



A windmill program is one of the projects left hanging now that the Office of Appropriate Technology has been severely cut.

Living within our means

A Lane County office wants technology to make sense

Another government attempt to help alternatives evolve has died.

The Lane County Office of Appropriate Technology, the first such county office in the nation, in November was demoted and changed to the Energy Management Program while its staff, which once numbered 10, was allowed to wither to 1.

Largely, OAT was the victim of reactionary politics and widespread misunderstanding. Attacks aimed at the office were often attempts to discredit Lane County Commissioner Jerry Rust. Others were the result of fear of change and attempts to keep things as they are.

Story by Greg Wasson

Photos by Keith Allen

Traditionalists often balk at suggestions that technologies appropriate when things were plentiful must prove themselves again, but to paraphrase E.F. Schumacher, author of "Small is Beautiful," we can no longer depend on processes that require so much and accomplish so little.

New systems must be designed. But when's the design to happen? Sound economic pressures guide development of new systems or should we attempt to direct the changes before they direct us? The latter choice is the basis of the appropriate technology movement, and while the concept was originally championed in the private sector, recent government attempts, like OAT, have reflected it as well.

When energy shortages hit the state during Tom McCall's second term as governor, one response was to create an office headed by McCall's personal energy adviser, Joel Schatz. It was Schatz who suggested the outdoor lighting ban when electricity supplies grew short in 1973. In 1975, Schatz's office of Energy Research and Planning, published "Transition," a plan to make Oregon as energy self-sufficient as possible.

But McCall's tenure ended in January 1975, and Bob Straub's began. Complaining he didn't understand what the office was doing, Straub deleted it from his budget and the department ran out of funds the following June.

Schatz says Straub was threatened by the shifts the energy office advocated.

"When your ideas sound unfamiliar, that's the reaction of the bureaucracy: to get very anxious about them and look for ways to suppress them," Schatz says.

The city of Portland tried a different approach. Two years ago, the city contracted with Public Technology Incorporated, a national clearing house of information on alternatives. But the \$12,500 contract wasn't renewed.

"We did a survey of the bureau of managers," says Ken Jones of the city's management and budget bureau, "and could not identify any significant cost-savings or new information PTI had provided us."

A hundred miles to the south, Lane County's in-house attempt lasted 1½ years. One of OAT's central figures, Sam Sadler, who worked with Schatz, predicts there will be other government-sponsored attempts but warns of forces that will make survival difficult. "The problem we had is that people didn't expect us to be serious in pursuing alternatives," Sadler says. "Traditionally in government, pursuing alternatives has been a token effort, so people were surprised when we took ourselves seriously. That's something people setting up other offices have to be aware of."

One of OAT's major enterprises was studying alternative ways to deal with solid waste. The Eugene-Springfield area creates 600-800 tons of garbage a day and the Solid Waste

Division has designed a series of transfer sites and land-fills to deal with the debris. Last summer, OAT operated a pilot project at the main transfer station "highgrading" metals — separating them into brass, copper, aluminum and such — to increase the price the county gets selling them and to encourage recycling.

Prior to the operation, metals were lumped into two large bins and sold for \$24 a ton. OAT reports the highgrading project raised the revenues the county got to as high as \$580 a ton. For cast iron, the most plentiful metal, the office got at least \$40 a ton. In addition, the office claims the information provided by the project increased recycling of metals about 75 tons during its 2½ months.

Data from the project has been distributed and studied, but the commission hasn't decided what kind of highgrading plan, if any, to implement. An advisory committee has recommended putting the metal resources out to bid, leaving it open to the bidders to suggest

diverse energy plans. On the other things, we were."

OAT's death ended a strong effort by Rust, who felt OAT brought a fresh perspective that benefited the county. However, Rust admits some solutions offered by the office were difficult to assimilate into the county structure.

"To a degree, the office was a bit ahead of its time. But it was a vitally-needed institution that should have been kept."

Rust's belief in OAT is challenged by another commissioner, Archie Weinstein. Despite his wealth, Weinstein claims to speak "for the little guy" and is constantly complaining about tax money being spent in ways he sees as frivolous. In May he tried to cut the \$20,000 recommended for OAT from the county's proposed \$114 million budget.

"The Office of Appropriate Technology fails to pass two basic tests: accountability and duplication," Weinstein charged during a hearing on his motion. "Let's face it, they duplicate

fails. If energy conservation is only part of the definition, what is the rest? Andrew Freeman, who helped coordinate the Northwest Appropriate Technology Forum at the University in September, says concentrating consumption in the immediate environment is essential. An appropriate process helps solve local problems with local resources," Freeman says. "The whole push is toward promoting community and local self-reliance."

"When you're dealing with things on a certain level, you've got to gear up. There tended to be emphasis on our part on smaller things because the larger things that are appropriate are being well studied. The whole momentum of this society is toward large projects."

OAT spent a good deal of time looking at the various factors involved in resource recovery because CETA people who formed the staff were paid by the federal government to explore recycling.

"The problem we had is that people didn't expect us to be serious in pursuing alternatives," says Sam Sadler of the Office of Appropriate Technology.



highgrading if they choose. OAT would have liked to have the county fund a position, allowing the project to continue but federal timber revenues dropped about \$1.5 million this year, making creation of new positions difficult.

OAT also attempted to start a composting project just south of Eugene fueled by organics from the transfer site, which the office estimates make up about 40 percent of the trash dumped.

According to John Karlick, the OAT staffer most closely associated with composting, the project's purpose would be to determine the marketability of compost in the Eugene area. But bureaucratic hassles slowed the project to the point Karlick's CETA funding expired before it got started.

A grant from the state Department of Energy should pick up the cost of the program, scheduled to start in March because OAT is no more, administration of the project is now the task of the Department of Environmental Management.

Most of OAT's projects were less participatory, though. The office housed a library on alternatives, designed solar-powered wood kilns, solar collectors and options to standard ways of dealing with sewage. It's difficult to determine the success of intangibles like design and collection of resources, but OAT's library was well-used and the office's designs were explained at conferences around the state.

Sadler is the only member of the OAT staff still working for the county and says that "most things I'm involved in now are directly energy-related. It turned out over the year that energy was a safe area because nobody else in the county was involved in that. As far as having us look at alternatives, we were not infringing on anybody else's turf when we got into alterna-

again stealing from Schumacher, if energy fails, everything fails."

Weinstein labeled the staff "a bunch of hippie boys" and dismissed them as champions of the counter-culture.

"The OAT office," he claimed, "is acting as an advocate for certain lifestyles that do not reflect the views or dictates of the commission as far as I'm concerned."

Don Corson, a member of the OAT staff until his CETA funding expired in August, sighs and says misconceptions like those voiced by Weinstein hampered the office all year.

"I say misconceptions because people with radically different lifestyles simply aren't going to take this kind of job. We didn't represent radical changes but our office was associated with that and criticized for it."

Rust agrees it was unfair to turn debates on OAT into debates on lifestyles.

"Economics should have been the main point of the discussion. Not only are these things more socially and environmentally acceptable, but dollar-wise, they make more sense."

As for the charge of duplicating other departments, Sadler rejects it. He says OAT investigated systems other departments had neither the time nor the inclination to explore.

"We didn't duplicate what other people were actually doing. The never-never land of what others could do wasn't really important."

The term "appropriate" is vague and open to many definitions, but Sadler says it's a mistake to assume, like Weinstein, that it means drastic changes.

"In the past we didn't really have to consider very much the energy embodied in a process and asking 'How can I maintain a comfortable lifestyle without being wasteful?'"

Not that appropriate is defined entirely as a matter of how much energy is consumed, but,

In addition to the notion "appropriate means small," Sadler says rejections of high-technology need to be re-examined.

"Computers are high-tech and there are times to use them. Telephones are too."

"We had been working for several months on a county-funded office and got delayed while we negotiated with the other commissioners," says an aide to Rust, Bill Muir. At the same time, we had the CETA process going on so we got together and drafted a bunch of projects in the hope they would be housed in the OAT office."

Besides the CETA-paid staff, OAT was budgeted through the county for about \$20,000 to pay the director's salary and provide minimal support. The budget wasn't increased this year and when the CETA grants expired, Sadler was the only member of the staff left.

Actually, when the office first opened, Sadler shared the directorship with Dan Knapp. The fact they job-shared wasn't unique — about 20 other county employees have, too — but they were the only pair to share directorship of an entire office. Sadler says he and Knapp ran the office as a team, downplaying their role as directors.

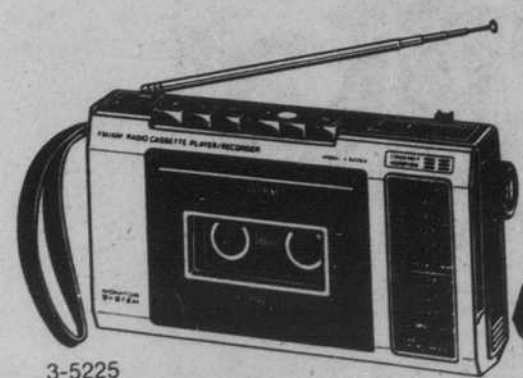
"Perhaps that didn't mold well with the traditional hierarchical structure," shrugs Sadler who learned that directors were expected to deal with other departments. "When we didn't, people assumed Dan and I weren't in control. The feeling was if we knew what was going on, we'd stop it. But we made a conscious decision to operate like that."

But sharing of the directorship was ended in August and OAT was slated for transfer from its niche in community relations. Discussion of the transfer included an

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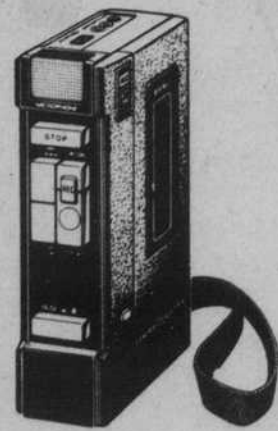
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