

County cancels meeting on bid to reclassify farmland

Eric Mortenson

Capital Press, August 2, 2016

Oregon's Clackamas County canceled a meeting this week on its bid to redesignate farmland following critical remarks from communities, a conservation district and a key state land-use agency.

That doesn't mean the idea is dead, however. A majority of county commissioners want to review the status of 1,625 acres now designated "rural reserves." The land, three parcels south and southeast of Portland, was designated to remain farmland for 50 years under a 2010 agreement signed by Clackamas, Washington and Multnomah counties and Metro, the Portland area's land-use planning agency.

The Clackamas commissioners now want to review that decision. They believe their county needs more "employment land" that can be developed for industrial or commercial use and jobs. This summer, they announced a plan to review the status of 800 acres south of Wilsonville, 400 acres adjacent to the urban growth boundary of the city of Canby; and 425 acres south of the Clackamas River along Springwater Road. County officials believe the land should revert to "undesigned" rather than rural reserves.

The proposal caught the attention of groups such as Friends of French Prairie, which opposes development spilling over from the Portland area into the northern Willamette Valley.

The Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District, which usually steers clear of political arguments, took the unusual step of expressing its concern in a letter to the commissioners. The district's board said the county's plan "may not adequately consider the long-term value of high-value farmland," which it called an "irreplaceable natural resource."

Officials in Wilsonville and Canby, which might have to provide services such as water, sewer and police and fire protection to new development, said their cities have already designated other areas for development, and don't favor adding land that is outside their city limits and urban growth boundaries.

Meanwhile, the state Department of Land Conservation and Development said the county's intended review goes beyond the narrow issues detailed in a court-ordered remand of the rural reserves issue.

In a letter to the county, regional representative Jennifer Donnelly said DLCD "encourages the county to maintain the rural designations of the three study areas and focus on completing the reserves process."