

Neighbors join conservation struggle

By KEVIN HARDEN
Of the Emerald

In 1875, when Eugene was but a mudhole in the center of Lane County, there was little need for a city expansion plan. The watch-word of that time was growth. A sense of manifest destiny must have prevailed over every pioneer who constructed a new home somewhere in the city.

Today, only 102 years later, all that has changed. Gone is the Eugene of 1,852 people and one newspaper. Gone also is the idea that growth and expansion are always good for certain neighborhoods. Their replacements are of a somewhat different philosophy.

In the place of an overbearing pioneer spirit the city has a plan to aid developments of city property and residential areas up to and including the year 1990. A large part of that plan has been — and will be — decided by Eugene's several neighborhood groups.

Neighborhood groups are nothing new to Eugene. Several have sprung up in the past for some reason or another, according to Ruth Miller of the city's Neighborhood Liaison Office. Most groups were formed on an ad hoc basis to support or oppose some development within their neighborhoods, she said.

But neighborhood groups in Eugene today have taken a different and more permanent stance toward their city. Today, besides carefully controlling the amount of growth in each section of the city, neighborhood groups have become recognized political units which regularly participate in city government decisions that may affect their neighborhoods, Miller explained.

Formed several years ago, the neighborhood groups were formally recognized by city government in August, 1973, and now operate under the city's Neighborhood Organization Recognition Policy, The Eugene Community Goals and Policies Document, and the Eugene-Springfield Metropolitan

Area 1990 Plan.

While concerned mainly with growth problems certain areas of the city might encounter, the city council updated their neighborhood recognition policy to include broader interests, such as historical preservation of certain homes in the older neighborhoods.

According to Charlotte Lemon, neighborhood group contact for the West University Neighbors, historic preservation and beautification have become neighborhood policies, along with development in the area.

Lemon, whose group serves about 4,000 people in the area west from Kincaid Street to Willamette Street and north from East 19th Avenue to East Broadway Avenue, explained that a beautification program has become just as important to that neighborhood group as the establishment of bicycle paths along busy streets.

West University Neighbors have also begun plans on a series of mini-parks in their neighborhood, one of which has already been approved by the city.

Historic preservation has also become a large part of the neighborhood's activities, Lemon said. The West University group is directly responsible for the preservation of the Calkin's house on Patterson Street.

Lemon promises more efforts to preserve the homes of the first residents of Eugene, which are located in her area.

Besides being part of the city political system, neighborhood groups are also an important part of the city's social system.

Leslie Childress-Ullman, neighborhood group contact for the South University Neighborhood Association, explained that even though the groups have become political sounding boards on several issues, there are a number of social activities that are also provided.

"Part of our purpose is to let people who live in the area meet socially for all sorts of reasons," Childress-Ullman said. "Basically it's part of knowing where they live and

knowing those people they live with."

The South University Neighborhood Association serves about 4,500 people living between Hilyard and Agate streets, and between 18th and 24th streets, south of the University campus.

According to Childress-Ullman, the South University group has been directly responsible for the closure of Agate street, which allows only bicycle traffic between certain streets, and the lowered speed limit on the same street.

High density housing and planning, Childress-Ullman explained, has also become a concern of her organization. Developers "ripping off" students with "shoddy" apartments has brought action by her group.

Development in any part of the city has been the focus of most of the groups at one time or another, Ruth Miller said.

Of the 18 neighborhood groups now operating, several were organized to control development in their areas. The first group to form, the Laurel Hill Valley Citizens Committee, did so because of a proposed huge apartment complex to be built in their semi-rural neighborhood. By sheer willpower, said former Laurel Hill committee President Hilda Young, the neighbors were successful in reducing the size of the apartment complex.

Citizens of the Crest Drive, Westside and Whiteaker neighborhoods followed with their formation to work on a refinement plan for their areas.

Forming a neighborhood group is easy and encouraged by the city's Planning Commission. Almost 98 per cent of the city's 34,000 names has become involved in the groups, Miller said.

To begin a group, neighborhood members must only contact those in their geographic area, organize a meeting, prepare a charter and contact the city's neighborhood liaison staff for help.

Once a group is started, it can become

eligible for funding through the city's Community Development budget which, Miller said, is nearly \$1,146,000. Most of the neighborhood group funding is done through a federal system of making money available for community projects, she explained.

The West University group, which is a funding project area that shares \$548,000 with two other neighborhoods, used a portion of their money to purchase a community center where they hold group meetings and social events.

Trees were purchased and planted along neighborhood streets by the South University group with funds from their development budget.

Part of the funds also go for the publication of neighborhood newsletters. Although the city pays for the printing and all other costs of the newsletters, each is operated by independent neighborhood staffs.

Neighborhood groups are not unique to Eugene. Portland and Salem have had similar groups for several years, Miller said.

Although the groups in Eugene have proved to be successful, Miller explained that similar groups trying to organize in Springfield have met with opposition.

"There have been some who have tried in Springfield," she said, "but they haven't been successful. It might be because the city council is a little fearful of the groups. It's really something new for them, and they may not like the idea."

Newly-elected Springfield city councilperson Sandy Rennie, however, disagrees that the city council is afraid of the groups. The council discussed the idea before but didn't feel staffing was available, she said. "I think if the people of Springfield are really interested," Rennie explained, "then it will have to be a grass roots organization. I don't see it coming from the city council at all."

Springfield has one active neighborhood group, but no others have asked for help, she said.

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