



Oregon

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October 2, 2008

TO: Land Conservation and Development Commission

FROM: John Renz, Southern Oregon Regional Representative;
Darren Nichols, Community Services Division Manager

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item 11a, October 15-17, 2008, LCDC Meeting**

GREATER BEAR CREEK VALLEY REGIONAL PLAN

I. AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

A. Type of Action and Commission Role – The local regional planning project participants are asking that the Commission act in their role as a participant and collaborator in this Project to review the draft *Greater Bear Creek Valley Regional Plan*¹ discuss any issues the Commission has with the plan; and indicate to the project participants that the Commission expects to acknowledge local comprehensive plan amendments if they are consistent with the adopted plan, provided that:

- any issues that are raised through public review of the plan amendments are resolved to the Commission's satisfaction;
- provided that the plan amendments are supported by adequate findings, and
- provided that applicable procedural requirements are followed.

The region wants confirmation of the Commission's support to begin implementation of the plan.

At this time there are no proposed comprehensive plan amendments or other land use decisions before any of the local governments for implementation of the regional plan. LCDC is not being asked at this time to acknowledge any plan or code amendments related to the regional plan. These will come later over the next two years. LCDC is being asked to sign the Participants Agreement for the RSP effort.

B. Staff Contact Information – John Renz, Southern Oregon Regional Representative is the local DLCD contact for this project. John serves on the project's Technical Advisory Committee, the Resource Lands Review Committee, and is a non-voting member of the project's Policy Committee. John can be reached at (541) 858-3189; John.Renz@state.or.us; or at PO Box 3275, Central Point, OR 97502.

¹ For everything available on the plan see RVCOG's website at www.RVCOG.org/ regional problem solving.

II. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED ACTION

To assist the local participants in the RPS process, the Commission should identify any changes to the plan the Commission would like to see. In addition, the Commission should review the proposed Participants' Agreement, and determine whether the Commission is prepared to sign the agreement at this time.

III. BACKGROUND

As the Commission knows, the jurisdictions in the Bear Creek Valley have been working for the past eight years to develop a regional plan that directs future urbanization in the valley through the establishment of urban reserves. The project uses ORS 197.652 to 197.658 – Collaborative Regional Problem Solving (RPS) to accomplish the regional plan. The decision to develop a regional plan and to use an RPS process to do so resulted from eight years of frustrated attempts to establish urban reserves for some of the cities in the Bear Creek Valley. These unsuccessful attempts cultivated awareness that the valley's growth issues were best dealt with through regional cooperation and collaboration. This realization led to the DLCD-funded 'Our Region' project and then to the county-sponsored Multi-jurisdictional Committee on Urban Reserves. DLCD was an observer to the growing regionalism in the valley and in 1999 suggested the region apply for a grant to use RPS to address the region's problems. The grant was awarded in 2000. DLCD has continued funding the project every biennium since then, except for the current biennium. These grants have augmented local funding and funding from the MPO. The department is currently considering a request for funds to pay for preparation of findings supporting the comprehensive plan amendments that will be necessary to implement the regional plan.

The *Greater Bear Creek Valley Regional Plan* is the product of collaboration between Jackson County; the cities of Ashland, Talent, Phoenix, Medford, Central Point, Eagle Point and Jacksonville; the Bear Valley Sewer Service; the Medford Water Commission; the Oregon Housing and Community Development Department, the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department; the Department of Agriculture; the Department of Environmental Quality; the Oregon Department of Transportation; and the Department of Land Conservation and Development.

IV. WHAT THE REGIONAL PLAN PROPOSES

The region has identified three problems that the RPS plan addresses. The problems identified for resolution through RPS are:

Lack of a Mechanism for Coordinated Regional Growth Planning – A structure and process needed to be established to facilitate collaboration in planning for future urbanization in the region.

Loss of Valuable Farm and Forest Land Caused by Urban Expansion – The region identified the loss of farmland from urbanization as a significant issue, and as a threat to the quality of life and economy in the future if it could not be mitigated.

Loss of Community Identity – The region identified the decreasing rural land separation between some of the communities as jeopardizing important aspects of these jurisdictions’ sense of community and individual identity.²

Urban Reserves

The primary way the plan has addressed these problems is by providing a guide for the direction of urban growth for the next 40-50 years. The plan does this by proposing 9,082 acres of urban reserves. Urban reserves are proposed for all of the cities in the region except Ashland.³ Of these urban reserves 6,935 acres or 74% are zoned for exclusive farm use.

The need for these urban reserves is based on a doubling of the current regional population of 168,966 to 337,932 or approximately a 50 year population forecast,⁴ a regional housing need analysis and a regional economic opportunities analysis.⁵

The proposed urban reserves address all three regional problems. Proposing them was a regionally coordinated method to establish predictability of where future urban growth will occur. If adopted they will protect the farm land outside of the reserves from urbanization for 50 years and they will also prevent the premature conversion of farmland within the urban reserves to urban uses. Urban Reserve Area Management Agreements (URAMA) between cities and the county are required for every urban reserve. The purpose of the URAMAs is to coordinate the management and planning for the urban reserves and to protect the land in the urban reserves from premature development with might curtail its utility as future urbanizable land. Land with in an urban reserve that is in resource use must remain in resource use until it is brought into a UGB. At the time each jurisdiction decides to expand its UGB, it will still need to demonstrate that the land is needed under Goal 14, and in the case of cities over 25, 000 – ORS 197.296. The establishment of urban reserves provides certainty for real estate investment and for long term agricultural investment for 40-50 years. The urban reserves also enable long term infrastructure planning and transportation corridor preservation.

Economic Development

Two regional employment centers are proposed in the plan. One, the “South Valley Employment Center” lies between Phoenix and Medford and uses urban reserve lands of both cities. It is thought that this area will mitigate some traffic congestion and air quality concerns by bringing jobs closer to the population centers to the south of the valley. The other is the Tolo area northwest of Central Point. The Tolo areas will be an urban reserve for Central Point. The focus for land use in Tolo will be freight handling. It is hoped that the local trucking industry will eventually move their operations to the area.

² Greater Bear Creek Valley Regional Plan, page 1-7

³ Ashland proposes to accommodate its growth within its present UGB.

⁴ The use of a doubled population rather than a 50 year projection is one deviation from the Urban Reserve Rule that the project has used.

⁵ The RPS Policy Committee agreed that neither the regional housing need analysis nor the regional economic opportunities analysis were detailed enough to use for a UGB expansion. Detailed studies are required before any UGB expansion into an urban reserve. The regional studies can be found at Greater Bear Creek Valley Regional Plan, Appendices II and III.

Urban Buffers

By not proposing urban reserves between cities in planned buffer areas (areas where the region has agreed urbanization should not occur) the urban reserves contribute to maintaining individual city identity.

Agricultural Buffers

Agricultural land is further protected from conflicts with urbanization by the plan requirement that each city adopt the agricultural buffer standards developed by the project's Resource Lands Review Committee. The Oregon Department of Agriculture has commented that these buffer standards are the best in the nation. They will be used wherever urban development is proposed adjacent to agriculturally zoned land.⁶

Increased Density

The region has adopted a policy of region-wide increases in gross residential densities. The plan includes a minimum increased density target for each city. These targets will increase the efficiency of urban land use for all the cities. Each city determined its own density target using different methodologies. A future density target is one possible product of a UGB review for housing needs under ORS 197.296. ORS 197.296 was not used by any city in determining its target density under the RPS Plan. As a result, we expect when cities do their housing need studies they may come up with a different density target than is presently in the plan, which may necessitate future regional plan amendments.

Coordinated Population Allocations

Jackson County coordinated its population allocations with the regional plan so that each city has an allocation that generally conforms to the capacity of the urban reserves. Each city has population allocation that is consistent with its growth aspirations except for Ashland. The county has committed to reviewing and possibly adjusting these allocations after the regional plan is adopted.

Transportation Policies

The plan contains transportation policies addressing the following which are a general condition required by the state agencies:

1. The region shall identify a general network of locally-owned regionally significant north-south and east-west arterials and associated projects to provide mobility throughout the region;
2. The region shall designate and protect corridors for locally-owned regionally significant arterials and associated projects within the MPO to ensure adequate transportation connectivity, multimodal use, and minimize right of way costs; and

⁶ Greater Bear Creek Valley Regional Plan, Appendix VII

3. The region shall establish a means of providing supplemental transportation funding to mitigate impacts arising from future growth.

These policies shall be implemented by ordinance upon the adoption of the latest update of the Metropolitan Planning Organization's Regional Transportation Plan and the local adoption of the appropriate portions of the RPS Plan relative to transportation into a city's comprehensive plan and implementing ordinances.

V. COMPLIANCE WITH STATEWIDE LAND USE GOALS

The statewide land use goals affected by this regional plan are Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 14. The plan contains draft findings for each goal in Appendix I. Final findings will be submitted with the adoption of the comprehensive plan and code amendments that will follow from each jurisdiction.

VI. STATUS OF THE REGIONAL PLAN AT THIS TIME

As of the date of drafting this report, September 23, 2008 the cities of Ashland, Talent, Phoenix, Medford, Eagle Point and Central Point support the plan as written. The City of Jacksonville has not yet decided if it wants all or part of the proposed urban reserves, or if it just wants to be a non-implementing signatory to the agreement. We hope, but it is not a certainty that the city will be a supporting participant by the time of the October 16, 2008 LCDC meeting.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

1. Should the Commission wish to see changes to the plan, it should notify the regional participants at this time.
2. Should the Commission wish to see changes to the Participants' Agreement, it should notify the participants at this time. The Department is recommending several clarifications to the Agreement, as indicated in Attachment A.
3. If there are no changes the Commission would wish, then staff recommends that the Commission:
 - a. Direct the Chair to sign the Participants' Agreement, substantially in the form attached, and;
 - b. Communicate (verbally) to the RPS Participants that the Commission expects to acknowledge local comprehensive plan amendments that implement the RPS Plan provided that any issues raised through public review of the plan amendments are resolved to the Commission's satisfaction, provided that the plan amendments are supported by adequate findings, and provide that applicable procedural requirements are followed.

Attachments:

- A. Greater Bear Creek Valley Regional Problem Solving Agreement
- B. DRAFT Local Process for Comprehensive Plan
- C. Regional Problem Solving Statutes