



# BULLDOZER

DEVELOPERS PUSH TO POP THE URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARY. BY ALAN PITTMAN

**D**evelopers and land speculators are pushing to explode Eugene's urban growth boundary (UGB) to cash in on urban sprawl.

"The top agenda item for the local and state right wing is expanding the urban growth boundary," says Eugene City Councilor Bonny Bettman.

Last month, the developer bulldozer for sprawl gained traction when the Eugene city council majority voted to meet with the Lane Metro Partnership business group to discuss allowing city development to spill into rural areas.

Jack Roberts, who has lobbied for UGB expansion as director of the Metro Partnership, urged the City Council on July 14 to move to expand the UGB by conducting a study of the need for more land for development. Roberts cited a pair of 2001 Eugene Chamber of Commerce studies and lobbying by local housing developers as evidence of the need for moving to expand the growth boundary. "This is something that should be done," he said.

The Chamber study of industrial lands concluded that the city needed to add up to 2,000 acres of industrial land to the urban growth boundary within the next 20 years. That's enough land for more than 1,500 football fields.

A companion Chamber study concluded that the city needed to add up to 800 more acres of commercial lands to the UGB. That would sprawl strip mall and box store development over the equivalent of about another 600 football fields of rural farm and forest land.

Lauri Segel, Lane County planning advocate for 1000 Friends of Oregon, says the Chamber studies' calls for huge UGB expansions are laughably biased. "It's just hilarious."

"They're embellished," Segel says. "Those types of numbers are not based on the needs analysis that state law requires."

Bettman agrees the studies are "biased" and were "arbitrary" in not considering the

many developable or redevelopable sites with the existing UGB. If the growth boundary is expanded based on the Chamber studies, "there's no incentive to redevelop the existing property within the urban growth boundary," she says. "That's the exact recipe for sprawl."

Councilor David Kelly also voiced skepticism of the Chamber studies. "I'm very far from convinced."

Councilors pointed out that the need for expanding the UGB is usually considered by taking into account the land supply in the entire metropolitan area, including

"There's no established basis currently for saying we don't have enough industrial, commercial or residential land," Segel says.

Historically, Eugene has had a fairly loose UGB because planners in the 1970s set the boundary far out, anticipating that rapid growth in the 1970s would continue. Instead, the 1980s recession in the area left much of the land undeveloped. Today, many large industrial sites listed by planners in 1989 remain vacant, including the Greenhill Industrial Park and sites on Chad Drive in north Eugene.

The difficulty in selling such vacant

for a new study of UGB expansion. A study funded and designed by a special interest group "is not going to have any legal basis," Segel says.

Bettman says, "it's up to the city to fund a study that is neutral as opposed to generated by political entities."

Segel says the city has already fallen behind in meeting state requirements that it update environmental studies and a study of natural resource land for possible protection. State law doesn't require that the city update its UGB studies for another 10 to 15 years, she says. "It would be horrendous" to fund the developer studies while continuing to delay environmental protection studies, she says.

Kelly says that the city has also fallen behind on land use code updates and nodal development planning work, and questions whether the developers should take top priority for the city's dwindling planning staff and money. "The broader question is what are our planning and development priorities?"

Given the city's lack of money and planners, private financing of the UGB studies "would be a way to go," Kelly says. But he says it's a "serious question" how the study could then maintain its independence. "I don't think an update of the Chamber study is going to do it."

Although state law doesn't require that Eugene update its UGB studies now, that could change. Gov. Ted Kulongoski has argued that the state needs more "shovel ready" industrial land to lure big companies and create jobs. A taskforce the governor appointed, Jack Roberts is a member, has drafted a recommendation that the state require Eugene and other cities to update their land supply studies to expand UGBs every five years.

"It's an unfunded mandate," Bettman says.

In addition to having to pay for the costly studies, Bettman says city taxpayers would have to fund expensive roads, sew-

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Springfield, rather than just one city. "I thought we were one UGB," said Councilor Gary Papé at the council meeting last month.

## DRAMATIC DEPARTURE

The Chamber studies are a dramatic departure from previous city studies of the need for more developable land.

In 1993, the city found that the supply of industrial land within the UGB exceeded the projected 20-year demand by between 650 and 1,172 acres.

In 1992, the city found that the commercial land supply would exceed the 2010 demand by 170 acres.

A more recent 1998 study found that the 20 year supply of residential land within the urban growth boundary still exceeded demand by 1,415 acres.

industrial lands has lead to complaints from developers in *The Register-Guard* that adding yet more land to the UGB would devalue their existing industrial sites.

"There's a lack of demand for some of the industrial land, even the shovel ready industrial land," Bettman says, citing the recently vacated Sony factory in Springfield.

But the Chamber and Roberts insist that the earlier studies still need to be updated. Roberts told the City Council that "generous use" could be made of the Chamber studies to save money and that his group could raise private money to contract for and help fund studies that would meet state requirements for growth boundary expansions.

Segel says it would be "egregious" to use the biased Chamber studies as the basis