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Hot Topics Plenary

The City as Commons - Creating a Deliberate Place Through Land Use Planning

Twenty five years ago, Oregon adopted the first state-wide land use laws in the United States. The program was designed to protect natural resources and make wise use of the land in both urban and rural areas. Due to the coordinated approach to land use planning in cities and counties throughout the state, today, Oregon is the closest thing America has to a deliberate place.

Adopted by the Oregon Legislature in 1973, SB100 (as the land use law is known) has been a rallying point for Oregonian's love of open space and protective attitude towards farm and forest ever since. The results have been astounding. In 1974, Oregon agriculture was producing \$1.1 billion in cash receipts. Today, farms and ranches provide \$2.9 billion from 250 different commodities. Between 1988 and 1992, Oregon lost only two percent of its agricultural land to development, while during that same period, California lost eleven percent.

The effect of SB100 on urban areas has been equally as profound. The law requires each city in Oregon to establish an urban growth boundary (UGB) and to adopt a comprehensive plan that meets the goals and guidelines of state land use planning. The UGB focuses development in the urban core and prevents sprawl onto farm and forest land.

The goals and guidelines allow individuality for cities to develop by their own design, but design they must and the comprehensive plan must meet citizen review and involvement which is the number one goal.

The goals offer the opportunity for urban design and account for land use, transportation systems, open or common spaces, water, etc.

Governance

About one-half of Oregon's population lives in the Portland Metropolitan area. There are 24 cities in a three county area whose boundaries closely abut one another. There are also 27 water districts, 23 school districts and numerous special services districts, providing everything from sewers to fire and emergency services. This area of approximately 1.5 million people has a single UGB and a regional government called simply Metro.

Metro is a unique government in the United States. Its primary purpose is planning for the future. With an elected executive (region wide) and council (seven districts), Metro administers the UGB and establishes regional planning goals to coordinate land use and transportation for the

entire region. A full municipal government with ordinance and taxing authority, Metro also provides regional services, such as a convention center, performing arts center, stadiums, exposition centers and regional parks and openspaces.

Urban Design

The western part of Oregon is lush, green and contains extremely valuable farm land and forest lands. In the past eight years, however, the primary economic growth has come from high-tech industries; in 1995, over \$11 billion in capital investments were announced in the region and the resultant population increase from employment was over percent per year from 1995-1998. Essentially, a clash of economies has occurred: a growing, job-rich high tech industry, and an established farm industry with annual sales of over \$500 million.

This has made Oregon UGB's even more significant as ways were sought to find balance between the needs of these two industries. The cities within Metro's UGB had to make decisions about how to manage growth and the design of their "place" - literally how to insure that there is a "there" there. Oregon's way differs. Compare the two fastest growing counties in the Portland SMSA: Washington County, Oregon, and Clark County, Washington. Between 1979 and 1992, these two counties accounted for 62 percent of the growth in the four-county area (The SMSA is three Oregon counties and Clark County, just across the Columbia River in Washington). Clark County, which had no UGB during this period, grew by 87,600; Washington County by 125,000. But, 76 percent of Washington County's growth occurred within incorporated cities, while only 6 percent occurred in incorporated cities in Clark County.

Open Spaces Essential

The UGB means a more intensive use of land, greater densities, redevelopment, and in-fill. While it can be demonstrated that this type of development is economically more practical, unless designed properly, this type of space can also be a less attractive human habitat. Good transit services and market driven housing within the core are critical to a community. But the amenities of common space, parks, and openspaces are deemed by most as essential features for a livable community.

Portland also prides itself as one of a very few major American cities that can boast of significant amounts of natural habitat, sustainable runs of salmon and other anadromous fish, and other wildlife experiences within the boundary of the city.

Regulatory Approach

In adopting a regional framework plan to manage the burgeoning growth occurring as a result of the economic boom, Metro asked each of its 24 cities to determine how much space they had for a 20-year growth period, and what type of design pattern would occur. Metro told the cities to "discount" 20 percent of all vacant and developable land for amenities such as openspaces, stream corridors, steep slopes and parks, and additional land for public facilities such as schools and fire stations.

Metro also established street design standards to ensure that all new roads or any roads undergoing major revisions would have a human scale to them, in other words, wide sidewalks, bicycle lands, and street trees, with buffers to protect natural areas. Parking maximums were established, and lots are required to be landscaped. A set of regulatory protections of streams

with minimum set-backs to protect vegetation have been adopted, as well as prohibition against construction in flood plains and on certain slopes. We are developing incentives for higher densities and creating open space within developments.

Buy it or Loose it

The regulatory and incentive approach can only go so far in creating open spaces or commons. Recognizing this, Metro asked the voters to approve a \$135 million property tax bond to buy open spaces in the region. Overwhelmingly approved in 1996, the measure has allowed Metro to purchase 3,500 critical acres in 14 target areas throughout the region so far. The bond measure is a critical part of the region's strategy to protect sensitive natural areas and provide recreational opportunities for citizens.

Maintain Vigilance - Look to the Future

While the Portland metropolitan area can be proud of its record and past achievements, it cannot afford to rest on its laurels. The continuous increase in population, pressure for more land and the consumptive habits of residents all make the task of maintaining a proper sense of place and protection of habitat more difficult. Any plan is worthless if it is static. Performance measures, benchmarking, continuous efforts at public involvement and outreach and especially education are keys to success. The greatest hope for the future of the "common" in the Portland metro area may lay with our habitat restoration grant program in 75 schools throughout the region. The children will learn and then lead and give us better hope than our current generation for future success.