

Officials field tough questions at meet-and-greet

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By Jake Bartman



SPOKESMAN PHOTO: JAKE BARTMAN - From left: Representative John Davis (R-Wilsonville), Clackamas County Board of Commissioners Chair John Ludlow and Wilsonville City Councilor Scott Starr.

A meet-and-greet event at the Wilsonville Public Library Sept. 28, which involved a panel including state Rep. John David (R-Wilsonville), Clackamas County Board of Commissioners Chair John Ludlow and Wilsonville City Councilor Scott Starr, saw the officials field both pertinent city issues and pointed accusations.

“You mean, am I bought? No. I’ve lived here for 40-plus years,” said Ludlow when asked whether the Commission’s vote to re-designate property owned by Chris and Tom Maletis was influenced by the brothers’ campaign contributions.

All five of the present county commissioners — Paul Savas, John Ludlow, Tootie Smith, Jim Bernard and Martha Schrader — have received contributions totalling more than \$60,000 since 2008 from Chris or Tom Maletis, according to the Oregon Secretary of State.

The land in question is located just south of Wilsonville, and includes the Langdon Farms golf course southwest of Charbonneau. The County Board of Commissioners voted 4-1 Aug. 17 to remove the Rural Reserve designation — which protects it from urban development — from that property. The dissenting vote was from Bernard. Ludlow pointed to state and federal politicians, who he said require far more funds to run a campaign, but who are not necessarily swayed by contributors. “Does it always taint you just because you’ve gotten money from somebody who believes in you first? I’ve made the tough decision to probably disappoint a lot of my supporters,” Ludlow said.

Ludlow said that removing the land's designation will not necessarily hasten development. Infrastructure needs and other requirements will ensure that development does not begin there for another 20 to 30 years at the earliest, he said. "Right now, I have to vote my conscience. And my conscience says undesignated is reasonable, since neither you nor I will be around when that actually is developed," he added. "Call it a placeholder for the future — a future none of us will probably see."

Starr said that the Wilsonville City Council has no interest in seeing the Langdon Farms area developed soon. He said that it could take 25 to 30 years for the land to be developed, in part because the City is much more interested in supporting development north of the Willamette River. "The resources just wouldn't be there, because we're trying to develop first, Coffee Creek, and then Basalt Creek, and if there's any crumbs left over, Frog Pond, as a way to have people live close to where they might work," Starr said. "It's years and years and years away from what the City could do."

Starr said that at present, he is more concerned with the level of traffic on the Boone Bridge than with the Langdon Farms area. "We're Wilsonville, not Portland. And I don't see how we're ever going to win the fight of trying to get dollars to replace the Boone Bridge and make that much more accessible for I-5 traffic," Starr said.

Davis noted that the Boone Bridge makes Wilsonville into a funnel for traffic to and from Portland and Seattle. "Nobody really thinks of it that way. They think, 'Oh, Wilsonville's just this little suburb town.' No — we are literally the funnel. All the roads lead right through here," he said.

Davis said that although he's helped to increase awareness of the bridge's importance, changes are not necessarily forthcoming. "We are making progress with the Department of Transportation," he said. But he added, "The timelines we're talking about, both in the development projects that have been mentioned and in the transportation projects, are really in the five, to 10, to 15, to 20, to 30-year range. That's just the way it works."

All three panelists took a similar line with respect to the Newberg-Dundee bypass. The bypass would allow drivers to exit 99W and avoid traffic on the highway when traveling through Newberg. But the bypass, which is currently under construction, is slated to end at the intersection of Highway 219 and Wilsonville Road — which would increase traffic on Wilsonville Road.

The Oregon Department of Transportation presented an alternate plan to Newberg that would prevent drivers exiting the bypass from continuing straight onto Wilsonville Road, thereby routing some of the Wilsonville Road traffic through Newberg. Newberg rejected the amendment.

"There was between \$200 to \$300 million of the last transportation package dedicated for this road way out in Newberg, much to the chagrin of many other communities. And Newberg is being very grateful for the gift the state's given them," Davis said.

"ODOT has guaranteed Newberg if they've altered their plan for the straight on version, they will mitigate the problem that they would encounter," Ludlow said. "They've refused. So my question to the ODOT director is, 'Will you mitigate the problems on Wilsonville Road?'"

"If there's an issue as a city councilor that there's no problem with all five of us, dead-on, same place — it's this one," Starr said. "We've been fighting very hard on a local level to try to get our point across."