

Salem Report

By Representative Brad Witt



As you may know, House District 31 includes all of Columbia County, rural NW Multnomah County including Sauvie Island and a lot of

Forest Park, and almost half of Washington County. It is a district rich in natural resources, with miles of streams, river banks and forested habitat. We couldn't live in a more beautiful part of the state. Recently, in my Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources, we reviewed the budget for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) [<http://www.oregon.gov/OWEB/pages/index.aspx>], and I wanted to share some of the information that was covered because it bears directly on the care and maintenance of a huge portion of District 31.

Since 1999 OWEB has provided funding to support local capacity for watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts and other local restoration partners. They focus on the use of scientific criteria to jointly decide what needs to be done to conserve and improve the natural habitat where we live, and their funds are derived from the Oregon Lottery, federal dollars and salmon license plate revenue.

For the last 18 years, OWEB has provided more than 8,200 grants to local volunteer efforts, keeping Oregon's water clean and habitats healthy. About 67% of the funds invested go directly to on-the-ground improvements of land and water such as native plantings, dam removals, irrigation efficiencies, streams and rivers made accessible to fish, and land protected for future generations. The other 33% supports related activities

such as project design, watershed workshops and field experiences for K-12 and adults, and data collection before and after the project to determine effectiveness.

To give you an idea of what has been spent in terms of local dollars since 1999, here is the breakdown for my three counties: Columbia County \$8,502,141; Multnomah County - \$11,363,560; Washington County - \$4,263,789.

What did we get for our money? Adding up all three counties, restoration projects have improved about 420 miles of streams, 216 miles of fish habitat, 1,556 upland habitat acres and 3,048 wetland or estuarine habitat acres. Not only does OWEB improve the landscape, every \$1 million of public investment creates 15-24 jobs, and more than 90 cents out of every grant dollar is spent at local businesses and suppliers. In reviewing this agency's budget, it is encouraging to me that it has a positive record of accomplishment in my district. Our Subcommittee will continue to review this budget, and others before us, prior to making any allocations. It will not be an easy task given the budget crisis that we are in.

As you know, Oregon has a rigorous system of land use laws, dating back to the 70s when urban sprawl threatened to overwhelm the agriculture and natural resource lands of the Willamette Valley. Watching our neighbors to the south pave over acres and acres of productive farmland was enough to sound the alarm, and Governor McCall and the legislative leaders at the time passed SB 100 to help protect these precious resources. It was not easy then, and it is not easy now, to ensure that the system is fair and reflects the needs of the times, particularly with regard to

economic development.

The Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) was created to oversee the process and one of their objectives is to provide grant funds to local governments for a variety of planning projects. This is the opportunity that cities and counties have to get some state assistance for economic development and technical assistance. As I reviewed this budget in my Subcommittee on Ways and Means, I was keenly aware that these funds are strategic and they make a difference in our local communities.

One of the applications to come before the DLCDC was an application for technical assistance from the City of Scappoose. Following the expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary, the City urgently needed funds to help them implement a compatible employment plan for the Scappoose Industrial Airpark. For a modest request of \$3,500, the City was able to update the zoning map, which would then allow for a mix of targeted light industrial, commercial service and office, lodging and restaurant uses, all in the interests of providing increased employment opportunities. The request was granted and the Airpark is well on its way to becoming an economic engine for South County.

At the other end of my district in Washington County, the City of North Plains requested, and received, a grant for \$40,000 in order to prepare a buildable lands inventory, a housing needs analysis and an economic opportunities analysis in order to respond to the growth needs of Western Washington County. Again, these grants will facilitate strategies to support and attract businesses that will provide quality employment opportunities.



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Johnson and Witt Hold Town Hall in Vernonia

State Senator Betsy Johnson and State Representative Brad Witt held a joint Town Hall with constituents at the Vernonia City Hall on Saturday, April 1, 2017.

Johnson and Witt addressed numerous issues and concerns from the audience, including fair housing, changes to the Oregon Forest Protection Act, fisheries on the Columbia River, sanctuary cities, and fees for bicycles.

Johnson kicked off the meeting by noting that Representative Witt is a "policy guy" and that she is a "budget

guy" and of course, she works in the Senate and he works in the House, so, "you get two perspectives and two different takes."

Representative Witt talked about two bills he has introduced in the State House, HB 2570, The Affordable Homeownership Grant Program, and HB 2961 which establishes a homeownership repair and rehabilitation program. Both programs would provide revolving grants to eligible nonprofit organizations to provide either opportunities for homeownership to persons in low income

households, or financial assistance to low income people for repairs and rehabilitation of residences. "There is such a housing crisis across our state," said Witt "These bills are aimed at increasing the number of housing units available for people to live in." Witt explained that the bills would make funding available for purchase or repairs and would be paid back at zero or low interest, and then be made available for someone else to use in the same manner. Witt also noted that he is working on a bill that addresses reverse mortgages.

Johnson took a moment to acknowledge Community Action Team (CAT) Director Dan Brown, who was in the audience, and CAT's work to address housing issues in Columbia County.

Johnson said she is working on the state budget and discussed the budget process at the state level. Johnson said both the Governor and the co-chairs of the Legislature prepare budget documents and said the Governor relied on revenue that has not been realized to balance her budget, terming it an "anticipa-

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