

Maudlin 'bout Remodelin'

Critics bemoan the difficulty of redeveloping our urban core



How should Eugene grow? A group called 1000 Friends of Oregon says that Eugene should "grow up," not "grow out." This group favors increasing the density of our urban core rather than expanding our urban growth boundary (UGB), which is the line around the metro area that prevents shopping malls from encroaching on farmland and forestland.

On the other hand, a group called Oregonians in Action (OIA) insists that redevelopment of the urban core is too difficult. These people like the UGB about as much as they like the KGB. In a recent op-ed piece for *The Register-Guard*, an official with OIA said that the philosophy of urban containment stifles economic development. The author put quotation marks around terms like "land use planning" and "land use goals," as if these were dubious propositions rather than settled law.

My own view is that we should explore all opportunities for redeveloping the urban center before we consider enlarging the UGB. Let's be honest: Downtown Eugene could use a facelift. Many of the buildings in our downtown sprang up in the 1970s, which was not exactly the zenith of American architecture. Maybe we should market Eugene to Hollywood as a shooting location for films set in the '70s, like the upcoming remake of *Starsky and Hutch*. Some of the concrete buildings in downtown Eugene make communist Eastern Europe seem like Renaissance Italy. On December 13, 2001, a cover story in *EW* used a fancy architectural term to characterize Eugene's buildings: "Butt ugly."

If we have to put new buildings somewhere so we can accommodate our growing population, why not transform the ugly buildings of downtown Eugene into taller, better-looking buildings? Why allow the construction of more and more box stores on the periphery when several lots are underutilized in the urban center?

Abandoning downtown for the so-called "premium land" on the edges of our community is like abandoning your spouse of 20 years for a new trophy wife. It's not just bad land use planning, it's disloyal. We should stand by our downtown, the way several thriving communities such as Portland have done.

The op-ed by OIA complained about the scarcity of developable land within Eugene's UGB. But what about all the developable land that exists in distressed timber towns like Cottage Grove and Oakridge? These towns benefit when developable land is scarce in Eugene. When it comes to the economic development of Lane County's small towns, OIA is MIA.

Of course, we shouldn't rule out any expansion of Eugene's urban growth boundary for all eternity. At some point in the future, we'll need new ground to accommodate major employers that might want to establish facilities in our community (especially employers that can't find suitable lots within the existing UGB). I, for one, believe that our local governments should follow the suggestion of the Lane Metro Partnership and invest a small amount of money to study the availability of industrial land within our UGB — so long as we're making comparable investments to create inventories of natural resources and other assets.

But in the meantime, let's unplug the centrifuge that flings all development to the edge of our community. While redevelopment of our urban center won't be easy, it's worth the trouble. If we insist on a new site for every new commercial or residential development, our urban core will collapse. Remember that "new" is half the way to "Newark."

Tom Lininger is a law professor and former county commissioner.

BUST THEIR BUTTS

I am responding to Tom Clark's (8/21) letter. He says, "There's a cabal on the planet composed of wealthy and powerful men with incredible political and economic power... Question authority."

I think a broader formulation would be better: In the past/present there have been/are many cabals of wealthy and powerful men with incredible political and economic power. Question *all* authorities created or subsidized by the rich for their prime goal is to rule the planet for the benefit of the rich and the degradation of the poor and of the planet's resources.

The Bushies are just the current prime manifestation of this anti-democratic, anti-Christian, anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim, anti-compassionate and anti-scientific terribly gross tendency. We need to root out their secrets, publicize their secrets and bust their funky asses.

We need to lionize the Ramsey Clarks, Coleen Rowleys, Greg Palasts and Arundhati Roys of the world. We need to create a loosely coordinated world society whose prime directive is peace, justice, health care, a living wage and real democracy for all people and for all environments. Sustainable world peace instead of continuous warfare between dominating creeps whose prime directive in practical results is to destroy decent life on Earth as a sacrifice to the Great God Money.

For George Beres (8/28) and other concerned citizens, the list of Bush's creepy Portland donors should be at www.fec.gov about Oct. 15 (justice delayed).

Bob Saxton
Eugene

INFLAMING READERS

The story of "Fire Season" by James Johnston (8/28) tends to simplify a very complex set of issues and paint a picture in black and white.

On the one hand Mr. Johnston points out that this forest needs to burn. On the other, he attacks the fire managers for taking the opportunity to put some fire into the system by setting control burns. The truth is that this is the only time when there are enough resources available to accomplish these necessary burns. There is a blank check for fighting forest fires. Crews are available and ready to go, air support is assigned to the fire, and the operations team does not have to go through extensive environmental review to implement their strategies. The smoke intrusions are tolerated by residents as inevitable. If managers try to do prescribed burns in the spring to prevent later wildfires, this level of support is not available. One or two accidents with wind or judgement, such as we saw in Los Alamos, and the finger pointing begins.

It is true that the military model has served fire managers well in the assembling

and deploying of resources. They routinely set up and take down small cities in remote areas and manage the logistics required. Where the military mindset breaks down is in the sensitivity required to locate firelines on the ground. A field observer must go ahead of the fireline building process and hang flagging for hotshot crews to follow with chainsaw teams; dozers, hoses, pumps and holding crews may follow. The scouts are pushed by the crews, by the weather and topography changes, and by the fire coming hot on their heels. It is often difficult to make a landscape-wide decision under the canopy of trees. Backtracking and realignment can be impossible due to the pressures of the situation. Managers in the command post may lay out a line on a map but it is up to the people on the ground to make it happen. Training in fire ecology and stand dynamics is often missing from the job description of a field observer or saw team.

Managing forests and natural processes like fire requires an evolving science, an awareness of cultural and political realities, astute observation and judgement, attention to intuition, and just plain luck. People have devoted their entire careers to this calling, often sacrificing lives, family ties, and especially summer vacations to provide this service. When James Johnston inflames readers to jump on the bandwagon of finger pointing and criticism it does more to hamper this ongoing effort than understanding and timely support would do.

Mary P. Barton
Yachats

CREATE HAVOC

Tired of high gas prices? Feel that you as a citizen can't do anything to drive the prices down? Feel that Bush and his boys are owned by the energy companies (you would be right about that)?

We can drive prices down. There are about 30 million cars in the U.S. When we fill our gas tanks, we allow our cars to become storage tanks for the oil companies.

One factor concerning movement of oil by the oil companies, is that they expect "X" amount of cars to fill up their tanks when they pull into a gas station, on any given day.

If enough citizens in any city or location were to only half fill their gas tanks, we would create

havoc with the oil companies distribution. They would be forced to lower prices, to pull customers back to those location(s), to avoid problems with distribution.

Tom Wilt
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