



## “Reserving” Oregon’s future or outsourcing its economic opportunity?



“If not in your backyard, and not in my backyard, where will future generations be able to live and work?”

This was the 50-year question left hanging over the heads of regional planners and concerned citizens this week after a series of public hearings and meetings held in Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties to designate “urban and rural reserves” around the metropolitan region through the year 2060.

By choosing areas where future urban growth should occur---and where it should not occur---regional planners expected to bring more certainty to their long-term planning efforts and make more efficient use of the land, infrastructure and public resources needed to create “vibrant communities.”

But after more than 18 months of meetings and public hearings, the credibility of this new planning process is being challenged across the region this month.

Planners have identified only 45,000 total acres in three counties that may be suitable for urban development over the next 50 years and deserve further study. This represents about 11 percent of the 404,000 acre study area originally drawn around the metropolitan region when the planning process began last year and about 17 ½ percent of the land currently encompassed by the urban growth boundary.

In each of the three counties, the planning efforts have produced very different results.

By even the most cautious forecasts, the population of the Portland metropolitan region is expected to nearly double in the next 50 years, adding at least 2 million more residents and nearly a million jobs to the regional economy. But even these eye-popping forecasts may prove too conservative as more new residents try to move here in search of a coveted life style, or to escape natural disasters and economic hardships elsewhere.

It appears any new residential or commercial development in **Multnomah County** will probably be limited to infill and brownfield rehabilitation projects. Acting on the recommendations of a 16-member citizen advisory committee and county planning staff this week, members of the Multnomah County Planning Committee are expected to recommend a total of 80 acres for designation as “urban reserves” along the western boundary of Oregon’s most populace county.

While clearly inadequate to serving the future demands for new housing and jobs, state law requires each county to designate urban reserves if it also wants to choose rural reserves.

So this token allocation of 80 acres for urban development may legally entitle Multnomah County to also designate an estimated 60,000 acres as rural reserves--- primarily on Sauvie Island in the Columbia River; the forested west hills; and the Sandy River gorge cutting through the central portions of the county.

After nearly two hours of public testimony from dozens of concerned citizens and property owners last Monday evening, Commission members agreed further study may also be needed on a 400-acre area north of PCC’s Rock Creek campus and a much smaller area adjacent to the City of Troutdale.

The Planning Commission’s recommendations will be referred for formal approval from the Multnomah County Commission on September 10.

Testifying before the Multnomah Planning Commission Monday evening in Portland, WEA executive director Jonathan Schlueter cautioned, *“I fear we are driving below our headlights, and we are not looking far enough into the future to anticipate the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. We are facing a very different economic outlook than when we began this sightseeing tour a year ago, and the decisions we make for ourselves in this region will have important consequences for the future of our state and the kind of communities we are able to create for our children and future generations of Oregonians.”*

In **Clackamas County**, the planning directors have recommended between 11,000 -- 15,000 total areas for closer evaluation as possible urban reserves, but county staff are quick to point out only about half of this area may actually be usable for either residential or commercial development, since there are flood plains, wetlands, and steep slopes limiting possible use on nearly three dozen different locations scattered across the western portions of the county.

At a public hearing on Monday evening before the Clackamas County Planning Commission, most of the people who turned out to testify expressed opposition to urban development on French Prairie and portions of rural Clackamas County that lie south of the Willamette River and Wilsonville, but west of Canby and Interstate 5.

In **Washington County** this week, planning director Brent Curtis presented his recommendations for an estimated 33,800 acres as possible urban reserves and approximately 108,800 acres of the western and southern portions of the county to be designated as rural reserves to protect farming, forestry and natural landscape features from urbanization for the next 40 - 50 years.

A 16-member Reserves Coordinating Committee will hold a four hour public hearing and informational open house next Thursday, August 20, 4:00 – 8:00 p.m. in the Hillsboro Civic Center.

The public hearing will give county residents and concerned parties an opportunity to present written or oral testimony to the county's urban and rural reserves advisory committee. For more about this hearing, link to <http://www.co.washington.or.us/LUT/PlanningProjects/reserves/public-involvement-and-events.cfm>