooperatives

By Michael Howell

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Paul Travitz, Director of the Ravalli County Council on Aging, told the County Commissioners on Monday that his agency was considering investing in a potential Senior Housing Cooperative development on its property northeast of town along Old Corvallis Road. Working with Julie Foster, director of the Ravalli County Economic Development Authority, Travitz invited a national expert on Senior Housing Cooperatives to visit the Bitterroot.

Senior Housing Cooperatives come in all shapes and sizes, according to Terry McKinley, President of the Senior Cooperative Foundation based in Minnesota. Essentially they are apartment complexes designed to accommodate seniors who are tired of traditional single-family home maintenance. Unlike the traditional option of purchasing a condominium, however, the senior housing cooperative offers members a chance to own the entire development within which they live. Each member owns a share of the building and the business of running it. This eliminates the landlord from the equation and the need to produce profits for the landlord. Not only do cooperative members maintain control over the building and grounds, there is also equity preservation in their purchase, retention of tax benefits, more affordability, and to top it off, the chance to live in an enlivened, active and connected community.

McKinley explained that in most co-ops not only are the buildings and grounds owned by the occupants, but even the interior assets such as refrigerators and other appliances, and even the carpeting. All maintenance and upkeep is done by the management, often members of the co-op, themselves. Another potential cost savings is that services are not provided that the members don't choose to pay for. The arrangement also offers security to those who would like to lock up and leave for a few months in the winter, knowing that their home is being monitored and even their plants watered if they should so choose.

Co-ops range in size from 10 to 2,000 units and are located in both urban and rural settings.

In response to a commissioner's question about the role of local government, McKinley said that understanding the concept and supporting it was an essential aspect to any co-op's success, but that most co-ops depend primarily on private investment for their development.

Travitz noted that in this case the Council on Aging might be involved to the extent of selling the land to be used in the development and possibly bankrolling some of the preliminary work on establishing a co-op. He also noted, perhaps for the benefit of Hamilton Mayor Jessica Randazzo who was in attendance, that it could depend on the installment of a pump station to bring city sewer services to the property.

The next step, according to McKinley, would be to do a demographic study of the area to determine the suitable size for any such development. Then a tentative architectural drawing of the proper unit mix and size would be produced.

"Then we would hold a meeting and see who shows up," said McKinley. He said that the real size and scope of the development always depends on the local interest and what it can afford to support.