

# Regional Rivalry

Springfield and Lane County conservatives attack Eugene.

Eugene, Springfield and Lane County cooperate on a lot of stuff. Air pollution regulation, road funding, sewage treatment, jail funding, human services funding and metropolitan land use and transportation planning all are governed by regional boards composed of representatives from the various jurisdictions. Getting anything done requires cooperation, as the boards often give veto power to each jurisdiction.

In the past this wasn't too much of an issue. Eugene, Springfield and Lane County were all dominated by conservatives and/or Republicans who often put developer and business interests ahead of taxpayers and the environment. But last year that changed with the election of a progressive mayor and City Council majority in Eugene, leading to mounting friction.

"Every time there's a difference of opinion" on regional issues, Eugene Councilor Bonny Bettman said, "there's a tendency to attack Eugene, and let's get on the Eugene City Council bashing bandwagon. ... It's like a campaign."

Conservative Springfield city councilors recently threatened to withdraw from the Lane Regional Air Pollution Authority (LRAPA) if Eugene progressives could appoint a new member moving the air board from its pro-industry stance to a more pro-health and the environment position.

The threat apparently had the desired effect. Gary Rayer, a Eugene representative on the air board, recently cast a key swing vote against appointing a new pro-health member to the board. "I thought it [the appointment] would put the agency at risk for Springfield or Lane County pulling out," Rayer explained later.

"It's ridiculous," said Eugene councilor and LRAPA board member Betty Taylor. "I would not give in to threats."

Republican Springfield Mayor Sid Leiken last week called for Eugene to get out of the way of expanding the urban growth boundary, allowing urban sprawl and big developer profits. Conservative county elected officials recently chaffed at the Eugene council's rejection of a county plan to drastically increase taxes to double jail and deputy funding using a new special district. The controversial jail plan would have Eugene taxpayers subsidize rural services and could jeopardize Eugene school and library funding.

The Eugene City Council has itself been chaffing under Springfield and county official's refusal to allow discretionary federal road funding to go to fixing potholes rather than building new roads for developers. "It was really a non-starter," said Councilor David Kelly of the Eugene effort to redirect the road funding at a recent Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) meeting. "We didn't have a single supportive voice around the table."

"Springfield and Lane County are keeping Eugene from using money that we've been allocated for our highest priority needs which is street preservation," Councilor Bonny Bettman complained.

In the intergovernmental disputes, *The Register-Guard* has fallen squarely on Springfield and Lane County's side and helped whip up the conflict. The R-G, which long ago

dropped "Eugene" from its name, is also one of the area's largest developers and benefited directly from using the disputed road funds to build a connection to I-5 from its Chad Drive headquarters and business park.

Eugene's progressive representatives previously clashed with county and Springfield officials on the MPC over the controversial West Eugene Parkway (WEP). Despite almost 50 citizens testifying unanimously at a public hearing against the \$170 million, wetland destroying freeway, the MPC voted 8-1 just before last Christmas to proceed with the project.

Citizens criticized the body as undemocratic. Of 10 voting members on the MPC, only two represent Eugene, even though Eugene represents almost half the population in the entire county. "Eugene has not had nearly enough power there," Taylor said.

Most of the regional governing bodies are undemocratic. Eugene has nearly double the population of Springfield, but conservatives dominate LRAPA. Eugene property owners will pay about half the taxes under the county's proposed new jail/deputy district, but the coun-

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— BONNY BETTMAN

ty isn't giving Eugene representatives half the say in how and whether it will be created.

The regional rivalry shows little sign of abating and may likely intensify as the new Eugene mayor and council make appointments to regional bodies to replace conservative appointments made by the old council under Republican Mayor Jim Torrey.

The stress could cause some of the regional bodies to collapse.

"Cooperation is good and we should all act for the common good," said Taylor. "But if we have totally different ideas about what the common good is, then we should act independently."

LRAPA's functions would be taken over by state regulators. But it's unclear if the region could legally go without regional land-use and transportation planning bodies. State land-use planning regulations and federal road-funding regulations require regional planning.

Bettman says "Eugene does have a stake in how rapidly growth occurs in Springfield." Inefficient urban sprawl demands public subsidies from scarce regional road and other infrastructure funding, she points out. "The faster growing city is being subsidized by the slower growing city." **EW**

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