

Urban planners aim for efficiency

Editor's note: Today the Emerald continues a series examining the various aspects of the housing situation in Eugene. Today's article looks at Eugene's growth — real and planned — and how housing fits into the picture.

By JANIE L. NAFSINGER
Of the Emerald

Eight years ago, the Eugene-Springfield area had a population of about 148,000. By mid-1977, it had jumped to 179,000. Now, predictions estimate the area may have nearly 294,000 inhabitants by the year 2000.

The figures, supplied by Lane Council of Governments (L-COG), might startle some people, but not local officials and concerned citizens who are seeking ways to keep up with the housing demand and at the same time avoid "urban sprawl."

In 1972, in an effort to set long-range goals for metropolitan development, the Lane County, Eugene and Springfield governments adopted the 1990 Plan. The plan is aimed at two main objectives — the compact urban growth and efficient land use — inside the metro area.

Currently, a team of city and county planners and a citizens' advisory group are working on a five-year update of the plan. But the goals remain the same, says city planner Gary Chenkin, who is helping L-COG with the update.

"What we're trying to pin down is: 'What do we have now and what will we need by the year 2000?'," Chenkin explains. He says the area growth rate is slowing down, but the amount of land available to build on is running out faster than anticipated when the plan was first adopted.

Keeping urban growth more compact — that is, using all vacant lots and other available land in the metropolitan area and increasing density — is the plan's aim, Chenkin says. To do this, the plan calls for an urban service boundary (USB) that encloses the 90-square-mile metro area. Outside this boundary, urban development would be restricted until areas inside the boundary are used to their full potential.

Urban services required to develop an area include public water and sewers, urban-level fire and police protection, streets with curbs and gutters, solid waste collection and parks.

In keeping growth inside the boundary, and not letting it sprawl outward, outside areas containing agricultural land and resources such as vegetation and animal species would be preserved, Chenkin says.

There's a sacrifice involved, however, in preserving outside land — population in the urban areas will have to increase.

"We're currently building at a very low density rate of about 5 dwelling units per acre," Chenkin explains, which is an equivalent of about 5 houses per city block. If densities were increased to about 20 units per acre (considered "medium density") or to more than 20 units ("high density" growth), more housing could be built.

But density increase is just what a lot of people do not want, Chenkin says. "If the city decided to double its density, the character of neighborhoods would be changed," and some people do not want this "crowding."

The low density rate might be the reason behind the land shortage, but Chenkin believes the real reason is that households are decreasing in size. "Families are smaller and more people are living alone," he says. The average Eugene household size is about 2.65 persons,

and U.S. government figures forecast a continual decline nationwide.

If people do continue to "spread out," more housing will be needed to accommodate them. Whether growth will become denser inside the USB or whether the boundary will be extended out further into surrounding land is something local governments will decide. Chenkin says adoption of the updated 1990 Plan is scheduled for next June.

If higher urban density is the answer, how can it be achieved? Chenkin says one way is to "modify" traditional zoning ordinances which separate single-family dwellings from multiple housing such as apartment complexes. Under such modification, "there would be no discrimination on basis of housing structural types," Chenkin explains.

This idea of "mixing zoning" is not new to Eugene. Ten years ago, the city adopted a Planned Unit Development Ordinance (PUD), an attempt to combine a variety of land uses on a single site.

Developers who build on these sites, which range in size from a few acres to 35 or more, include a mixture of housing types as well as commercial development.

Neighborhood groups also adopt policies of mixed zoning. The Whiteaker neighborhood in northeast Eugene has guidelines for both mixed and non-mixed area.

Whiteaker representatives, concerned with preserving the historic East Skinner Butte Area, feel medium density growth is enough; city planners want to see more compact growth.

Other neighborhoods face the same question — how compact can growth be without adding to congestion and possibly destroying the neighborhood's quality?

Clark says Log exports behind NW timber trouble

By GREG WASSON
Of the Emerald

The timber-based economy of Western Oregon is in trouble. Twenty-five mills have closed in Lane County since 1972, costing 25 thousand people their jobs.

In January the county started a forestry department and Wednesday the head of the department, Virgel Clark, addressed a public meeting at Harris Hall on log exports. Clark says exports are responsible for most of Western Oregon's problems.

"If companies would use their own private timber (instead of shipping it overseas) or else sell it to the area's small mills, I think a lot of our problem would dissipate," he says.

A 1976 Oregon State report estimates the annual Western Oregon will drop by as much as one-quarter by 1990. The paper, commonly known as the Bueter Report, says such a decline would cost the jobs of 27 percent of the area's 50,800 timber workers. Against that backdrop Clark wonders whether we can permit 600 million board feet to leave Oregon's shores each year.

"Their legal position is obvious

— it's their timber and they can sell it to the highest bidder. But morally I'm not so sure it wouldn't be better to keep this wood in the USA."

Clark says 600 million board feet a year would be enough to feed about 12 good-sized mills. According to Lane County Commissioner Jerry Rust, Oregon's exports equal in volume the timber cut each year in the Willamette National Forest, the largest national forest in the country.

Rust took part in Wednesday's discussion and agreed exports are a major problem for Western Oregon. He also called for increased use of wood fiber currently wasted.

"What we're talking about," says Rust, "is a new ethic. An ethic that points us toward intensive management of the forest. We can create more jobs doing everything from thinning to the conifer release programs as an alternative to herbicides."

Turning to exports, Rust predicted there would be seven times as many jobs created by a tree if it is semi-processed in the Northwest before it is shipped overseas.

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