

Hundreds attend open house on county land re-designation

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Community members oppose development south of Wilsonville



SPOKESMAN PHOTO: JAKE BARTMAN - More than 400 people responded to announcements mailed by the City of Wilsonville and Friends of French Prairie that alerted community members to a June 28 open house soliciting feedback on whether the Rural Reserve designation should be removed from land in Clackamas County.

“Disingenuous” was the word of the night at an open house convened last week to consider whether Clackamas County should remove the Rural Reserve designation from some or all of 1,600 acres of agricultural land.

More than 400 people attended the open house at Clackamas Community College’s Wilsonville campus June 28, and had pointed questions for County staff.

“It seems to me it’s a bit disingenuous, this presentation, because you haven’t mentioned that the area in Wilsonville is foundation farmland,” said Tony Holt, president of the Charbonneau Country Club, after a presentation by County Senior Planner Martha Fritzie at the open house.

Both the 800 acres south of Wilsonville and 400 acres under consideration east of Canby are identified as Foundation Agricultural Lands. Foundation Agricultural Lands are identified by the Oregon Department of Agriculture as “agricultural lands that provide the core support to the region’s agricultural base. ... They incubate and support the larger agricultural industry and are vital to its long-term viability.”

The open house was held to solicit public input on those areas identified by county and regional governments in 2010 as land to be designated Rural Reserves. Rural Reserves lie outside the urban

growth boundary, and — unlike Urban Reserves — urban development is not allowed to take place on them for 50 years following their designation. A 2014 decision by the Oregon Court of Appeals regarding the designation of land in the Stafford area as Urban Reserve required regional government Metro and Washington, Multnomah and Clackamas counties to revisit their rural and urban reserve designations.

The Clackamas County Commission has declined to acknowledge its earlier designations, and has identified three possible areas previously marked for the Rural Reserve designation — 800 acres south of Wilsonville, 400 acres east of Canby and 425 acres around South Springwater Road south of the Clackamas River — as areas where land might be reclassified “undesigned,” making them candidates for development once 75 percent of Urban Reserve lands have been developed.

Fritzie said that changing conditions since 2010 have meant that the county needs more non-retail employment land. “There’s an opportunity in light of some of the changes that have happened, including increased uncertainty about whether the County’s two largest urban reserves really can accommodate long-term developments,” Fritzie said, referring to the Stafford area and the Damascus/Boring area.

She also mentioned House Bill 4078, which passed through the Oregon Legislature in 2014 and reduced by 2,000 acres the amount of urban reserves across the region, and said that studies have found an insufficient 20-year supply of employment land in the county.

Attendees of the open house had concerns about the presentation and the issue at hand, and especially about the land south of Wilsonville. “You’ve not mentioned the fact that there’s a lack of infrastructure down there. The City of Wilsonville has said they will not provide infrastructure in that area, and cannot,” Holt said.

That point was reiterated at a forum in Charbonneau last month, where Wilsonville Mayor Tim Knapp expressed concern about development south of the Willamette and noted that the City would prefer to concentrate its resources on development in Frog Pond and elsewhere in Wilsonville. Two-thirds of Frog Pond — which lie outside the urban growth boundary — are designated Urban Reserve.

Holt also was concerned that most of the 800 acres south of Wilsonville are owned by members of the Maletis family. “The Maletis brothers have contributed money to the commissioners to make sure that this happens. So this is a disingenuous presentation,” he said, to loud applause.

Chair John Ludlow, Commissioner Paul Savas, Commissioner Martha Schrader and Commissioner Tootie Smith have received campaign contributions from the Maletis family within the last five years.

Al Greenfield asked whether Marion County had given feedback about development of the land south of Wilsonville. Fritzie said that the proposal was to have the Rural Reserve designation removed from the land, not to designate it for urban development. “Keep in mind, this area is not being proposed for urbanization,” she said. Greenfield replied that her claim was “disingenuous.”

Some questioned whether the County was justified in revisiting the issue at all. Fritzie said that the County anticipated future legal appeals to a reaffirmation of the Stafford area as Urban Reserve, and that the County sought to review its reserves in order to resolve the Stafford conflict.

Bill Riggs, a former member of the Oregon Board of Appeals and a former member of the Oregon Supreme Court, said that a final judgment by the court of appeals had been entered some time prior. “To blame it on the court of appeals for not getting a final judgment out is disingenuous. It is the county commissioners — I think three county commissioners — really holding the matter up. It has nothing to do with whether some parties may choose to appeal later,” Riggs said.