

Comments of Greg Specht  
Reserves Steering Committee Meeting #19  
October 14, 2009

I want to take my time this afternoon and talk about aspirations, and about what quality of life means to me. I believe all of us in this room aspire to many of the same things; to provide for our families; to raise our children in a safe environment; to make this world, or our corner of it, a better place; to help those who are less fortunate; and to support causes which are important to us. I suggest that in order to achieve our individual aspirations, whatever they may be, it helps for each of us to be financially stable...and for most of us...that means keeping your job if you have one, or getting one if you don't.

Too many times I have heard that quality of life is what we enjoy when we visit a Farmers Market, or what we see on a drive to the beach. To me quality of life also includes having a job...and I will bet you almost all Oregonians would agree with me. Unfortunately too many of our neighbors and friends are today sitting on the sidelines out of work, or are underemployed. I believe the decisions we make in the coming months regarding Urban and Rural Reserves can help prevent a recurrence of the disastrous situation in which we find ourselves today.

Let's talk about how this relates to land use. The primary issue before this committee from the coalition of businesses I represent... in Construction and Real Estate...is ensuring the availability of employment land for future development as part of the Urban Reserve process. We want to go on record that in order to allow for expansion of existing business, and in order to allow the Portland region to compete regionally and nationally in attracting new businesses and their jobs to our area, we must have an adequate supply of large tracts of land, all of which are properly

zoned and serviced, are located adjacent to transportation corridors, and are affordably priced.

Over the past 22 months we have heard from industry representatives and national site selectors regarding the requirements necessary to just be included in the game of attracting new employers to our region. To believe that we can successfully compete if our best options require assembling parcels from multiple property owners, or that “just in time” UGB expansion or “fast tracking” annexation will be acceptable to these employers, simply does not pass the laugh test. If we cannot give a potential employer a list of credible shovel ready site options, along with a realistic timetable for land use approvals and permits, they will simply go elsewhere, to the economic detriment of our region.

Industry clustering is a successful concept, but to succeed, we must have land on which clusters can grow. Large employers also often require excess land they can warehouse for future expansion, and we have many examples of this land use in our region today. To assume that this corporately owned excess land will be available for development by others in future years ...is just not credible.

Let's talk about refill. Metro would have us believe that between now and 2030, just 21 years away, 24% of all existing industrial uses will be torn down and replaced with new employment facilities, and 45% of current non-industrial uses will also be redeveloped. I have been in this business for 35 years and my experience is that very little of this type of refill activity actually occurs outside of the CBD's of the cities within our region. To overstate the refill percentage, as Metro has done, is to understate the need for additional land. This convenient position that Metro has included in its calculations on the refill percentage is not supportable in any competitive marketplace today and must be revised to reflect the reality of the world in which we compete.

Let's talk about risk, what if we get it wrong? If we underestimate the supply of urban land, we will lose existing jobs, or fail to successfully attract new ones. Is that error going to affect any of us in this room? Probably not. But it will certainly affect the employment opportunities for our children and our grandchildren, and their quality of life. Let me put it another way.....what is the risk to us if we designate too much land as urban? My answer...is ...Nothing. If the demand for employment land does not appear, all of us in this room know exactly what will happen to this unneeded Urban land.....nothing, it will remain undeveloped. The risk of under designating is far greater than any risk associated with over designating Urban land as part of this process.

We must be reasonable in how we deal with the so called "hard edges to our urban boundaries, such as Hwy 26 in Washington County, or the Willamette River in Clackamas County. I won't dwell again on what happened to consideration of the land south of the Willamette for employment purposes but I will say that nobody in this room put either I-5 or Hwy 26 where they are. But both freeways serve a vital role in our region as critical transportation corridors and land adjacent to them should be natural sites for designation as employment land. To presume development shouldn't occur north of 26 ignores the obvious fact that it is already there. Further, the region has just spent tens of millions of dollars on improvements to interchanges on the Freeway. To exclude land north of and directly accessible to the Sunset is simply irresponsible.

Some have suggested we adopt a "less is more" philosophy, which will force employers into new architectural forms in the hope of acceptable or improved production outcomes. In the vernacular of Metro, this is known as the "reduced footprint policy objectives" which I think means Metro is hoping something that has never been successfully achieved elsewhere will actually work here....

because if it doesn't...we will have seriously underestimated the land cushion needed for employment purposes in coming years.

The process we are involved in...is not a zero sum game...Rural does not have to lose in order for Urban to win, and vice versa. There is room for everyone to succeed if the right decisions are made by our political leaders in the coming months.

In closing, the business interests I represent acknowledge that trade-offs are going to be made by the Core Four in the coming months outside the view of the public. Because of the highly subjective nature of this effort, and the very real risks associated with getting it wrong, I ask that you error on the side of a larger designation of urban land than proposed by Metro. Have the courage to go south of the Willamette, north of Hwy 26 and south of Hwy 212 in Multnomah County. I want to echo the comments earlier this afternoon of Mayor Knapp representing neighboring cities, and urge you to give both Troutdale and the five western Washington County cities the Urban designations they have requested, so that they can also achieve their local aspirations. If you make these difficult decisions, if you get it right, you will help to insure the economic health of our region for generations to come. Thank you and good luck.