

August 12, 2008

TO: Reserves Steering Committee

FROM: Friends of French Prairie

Thank you for the time to allow me to make public comment before the Metro Reserves Steering committee.

I am President of Friends of French Prairie, a local non-profit concerned both with appropriate development and sustainable agriculture in French Prairie, the historic north portion of the Willamette Valley. French Prairie is generally thought of as being in Marion County and outside of Metro's jurisdiction, but a pivotal fact is that the northeast corner of French Prairie is in Clackamas County, south of the river and east of I-5.

This area matters to all Oregonians because of its history (much of the activity for the formation of the Provisional Government that led to statehood occurred here) and because of its legacy as prime agricultural land that was subsistence farmed by the Kalapuya people before the arrival of white settlers who journeyed to "the Eden at the end of the Oregon trail."

These are important factors to keep in mind, because this section of land in Clackamas County is not just some agricultural land south of the river that happens to be in that area quaintly referred to as French Prairie. It is because that portion of French Prairie, when considered in terms of the developmental pressure from Metro south, is the keystone, the gateway to the rest of French Prairie. The decisions you make in this small portion of French Prairie will carry consequences over many years and south down I-5 through Marion County.

The concerns of Friends of French Prairie can be summed up in a simple proposition: while we understand the stated 2040 Growth Concept that "guides how the urban growth boundary is managed in order to protect the community characteristics....., enhance a transportation system..., and ensures the mobility of people and goods throughout the region and to preserve access to nature," most of the visible evidence that we see demonstrates that the process is primarily driven by the mandate to provide an inventory of developable land for the next 40 to 50 years.

That emphasis must be at least balanced by the mandate to protect farmland. This proposition has changed from an idealized goal to a reality-based need in the past two years as the economy has soured, the cost of commodities have rise dramatically and the transportation costs for food have soared. You've heard of "peak oil," well, we may be approaching "peak food," and by that I mean a food system that has to be centered on local farms and sustainable agriculture if we hope to provide for our food needs and do so in an economic fashion.

That is why the UGB expansion and Rural/Urban Reserves decisions are so critical in the near term and the future. The sad fact is that the development forces who desire commercial or industrial development along the I-5 major transportation corridor covet the very asset that is necessary to put food on our tables: flat ground comprised of high quality soils with adequate water. The sadder historical fact is that once farm land is developed, it never goes back.

We are fortunate to have that asset in abundance in the Willamette Valley, and it is incumbent upon all of us to don the mantle of stewardship and begin actively stewarding this resource—not only with the goal of providing an inventory of developable land, but also with the goal of assuring that at the end of the process we have at least as much prime farmland as we did going into it.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely

Benjamin D Williams

President

Friends of French Prairie