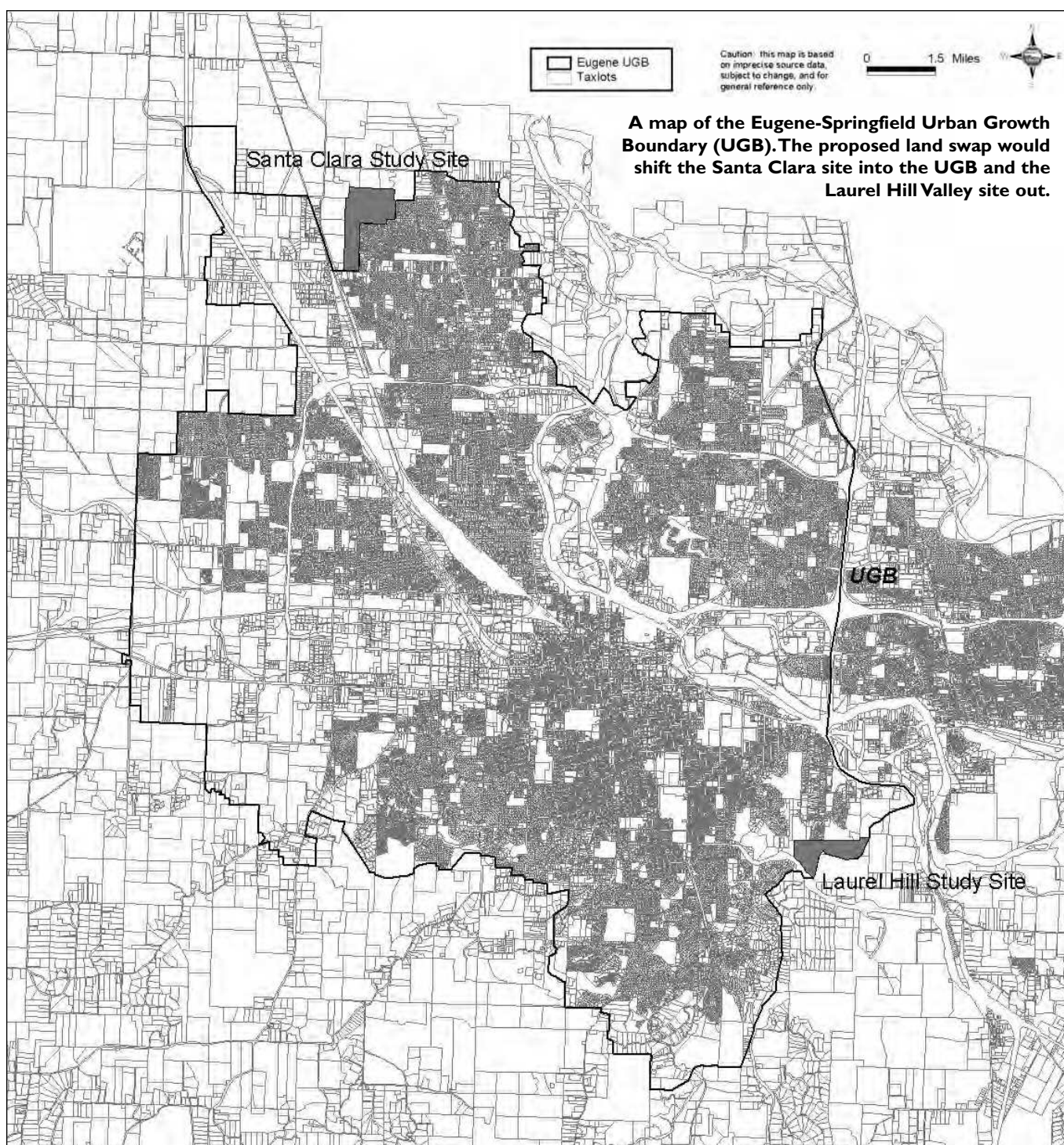




THE LAND SWAP

There's one thing everyone seems to agree on: Santa Clara needs more parks. The city aims to have 20 acres of public open space per 1,000 residents, and citywide it is close to that goal. But for Santa Clara's 28,500 residents, there are only 113 acres of open space, or 4 acres per 1,000 residents. That leaves an open space deficit of 457 acres in Santa Clara, and that number will only grow along with the area's population.

Parks staff established the need for open space in northwest Eugene in the 1989 Eugene Parks and Recreation Plan, but the department did not have adequate funds to pursue a community park in Santa Clara until the passage of a \$25.3 million bond measure for parks and open space in 1998. Parks found only two properties, both outside the UGB, that fit their criteria for a regional park in northwest Eugene: a parcel of flat agricultural land off Irvington Road in Santa Clara, owned by brothers Norman and Melvin McDougal, and a site east of River Road owned by Delta Sand and Gravel. The latter owners were not interested in selling, so Parks focused on the McDougals.

The McDougals are developers from Creswell who own a breadth of properties throughout Lane County, including a parcel of sloped, forested land inside the UGB in southeast Eugene's Laurel Hill Valley. Instead of selling the Santa Clara property to the city outright, the McDougals proposed a land swap. If the city will bring their 197-acre Santa Clara parcel into the UGB and take a 120-acre plot of their Laurel Hill Valley property out of the UGB, the developers will donate the difference — 77 acres — to the city for a regional park. The city only needs about 40 acres for the park, but the remaining 37 acres could be used for wetlands preservation.

The result would be no net loss or gain of developable acres within the UGB. But because the flat Santa Clara property can be developed more densely than the sloped Laurel Hill Valley property, the swap would result in more total commercial use acres and housing units in the city. The McDougals' representative calls this "smart growth;" opponents of the deal call it a swindle.

ARGUMENTS FOR IT

Now or never

Jerry Finigan, a retired high school English teacher, has lived in his Santa Clara home for 40 years, and he's witnessed the rapid development taking place in that area. As Finigan sees it, it's now or never for a community park in Santa Clara.

Finigan has been involved with the area's neighborhood group, the Santa Clara Community Organization, since 1984. As part of the city's open spaces advisory committee, Finigan helped to put the Santa Clara element into the Parks Master Plan in 1989. "At that point I indicated that things were already starting to fill up here and getting land was going to be problematic," he says. "[The land swap] is going to be a kind of godsend, because we wouldn't be able to have a regional park otherwise."

Although the McDougals' Santa Clara property is currently outside the UGB, Parks Planning Manager Andrea Riner says that it will be probably come into the modified boundary in 2017. In Finigan's reasoning, if the McDougal property is going to be developed eventually, it's better to accept the land swap now and get a park than to reject it and lose the whole parcel to development later.

Old McDougals Have a Farm ...

Developers' proposed land swap has Eugeneans quarrelin' BY KERA ABRAHAM

Imagine that your mom gives you a pair of pants with an inelastic waistband. She tells you that you must be able to fit inside them for about 20 years, at which point she will reassess your growth and issue you a new pair of pants. The purpose: weight control.

Now, if you'll humor the metaphor, consider this. You are Eugene, your mom is the state of Oregon and the waistband is the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). The city and county drew the current Eugene-Springfield UGB in 1997 to encircle an area set by the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD). The city may only develop within this boundary, which is based on projected population size, until the state reassesses it in 2017. The purpose: sprawl control.

The UGB isn't supposed to expand prematurely, but it can shift if the area inside it remains constant. A pair of developers have proposed to do just that, by moving a plot of farmland in southwest Eugene into the UGB and moving a similar-sized plot of forest in northeast Eugene out. In our pants metaphor, that would give you an extra inch for your belly if you lose an inch in your booty. But any change in the UGB must be approved by the Eugene and Lane County planning commissions, the City Council, the County Commission, the DLCD and finally the Oregon Annexation and Zoning Boundary Commission.

The UGB shift would open the door to a regional park in Santa Clara and allow the city to extend the Ridgeline Trail in Laurel Hill Valley. It would also pave the way for a large residential and commercial development on prime farm soil. Last July, the Eugene City Council gave the go-ahead for the Parks and Open Spaces Department to begin work on the application to shift the UGB, but some Santa Clara residents are pushing to kill the deal before it goes any further.