



The new Oregon Research Institute Building aims to achieve LEED Platinum rating.

Green Cities Movement

Is Eugene on the bus?

The Green Cities Movement is an effort by local governments around the globe to deal directly with the environmental problems they face. As national governments, such as our own, stay the course toward environmental disaster, cities are left to deal with the results.

One unlikely champion of the movement is Jaime Lerner — the former mayor of Curitiba, Brazil. In the early '70s Lerner was “installed” by the government and he promptly made a high-tech bus system a priority. The city grew in density around the system — concentrating the population and conserving green space. Now in a city of 2.2 million the system accommodates an amazing two million rides a day and helps make Curitiba perhaps the greenest city on earth.

But we don't have to look very far for inspiration. Our big sister Portland was the first U.S. city to meet the Kyoto Protocol's target for reducing carbon emissions. President Bush's myopic statement that “Kyoto would have wrecked our economy” is rebuffed by Portland leaders who contend the city has benefited with a effective public transportation, more green space, lower energy costs and cleaner air. Mayor Tom Potter told *The New York Times* that the perception that these measures would be drain on the economy is just wrong: “It's economical; it makes sense in dollars.”

Although Eugene lags behind many other cities, Mayor Piercy's administration has shown signs of positive change. The city has announced a partnership with three developers building green projects. The developers are given somewhat lightweight incentives such as a greased permit process and free technical advice — not exactly the big tax breaks that Hynix sucks up — but it's a start.

The city hasn't yet allocated real financial resources to promoting sustainable projects. And there is more they could do without spending much money. One move that should have been adopted years ago is to follow Portland's lead and require all new civic structures (such as the new City Hall) to be LEED certified. The U.S. Green Builders Council's LEED rating program (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) has become the standard in determining the sustainability of a project. Another is to increase tipping fees at the dump (also done by Portland) to encourage reuse and recycling.

The U.N. reports that in 2005, for the first time in history, more than half the world's population lives in cities. In the U.S., the Jeffersonian ideal of the citizen farmer spreading across the country is being supplanted by population pressures and a cultural shift to urban/suburban living.

When I moved to Eugene in 1986 the population was less than two-thirds what it is today — yet the urban core has changed little in those 20 years. We have a small city downtown with sprawling population of a mid-sized city.

A recent article in *The New Yorker* pointed out that if you really want to reduce your environmental footprint you shouldn't think about a little cabin in the woods — you should move to Manhattan. In terms of efficiency of energy and materials one answer is density. The apartment building is a model of efficiency with shared walls, floors and ceilings reducing materials. If you spread New York City's population out to the density of Eugene it would fill a 20-mile-wide swath from here to Portland. Of course many of us live in Eugene for its relaxed atmosphere, its trees, its wooded bike paths. A more intense urban core could actually help preserve those things — and with density should come green space in the form of urban parks and greener streets.

The Madison Avenue high-rise isn't the answer in Eugene. But St. Vincent de Paul's Aurora Building and the upscale Tate Condominiums represent what downtown Eugene should begin to look like — four to eight stories tall. At different ends of the economic scale both buildings incorporate commercial elements on the lower floor and get people invested in living downtown. The city should encourage denser development and discourage more pancake buildings downtown — if a Whole Foods wants to move downtown it should be in a mixed-use multi-story building development.

Our city has some catching up to do. Without the resources of Portland it will take vision, creativity and commitment. Let's hope the current city administration has that commitment to sustainable development, and isn't applying more of the thin coats of “greenwash” coming out of Washington. **EW**

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