

## Possible development south of the Willamette River sparks new controversy

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*Chris Maletis and his brother, Tom, want their Langdon Farms Golf Club south of the Willamette River to be considered for future urban development. Their land includes surrounding parcels, including this former greenhouse site near Interstate 5. (Dana Tims/Staff)*

Eight years ago, Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties, working with Metro, embarked on a nationally one-of-a-kind venture to map where growth would and would not occur over the next half century. Fast forward to the present and not only isn't the process complete, but it's showing signs of coming apart at the seams.

The prime sticking point, due for consideration at a Thursday Metro hearing, is as old as Oregon's land-use system; namely, whether growth should be allowed south of the Willamette River at Wilsonville. There are other issues snagging the process, as well, all of which have been endlessly mulled in legislative hearings, administrative decisions, court rulings and bills signed by the Governor.

But obscuring all of these is one side arguing that the Willamette should be the Rubicon when it comes to river-jumping development and the other countering that nothing makes more sense than to go south in search of suitable employment lands.

"What is so special about this river?" said John Ludlow, chairman of the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners, where a majority of members is asking Metro to take a big step toward developing 600 acres of land on and around Langdon Farms Golf Course. "The playing field has changed and it's time to seriously consider what amounts to a very reasonable proposal."

Former Metro Councilor Carl Hosticka is among those who couldn't disagree more. "The Willamette is a boundary that gives you some kind of delineation of what's appropriate over the long haul," he said. "Once you go across that river, they'll nickel and dime you to death until you've filled in the whole valley clear to Salem."

It's not lost on Hosticka that it was the early 1970s development of Wilsonville's Charbonneau district immediately south of the Willamette that rang alarm bells for many. The late Hector Macpherson, a Linn County dairy farmer, was among the first to react, helping introduce and push through Senate Bill 1000.

That 1973 legislation, the first of its kind in the nation, required every Oregon city and county to prepare a comprehensive plan in accordance with a set of general state goals. Its aim was to protect farm and forestlands, while limiting areas where development could occur. Ever since then, south of the Willamette has remained hands-off for new growth. More recently, in 2007, Metro and the three counties tried to address the repeated delays in planning for development by getting legislative authorization to affix 50-year labels on closer-in lands most suitable for growth and those deemed as prime farming acreage.

The two-year effort to accomplish that was upended twice. First, in 2011, the State Land Conservation and Development Commission remanded parts of Metro's agreement with the counties, finding that parts of it were flawed. Once those were addressed and resubmitted, the Oregon Court of Appeals sent the plan back for further analysis after ruling that portions of each of the counties' maps contained errors. In Washington County's case, the Legislature, during a special session in February 2014, passed what became known as the land-use "grand bargain," giving the county's plan a stamp of legal authority. That left Multnomah and Clackamas counties with problems to address, but it's only in Clackamas County's case that the controversy, far from abating, has continued to grow.

Some now wonder, given Clackamas County's renewed efforts to erase the "rural reserves" classification originally placed on lands around Langdon Farms, whether the entire eight-year process could end up tearing itself apart. "This would be a big change in the rules," said Tony Holt, president of the Charbonneau homeowners association and a long-time follower of the urban-rural reserves planning effort. "If Langdon Farms gets this change, why wouldn't every other landowner in the region be entitled to a fresh look at their property? Throw in the lawsuits that might result from any of those and this has the power to stick a dagger in the heart of everything that's been done to date."

Immediately south of Charbonneau, just across Southwest Miley Road, brothers Chris and Tom Maletis have owned Langdon Farms Golf Club since 2000. They've tried a number of times over the years to get their land redesignated from exclusive farm use and still insist that Clackamas County, as well as the entire region, would benefit from their current vision of a Nike-like business campus on some of their land.

The parcel is surrounded by busy roads, they say, and located less than a mile from Aurora Airport. And not only is Langdon Farms a pitching wedge away from Interstate 5, they add, but it's flat and more suited to easy and ready development than anything in the metro area. "This represents the most valuable tangible asset that the state has right now," Chris Maletis said. "We're simply saying, leave us undesignated and see how the market responds."

Critics point out that the brothers have given nearly \$60,000 in campaign contributions since 2008 to the four Clackamas County commissioners who voted 4-1 in August to remove the area's rural reserve classification. Of that, \$25,000 went to Ludlow.

Maletis and Ludlow both brushed aside assertions that the campaign money helped sway the vote. "I've given money to everyone, on both sides of the aisle, who at least bothered to come out here and see for themselves what this land has to offer," Maletis said. Responded Ludlow, "People give me money because they believe in what I have to say, not because I believe in what they have to say."

Jim Bernard, the lone commissioner who voted against the change, hasn't changed his mind. "When they bought that land, they knew the restrictions," he said. "There has to be a line separating development from rural lands somewhere, and there's no better line than the Willamette River."