

Habitat vs. Asphalt

Royal Node threatens more loss of wetlands

As the last ice age receded about 10,000 years ago, and Willamette Valley warmed, plants and animals began arriving from the south to settle in west Eugene.

Almost 7,000 years ago, crystals were growing in molten magma in the throat of Mount Mazama, known today as Crater Lake. When the volcano erupted, Mazama-fingerprinted ash was blown north and northeast over 500,000 square miles. One of the places the ash accumulated was the flat southern Willamette Valley. It formed the heavy clay that makes West Eugene's wetlands. Draining slowly, water stands in the clay wetlands during winter. Our cloudless summer days dry up the clay, which shrinks and cracks as far as three feet down. Long-lived (perennial) bunch-grasses could dominate in these wetlands, with a diversity of 100-200 herbaceous (forb) species and scattered oaks and streamside (riparian) trees.

For many generations, Kalapuya Indians set the wetland prairies on fire. As 1845 Salem settler John Minto wrote, "Fire was the agency used by the Calapooia tribes to hold their camas grounds and renew their berry patches and grasslands for game and the millions of geese, brants, cranes, and swans which wintered in Western Oregon."

And then the Oregon settlers figured the prairie was theirs and stopped setting it on fire.

By 1853, surveyors had divided western lands into townships (6 miles square) and sections (one mile square) and set out on foot to describe each section. In west



Eugene, surveyors reported that the Willamette River inundated the prairie "one to three feet deep" and optimistically pronounced the soil "first rate clay loam."

Early settlers mostly pastured cattle and subsistence-farmed the prairie for wheat. Late spring entry into soggy fields and dry summers precluded competing in the commercial world of wheat exports,



but the farmers eventually found their niche in rye grass. Most of the once-diverse prairie community was transformed into monocultures of exotic grass. Twentieth century berming, diking, ditching and draining to halt annual overbank flooding and dewater the wetlands further eliminated wetland prairie functioning and allowed Eugene to grow from 7.5 square miles in 1945 to 42 square miles 50 years later.

With this Eugene wetlands history repeating itself throughout the 110-mile long Willamette Valley, we have now arrived at the near complete (99.9 percent) extinction of our valley's wetland prairie. But apparently we're not done.

"Nodal developments" are supposedly walkable sites of purposely zoned dense housing, infrastructure, stores and parking lots designed to help Eugene meet Oregon's goal of zero increases in "vehicle miles traveled." By this standard, the proposed "Royal Node" in West Eugene has to qualify as a "who-are-we-kidding" plan.

First, the plan is to build Royal Node smack in the middle of rural west Eugene wetlands. Those wetlands have not even been delineated (i.e., surveyed for the amount of wetlands that would be destroyed), but streets (e.g., the ironically named Legacy Street) and sewers are in the city's funding and planning pipeline to anchor the Royal Node. The dense urban node would be jammed up against City and BLM public wetlands that are being "restored," further fragmenting their functions and viability as functioning habitat – for instance, for meadowlarks.

Secondly, instead of building a node in the core of Eugene, the city is locating Royal Node at the far western edge of Eugene's urban growth boundary in isolation from any promising mass transit. On average, residents in this area do and will drive far more vehicle miles per day than Eugene core residents.

As I padded through "Royal Node" wetlands two weekends ago in the rain, ducks rose from among glittering sedges, a great blue heron sailed into the nearby Greenhill tributary, shorebirds poked around in the mud for lunch and swallows swarmed above ponds into which neon-painted stakes (for Legacy Street? the Legacy sewer?) had been pounded. The swallows seemed unaware that their habitat is about to disappear under asphalt.

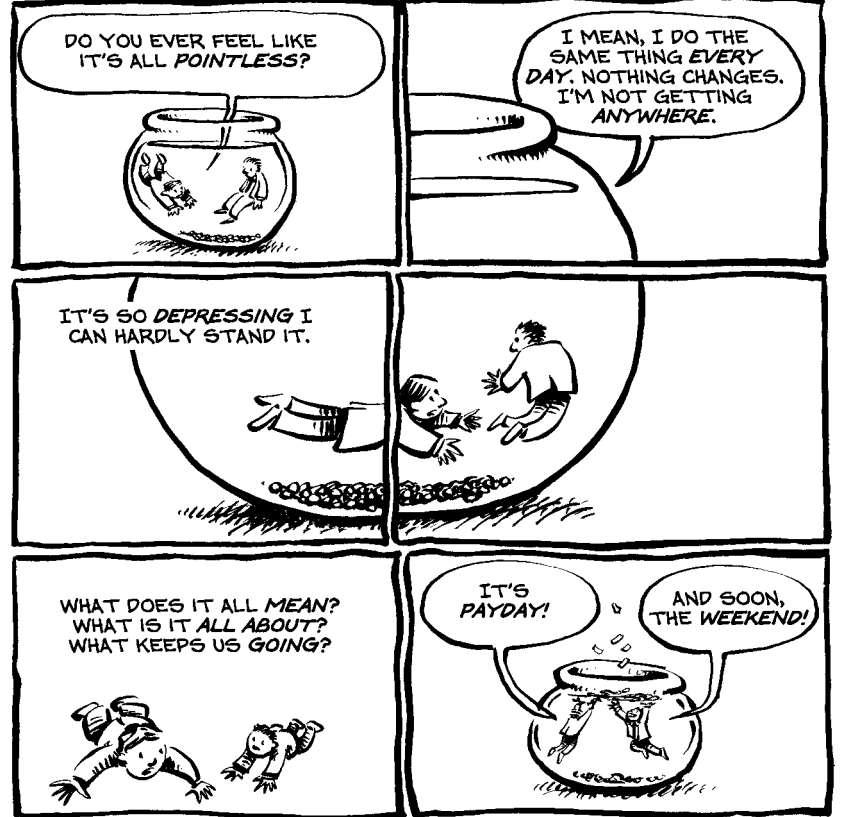
This is sustainable Eugene? If we can't reorient our subsidized nodal developments away from climate-warming, petroleum-addicted, car-oriented sites like the Royal Node, where land and water meet in the last 0.1 percent remaining wetlands of the Willamette Valley, what hope is there for Eugene claiming to be "sustainable"?

A good website for understanding Royal Node plans is www.archiplanet.org/wiki/Royal_Avenue_Node_Eugene_Oregon

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How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SPREAD SUSTAINABILITY

Eugene mayor Kitty Piercy is to be applauded for spearheading a serious local response to global climate change. All whose laudable intent was translated into creating what has become our change-of-the-month club should also be thanked for coming up with a strategy that is both meaningful and doable.

When we have 15 or 20 of these environmentally friendly changes under our belts, we'll be halfway home to the necessary goal of an 80 percent reduction in our carbon footprint. The hard part will be still to come: reining in the private sector's carcinogenic lust for consumption. For every destructive practice we ban or discourage, we can offer and encourage more sustainable practices.

In this information age, what we achieve can be exported everywhere immediately. If we move with all due speed, we increase the chance that our grandchildren will bless, not curse, us for our roles in this ultimate crisis.

Paul Prensley
Eugene

EGO WARS KILL ANIMALS

Camilla Mortensen did an excellent job of summarizing many of the issues ("No-Kill" cover story, 4/26) revolving around a fierce battle raging in Lane County involving an effort to protect the innocent lives of unwanted and abandoned animals in our community.

I have been heavily submerged in this battle to give recognition to the flawless merits of the "No-Kill Solutions" (www.nokillsolutions.com) presented by Nathan Winograd last July to a standing room only audience.

I have seen many things in my life that have repulsed me, but nothing as ugly as the ego wars that rage throughout this community, starting from the top — the commissioners — and trickling down to the most innocent-appearing of animal welfare

supporters.

With these battles raging, the only victims are the animals themselves, and unless and until there is common ground for all to stand on and people can rise above their own personal issues and dig deeply into their souls to feel that the need of these animals is much more important than winning their personal ego wars, the animals will continue to die at a rate of 10 per day at our local animal control shelter.

The commissioners (with the strong exception of Bill Fleenor and Pete Sorenson) can't stop fighting among themselves long enough to look at what's happening around their own chairs, much less the community.

I believe this community has enough heart and resources to do away with the unnecessary killing of adoptable animals at our local shelter. It should be THAT simple.

Robin Loving
Eugene

HALL HAS IT ALL

Lane Community College is facing some critical decisions. State funding has dropped dramatically, forcing raises in tuition and reductions in staff and services. A strong, informed board is essential as LCC addresses these problems.

Dr. Roger Hall deserves your vote in the upcoming election. His 16 years of experience on the board, his understanding of the issues and his ability to work cooperatively with all parties involved make him the ideal candidate for Zone 6. Dr. Hall understands and supports the mission of the college. He is familiar with the programs and services the college provides. He has no personal agendas and always makes decisions based on what is best for the college. Because three of the present board members will be retiring, Dr. Hall's experience is even more important. As a former LCC board member, I have had the opportunity to work with Dr. Hall and see firsthand the vital role he fills on the board. Please cast