

Metro, Clackamas County headed for clash

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Written by Peter Wong

County seeks to reopen debate about reserves; council urged to limit issue to Stafford Triangle.

A showdown is looming between the Metro Council and Clackamas County commissioners over whether unincorporated areas other than the Stafford Triangle should be considered for future development. The council heard Thursday (Oct. 8) from almost 20 witnesses, most of who say the council should limit its consideration to additional evidence that would support its 2011 decision to designate the Stafford Triangle as an urban reserve. That designation would allow development within the next 50 years of an estimated 6,230 acres bordering Tualatin, Lake Oswego and West Linn, and north of Wilsonville.

The issue is back in the hands of Metro and Clackamas County as a result of a 2014 decision by the Oregon Court of Appeals and a subsequent remand by the state Land Conservation and Development Commission, which had approved the designation of urban and rural reserves.

“To go through this process in the same way would be a terrible waste of time,” says William Riggs, a retired justice of the Oregon Supreme Court who lives in Wilsonville.

But Clackamas County commissioners want to reopen consideration of three other areas now designated as rural reserves — among them an area south of Wilsonville that includes the Langdon Farms Golf Club — that would leave open the potential for their future development.

“Until our work is complete, we will not be in a position to approve a new decision on remand,” says a letter signed by Chairman John Ludlow. “Finally, we want to communicate that Clackamas County does not intend to review or co-adopt findings on the Stafford area until the planned facilitated discussion is completed.”

Ludlow was present but did not speak at the first of two hearings by the Metro Council, whose seven members are elected. The council plans a second hearing Nov. 19.

Council President Tom Hughes says the focus is on whether to reaffirm its earlier decision on the Stafford Triangle or broaden the discussion to other areas.

While Multnomah County also is involved, virtually all of the discussion was about Clackamas County. Washington County's reserves were settled by the Legislature, which acted in 2014 after the Court of Appeals decision.

One side speaks out

Most of the comments came down on one side of the issue. “It seems to me the elephant in this room is an attempt to scuttle the process by Clackamas County commissioners,” says Tony Holt, president of the Charbonneau Homeowners Association. “Two or three members seem

obsessed with changing the designation of property owned by one family — the Maletis brothers — south of the Willamette River.”

His reference was to Chris and Tom Maletis, who own Langdon Farms Golf Club. “There seems to be something stinky and unseemly” about the timing of the action, says Eric Hoem, another resident.

Chris Maletis says he will testify formally on Nov. 19, and invited councilors to hold one-on-one meetings beforehand. Hughes said in response that each councilor would have to make that choice. “You have heard my brother and I raked over the coals,” Maletis said at the close of the first hearing. “It is very difficult to sit back here to hear a whole bunch of people make up a whole bunch of things that are not true.”

Their golf course is within an area south of Wilsonville that Clackamas County commissioners voted 4-1 on Aug. 17 to re-evaluate their current status as rural reserves. The area is south of the Willamette River, and bound by Arndt Road to the south, Airport Road to the east, Boones Ferry Road to the west, and Miley Road to the north.

The other areas are 400 acres east of Canby, and one of unspecified size on Springwater Road southeast of Carver. All five county commissioners have received campaign contributions from the Maletis family.

'Put issue behind us'

The lone dissenter on the Aug. 17 vote was Commissioner Jim Bernard, who says the county and the Metro Council should focus on the Stafford Triangle alone.

“I believe putting this issue behind us would allow us to do the hard work which will come after this is resolved,” Bernard says. “My greatest concern is opening up this entire process, disregarding the thousands of participants, reapplying the factors (for reserves) — and leaving us in no better position than we are currently in.”

Similar comments were made by Wilsonville Mayor Tim Knapp, Washington County Commissioner Greg Malinowski, and Charlotte Lehan, a current Wilsonville city councilor, former Wilsonville mayor and Clackamas County commissioner.

“Let’s settle this in order to provide sought-after long-term certainty for both public and private investment,” Knapp says.

But Jeff Condit, a Portland lawyer who spoke for the cities of Tualatin and West Linn, says there are unanswered questions about how to pay for public works improvements in the Stafford Triangle.

Carl Hosticka of Wilsonville, a former Metro councilor, put the issue in a regional context. The Stafford Triangle has about 25 percent of Metro’s planned urban reserves. If the council and Clackamas County fail to resolve the issue, “you would have to look for 6,000 acres someplace else in the region in order to make up the amount of urban reserves we need,” says Hosticka, also a former state representative from Eugene. “That is a process I am glad I would not be part of.”