

Woodburn leaders must respect law

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Kathleen Lee Carl is a member of a Woodburn farming family. (Photo: Special to the Statesman Journal)

Woodburn's leaders don't need to go to the Legislature to solve their urban growth boundary problems. They can do it today.

As a member of a four-generation farm family near Woodburn, I've opposed parts of Woodburn's UGB expansion from the beginning. Eighty-five percent of the city's urban growth boundary proposal is uncontested. None of the proposed expansion for residential land has been challenged.

But for over 10 years, city leaders have held onto a small portion of their proposal that does not comply with the law. City leaders have been told repeatedly that this expansion portion is illegal. It squanders productive, high-quality farmland for speculative and unnecessary industrial zoning.

Woodburn, like all cities, deserves to prosper. But its residents also deserve land use decisions that respect the facts and the law. Woodburn's leaders could take a simple step to do both by making a very small change to their proposal.

Yet, as city leaders complain about delays, they incur more. First, they returned to the courts with exactly the same proposal that had previously been overturned. Now, they indicate they would rather go to the Legislature for a carve-out than make any changes to their proposal.

They claim confusion about land use law, but it's straightforward: Respect the facts and assets you have. While Woodburn stretches for industries that might never come, agriculture remains Marion County's top industry with about \$630 million in sales. Altogether, 23 percent of Mid-Willamette Valley jobs depend on agriculture, with an economic footprint over \$15 billion. Most of these dollars come from outside the state.

Converting farmland to urban development means building expensive infrastructure that taxpayers must maintain. If those jobs never materialize, an asset becomes a liability. There is indeed a very good chance those jobs will never come.

Woodburn has about 8 percent of Marion County's jobs today. Their proposal imagines they will capture nearly a quarter of all new county jobs in the next 20 years. That is simply unrealistic.

Oregon's land use laws exist to protect taxpayers and valuable land from such costly errors. Yet Woodburn's leaders keep making the same mistakes. Now they look to legislators for special permission via a "grand bargain" like the one they think Washington County got.

Let's be clear about what the "grand bargain" was. It was essentially a legal settlement. Washington County illegally designated high-quality farmland for development, just like Woodburn. Legislators didn't overrule the courts or change land use law. They simply took out the illegally designated farmland.

Woodburn doesn't need to delay things further with legislative maneuvering or legal wrangling. Woodburn can have almost all of the land it seeks for new houses and jobs. All it will take is a small change to the map — one Woodburn's leaders could have made 10 years ago. They can do it today. Their constituents would be wise to ask why they still haven't.

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