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GUEST COLUMN

Is the Resiliency Project the right plan?

I never thought I’d be writing a guest column in the local newspaper, but I was raised that if something was important to you, take a stand. I am a representative of Concerned Friends for Clatsop County. We are a group of 80-plus local citizens who were sparked to gather due to the lack of transparency on the Resiliency Project.

The Resiliency Project is a multi-layered project slated to move the Clatsop County Public Works Department facility out of Astoria to the rural Lewis and Clark area, buy private roads like the Lewis and Clark Mainline and upgrade them to county standards, remove the

gates and use it as an “alternate” route under the guise of being for emergency purposes.

The county would also like to create another “alternate route” starting near Hunts Market area and connecting to the county-owned Pipeline Mainline, taking the route over the hill to end up near Williamsport Road.

Concerned Friends for Clatsop County is not opposed to the county moving public works, but feels that other essential buildings should be more of a priority. If they insist on moving, our opposition is to the location they have chosen.

In the original presentation to the Board of Commissioners in February 2019, the North Coast Business Park and land on Dolphin Avenue near the Oregon Department of Transportation facility in Warrenton were listed as options. Our group feels the North Coast Business Park makes the most sense both location-wise and financially. The business park is already owned by the county and has sat empty for nearly 30 years. Already zoned General Industrial, it is out of the inundation zone and located where it could be part of a first responder team with ODOT, Oregon State Police, Medix Ambulance, Pacific Power and the sheriff’s office.

We are aware there are wetlands at the business park. The county claims the cost of mitigation would be too expensive. They could try to self-mitigate the wetlands and save the taxpayers money as opposed to purchasing the



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Clatsop County is weighing a Resiliency Project that involves property in Lewis and Clark.

IS THIS THE RIGHT PLAN FOR OUR LIVES AND OUR TAX DOLLARS? THAT’S WHAT WE NEED TO ASK OURSELVES, AND ASK THE COUNTY AT EVERY PUBLIC PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITY.

Lewis and Clark sorting yard, applying for an expensive and lengthy goal exception and dealing with the potential of environmental hazards in the ground from the years as an old logging equipment site.

Another facet of this project is the roads. The county is looking to purchase the Lewis and Clark Mainline. This road is an old Crown Zellerbach logging mainline that has passed between timber companies.

Our group believes this costly purchase and upgrade is unnecessary. The upgrade and opening of this road will destroy the character of the community in which we live, opening the door to rezoning from forestry and agriculture to development throughout the Clatsop Ridge area.

This land is in the Lewis and Clark

area, a popular area to move to for the larger lot sizes and the tranquil setting surrounded by farm and forestland. The increased traffic, garbage dumping, theft and vandalism — not to mention excessive speeding on this stretch of road — would be detrimental to homeowners and burdensome on an already overworked and understaffed sheriff’s office.

The county claims they need this road for an “alternate route” during a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami. I recently helped a friend from Oregon City pack up her belongings to evacuate from the fires in her area. It was not only scary, but made it clear to me that no roads will be of help during an earthquake or tsunami.

Everyone will be trying to flee at the same time and going nowhere. A complete bottleneck will ensue from Wah-

anna and Lewis and Clark Road in Seaside off of U.S. Highway 101. We will not have time during a tsunami, as studies show that based on where you are on the lowlands, you will have between eight to 15 minutes, on foot, to reach higher ground. This upgraded road will only be beneficial after a disaster — if it’s still intact — and there’s no guarantee of that.

What Concerned Friends for Clatsop County know is needed are lateral routes off of Highway 101 for those in the lowlands to reach higher ground. We believe that if the county got easements from landowners and made them accessible with solar lighting, good footing and signage off of Highway 101 to show people where to go it would be lifesaving.

More vehicle routes are needed as well. Having just a few routes off of Highway 101 won’t be enough. Placing full provisions in pods in the hills would also aid in higher survival rates. Each person will need a gallon of water a day for an estimated 14 days to survive. When you are fleeing, that’s the last thing on your mind. We’d like to see funds spent on maps, education and drills to help our residents prepare.

Upgrading our county bridges with the funds slated for roads would be a better investment. Our county communication system definitely needs to be upgraded to handle such a horrific situation, and after participating in a few video meetings, it’s clear things need to work better.

The facts seem pretty clear. The county has no intention on saving anyone living in or near an inundation zone. They continue to take their tax dollars and issue building permits. The Resiliency Project is not a plan to save lives, it’s a plan to create a large county public works campus, create new roads and make a bypass under the ruse of resiliency to gain state and federal funding.

Is this the right plan for our lives and our tax dollars? That’s what we need to ask ourselves, and ask the county at every public participation opportunity. We are asking for an in-person meeting, but so far it is falling on deaf ears. We will keep trying. In the meantime, be smart and prepare on your own.

Suzette Bergeson, who lives in Lewis and Clark, is part of Concerned Friends for Clatsop County.

GUEST COLUMN

Forests, facts and our future

Oregonians are grieving about the death and destruction caused by wildfires across our beautiful state. There are likely to be more dangerous fires to come this year, according to fire experts. So I’m especially upset that #TimberUnity’s Julie Parrish made outrageous false claims about these fires in her recent op-ed in the Washington Post.

Parrish is a former state representative who was voted out of office, not a scientist. She is a representative of timber corporations and their astroturf group, #TimberUnity, here in Oregon.

I’m appalled by three of her claims. First, she dismisses climate change as “weather.” The consensus is that these wildfires started when



LAURIE CAPLAN

a powerful windstorm swept through Oregon’s drying forests. Climate change contributed to cause these unprecedented fires because of increasingly dry years and hotter temperatures year after year. In at least one case a lone tree left from a clear-cut fell across a power pole, unleashing a spark that started a fire because the growth around it was so dry.

Her claim that Black Lives Matter protests have somehow resulted in the wildfires is a racist dog whistle. She expects us to believe that state police would somehow have been able to stop the forest fires if they hadn’t been called to Portland to monitor protests. The state police have warned these false rumors are creating more work for them. There is no evidence that any first responders to the fires were somehow hindered by BLM protests. Parrish insults the state police, wildfire fighters and Oregonians with this ridiculous claim.

Lastly, Parrish wrongly states that most forestlands in Oregon are managed by the state. In fact, most Oregon forestlands, about 60%, are managed by the U.S. Forest Service. More than a third of Oregon’s forestland is in private hands. The state



Noah Berger/AP Photo

In this photo taken by a drone, homes leveled by the Almeda fire line the Bear Lake Estates in Phoenix.

owns comparatively little of our forestlands, about 4%. This includes the corporations behind #TimberUnity — Stimson Lumber, Freres Lumber and other timber interests. Parrish fails to mention this privately-held land is some of the most valuable for timber and has been logged by these private companies for years with little regulation.

The timber companies Parrish represents badly want to log these few state-owned forests. This explains why she claims the state forests have become fire hazards and must be cut down. Actually, there has been extensive logging on state lands. The state has a responsibility under the law to balance competing interests in managing these few forests under their control.

Parrish and the corporate interests behind #TimberUnity did not meet with Gov. Kate Brown out of worry about fire hazards in state forests. They went to the state Capitol to oppose efforts to fight climate change. They threatened employees’ jobs if climate legislation passed. Fighting climate change would mean limits and changes to logging practices that would cut into their profits. Parrish’s timber companies don’t want that.

Oregon is not losing control, as Parrish claims. #TimberUnity is losing control of its false narratives about climate change and logging practices. Instead of presenting facts or solutions, Parrish and #TimberUnity continue to try to divide Oregonians based on race and where they live. It’s easy — and wrong — for them to

blame Black Lives Matter protests in Portland for the difficulties in containing these fires. They want to distract us from real causal factors of these horrific wildfires — the timber industry’s failure to address climate change and to improve poor logging practices.

I’m eager to see #TimberUnity and Parrish actually present accurate information and productive plans for Oregon’s forests to benefit all Oregonians, not just corporate profits. We’re all in this together, and we need solutions to make sure our forests are healthy and thriving, for ourselves, our children and the generations to come.

Laurie Caplan is a community volunteer, retired teacher and chairwoman of Indivisible North Coast Oregon.