

Testimony on Urban and Rural Reserve Recommendations
Presented To

Washington County Board of Commissioners

Tuesday, December 15, 2009
Public Administration Building
Hillsboro, Oregon

Allotted time limit: 4 minutes!

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Presented by
Jonathan Schlueter
Executive Director
Westside Economic Alliance

Good evening Chairman Brian, and members of the Commission. From previous appearances, each of you already knows me as executive director of Westside Economic Alliance, representing and serving 150 employers, developers, property managers, communities and public agencies here on the Westside of the metropolitan region.

What you may not know about me, is that I am also a father and a fisherman---both full time activities that have instilled in me the need to be patient, and the importance of being optimistic.

Both traits have served me well these past two years as our region worked to create the urban and rural reserves for our regional growth. And both have been tested in the past week, when:

- Commissioner Rogers and I experienced the regional cooperation found around the JPACT Committee table last Thursday--raising new questions and doubts about the future of I-5 / 99W Connector and Hwy 217 in the 20-year Regional transportation plan
- Later that morning, Commissioner Strader and I observed the Multnomah County Commission hearing, from which our neighbors to the east were able to agree to add slightly more than 1000 acres for urban reserves, all in east county.
- Thursday afternoon, I met with Clackamas County Commissioners Lynn Peterson and Charlotte Lehan, who made it very clear neither would not support urban development of the Stafford triangle along I-205, nor along I-5 south of the Boone Bridge in Wilsonville. Instead, both favored adding as much as 1700 acres to the east side of Damascus---far removed from roads, sewers, water, schools and other public infrastructure needed to serve the area.
- Finally late that afternoon, the Metro Council, adopted their 20-year urban growth reports charting the housing and employment trends of our region.

We were also introduced to David Bragdon's and Carl Hosticka's vision for urban and rural reserves in our region, and they presented the maps shown here this evening that propose to designate as much as 28,500 acres to accommodate urban growth through the year 2060.

So what have we learned in the past week, and are we any smarter after all these meetings and discussions?

Population growth As Councilor Hosticka explained, his recommendations would represent an increase of just 11% in the urbanized area of the region over the next 50 years, at a time when our population is expected to double. If that is the extent of our regional vision and ambition, WEA suggests we need to be very certain about the population and growth needs of our region.

Yet Metro's forecast for our region assume growth rates that are much slower than our recent experience; slower than any state west of the Rockies in the past 10 years; and slower than Oregon has experienced in 150 years as a state. So are we allowing ourselves enough room to grow?

If you are confident Metro's projections are reasonable, and that future growth should occur where they expect it, then here is your blueprint.

Housing growth Metro assumes 225,000-300,000 housing units will be needed and built in our region over the next 20 years. If this proves true, the chance to build 11,000 - 15,000 new homes will be very welcome news for home builders

But is this expectation reasonable, and what types of housing are we talking about? Because 11,000 housing units are equivalent to the numbers of apartments and condo constructed in the Pearl District, and the South Waterfront combined every year for the next 25 years.

Even more remarkable Metro assumes infill and redevelopment equal to 41% ---numbers that have never been achieved in this region (or any region), let alone sustained for 25 consecutive years.

Metro also assumes home ownership levels will climb to >90% in Tualatin and West Linn, while housing affordability plummets throughout the region and large areas of Washington County in particular. Affordability leaves people on low income and fixed incomes being pushed outside the PMSA. This is not a sustainable or equitable model to endorse.

If you are confident Metro's projections are reasonable, and that future housing growth will occur where they expect it, then here is your blueprint.

Employment Growth By holding a tight urban growth boundary around our region Metro assumes brownfield and redevelopment will absorb >700,000 new jobs

A 2009 study by The Brookings Institute ranked Portland 23rd nationally in terms of population, with just over 907,000 jobs available within a 35 mile radius of the urban center. Yet despite our signature land use laws and urban growth boundaries, our region ranked 47th nationally for the number of jobs with 3 miles of the urban center, and 38th nationally for jobs within a 35 mile radius of Pioneer Courthouse Square.

The Portland Business Alliance reported the loss of 3,000 jobs from the urban core of the region since 2008, with employment now at the lowest levels in more than 5 years.

Now Metro anticipates these trends will somehow reverse themselves, and that employers will stream back into the urban core of our region, to redevelop and reclaim brownfields and blighted areas, and bringing with them tens of thousands of family wage jobs, providing attractive benefits and producing cutting edge products.

These promises would carry more credibility if local and regional leaders would indicate their willingness to develop areas such as West Hayden Island, Colwood and Broadmoor golf courses, Delta Park and Portland Meadows race track, for either employment or residential use.

Yet the recent track record by Metro and Portland City Council, and by several of the interest groups signed up to testify here this evening, has been quite different. In March 2008, the Metro Council voted (5-2) to deny an application by the City of Cornelius to expand the UGB north of their city to add 116 acres of much-needed and tax base.

Six months later, the Portland City Council voted 4-0 to deny the application to redevelop Colwood golf course in north Portland to provide industrial space and employment opportunities within sight of PDX. Remarkably, the Colwood application would have also created an identical 116 acres of developable land, as Cornelius had requested.

If you are confident Metro's projections are reasonable, and that future growth should occur where they expect it, then here is your blueprint.

Economic Prosperity In previous testimony, you have heard me boast and describe Washington County as "the economic engine of the state." But what we have all come to understand in the past year especially, is the importance of keeping this economic engine well-tuned and adequately fueled. Sadly, we have experienced some serious breakdowns and malfunctions in these past few months.

At present, the 9.7% unemployment rate in Washington County means 27,000 of your constituents are currently unemployed. These workers want desperately to get back to work, and contribute to Oregon's economic recovery with the payroll tax that will finance the growth and development of our regional planning schemes and transit dreams.

The question that I must leave you with, is to ask whether this plan and vision represent the best we can do for our constituents and neighbors? Does this map represent the full benefit of our regional hopes and ambitions, and allow our region to be the economic engine of Oregon?

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If you are confident Metro's projections are reasonable, and that future growth should occur where these reserves are designated and depicted, then here is your blueprint.

Thank you for your time this evening and consideration of these important issues.

Jonathan Schlueter
Executive Director

Actual elapsed time: 3:50