

## **Vernal City**

If there is a really distressed community in the state right now it would be Vernal City. Eastern Utah is dealing with a significant gas and oil development period currently similar to what happened last in the 70's. Vernal is now at a point of desperation in its attempts to assist in the creation of affordable housing. Due to the demand for housing the community is now at the point that it has allocated some of its general funds to use in providing housing that is truly affordable. Vernal has a current population of 7,880 and will likely grow to 8,125 before 2010 (over 1% annual growth rate). Fortunately, the growth rate has slowed somewhat in that a majority of oil exploration and production companies have hired significant numbers of people and are currently at capacity. There continues to be an extreme moderately priced housing shortage in Vernal and surrounding areas both in terms of home ownership and rental properties. This was despite the fact that in 2006 the number of residential building permits went up 92% over 2005. A significant number of homes in the \$300,000 to \$350,000 price range have been built in the area over the last two years and they are selling well due to the incomes from the oil and gas industry.

Lower income families not employed in the oil industry have been priced out of housing; even housing that was affordable historically. Landlords have increased rents without regard to the quality of the housing just because of the demand. Lower income residents have been forced out of housing either into badly deteriorated housing, overcrowding or even becoming homeless in some cases. Vernal, along with Uintah County has an ever increasing homeless population both from internal, as well as external factors. Many people have come to this area seeking employment only to find hiring is down. These families and individuals end up living in tents, trailers and even just in their cars in remote locations away from law enforcement. There are a significant number of families who are employed living under these circumstances due to the housing shortage in the area.

Vernal is desirous of updating its housing plan, originally adopted in 2002, and making it a viable and proactive plan to help them actually resolve the profound housing crisis currently plaguing them. They are excited about the potential partnerships to be created in this workforce housing initiative. The city will provide assistance in this initiative both in terms of financial and technical support for the program. Vernal City was on the verge of updating their entire general plan even before they were approached with this initiative.