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**news** BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

## Pushing Boundaries

Lane County looking to control more land

Lane County is updating its Eugene-Springfield Metropolitan Area General Plan, and the changes in the Metro Plan could have far-reaching effects on everything from new homes to new gravel pits to clean drinking water. Mia Nelson of 1000 Friends of Oregon says the boundary changes affect 20,000 acres and have “unintended consequences” to vast land areas and tens of thousands of people.

The Metro Plan is the official long-range comprehensive plan for metropolitan Lane County and the cities of Eugene and Springfield. It sets forth general planning policies and land use allocations, and it designates “urbanizable land” to accommodate urban expansion. The plan is periodically updated, and in February 2011 the commissioners directed the Land Management Division (LMD) to amend the plan and adjust the boundaries. Commissioner Rob Handy says the plan to amend “started innocently enough but has some deep ramifications.”

acquisition, putting those lands under the control of the county alone. Other areas involved include farmland around the airport and land around Lane Community College.

Springfield Utility Board (SUB) has expressed concern about the plan and its effects on drinking water. In a memo to the LMD in April, SUB pointed out that if the Metro Plan boundary is altered so that it is coterminous with Springfield's UGB, Springfield will no longer have a deciding vote on certain land use actions outside of the UGB, which might affect the city's water source.

According to the Metro Plan webpage, the Delta Sand and Gravel debacle was one impetus for the plan changes, and “Specifically, commissioners have expressed frustration about the ability of the cities to override board decisions on county land use issues.” Knife River — Northwest, a gravel mining company that owns property within the area affected by Lane County's proposal and within the area SUB is concerned about,

Amending the Metro Plan ‘started innocently enough but has some deep ramifications.’ — Commissioner Rob Handy

The process involves Eugene, Springfield and Lane County planning commissioners, city councils and the county commissioners. Keir Miller, a senior planner with the Lane County Department of Public Works confirms that the record on the proposed Metro Plan changes will close Sept. 13, meaning deliberations on the changes will be based only on the information and comments entered before that date.

The Metro Plan has historically acted as a “check and balance” on land use decisions. For example, when Delta Sand and Gravel attempted to expand its gravel mining operations, nearby neighbors objected, citing noise, dust and groundwater issues. Lane County agreed to the expansion, but the city of Eugene voted against it in 2008. Because of the Metro Plan, the gravel mine's 72-acre planned growth was held at bay.

The proposed Metro Plan updates would take place in two phases. Phase 1 would modify the Metro Plan boundary east of I-5 so that the plan boundary would be coterminous with the city of Springfield's UGB. Phase 2 would result in a similar boundary change to Eugene. This means that the county, without city input, would have control over 20,000 acres of land previously under joint control.

Nelson says the two-phase plan is not only unnecessary; it could create problems. She says, for example, if the Eugene and Springfield city councils and the County Commission agree to Phase 1 but not to Phase 2, Eugene and Lane County wind up alone on the west side of I-5 making land use decisions on the “urbanizable land,” but Springfield alone making decisions to the east.

Nelson says the proposal will remove the entire Howard Buford Recreation Area from the Metro Plan, as well as the Nature Conservancy's 1,270-acre Wildish lands

has presented testimony in favor of the amendments that would allow Lane County to make the land use decisions without city input. Knife River specifically objected to SUB's attempts to protect Springfield's drinking water.

Nelson says, “The interests of Knife River and Lane County are not the public's interest.”

In order to protect drinking water, SUB proposed three options at the June 30 Metro Plan meeting: retain the Metro Plan boundary around the water resource areas, create an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) that would allow the city to participate in decisions that would affect the water resource areas, or adopt the Springfield Drinking Water Protection Plan into the Lane County Code. Knife River calls those proposals “unnecessary.”

Springfield city staff agreed originally agreed with the third option, but Miller wrote in a July 18 memo that it is “unclear if the board would be willing to undertake” that option “for a variety of reasons.” Last year an attempt by Lane County to protect its drinking water was defeated in response to politics, misinformation and loud opposition by some landowners.

As of the August public hearing on the issue, Springfield staff have recommended that the IGA be formed, and it would sunset when Lane County adopts a drinking water protection plan.

Handy says these changes to the Metro Plan would put decisions into the hands of the county, which has shown “little oversight on county rules and compliance follow up.” He adds, “The county has not shown the ability or the will to hold the line” on land use protection.

For more information go to <http://wkly.ws/13n> or contact Deanna Wright at 682-4082 and [Deanna.Wright@co.lane.or.us](mailto:Deanna.Wright@co.lane.or.us) **EW**

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