

## **Hillsboro mayor suggests setting rural reserves first; Smaller suburbs skeptical, worry doing so could lead to more dense development**

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**By Nick Christensen**  
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PORTLAND - About halfway through Wednesday's meeting of the 31-member Urban and Rural Reserves Steering Committee, someone realized nobody was talking about the latter half of the equation.

"What is the pathway for rural reserves? Why isn't it spelled out?" asked Wilsonville Mayor Charlotte Lehan, expressing frustration that all of the discussion so far seemed to be about how cities could acquire urban reserves.

But by the end of the meeting, the group's conversation had changed entirely. The focus, instead, was on a suggestion by Hillsboro Mayor Tom Hughes that rural reserves be identified first.

The reserves process is a region wide discussion on setting aside areas that will be looked at first during urban growth boundary adjustment periods - so-called urban reserves - and what areas will be preserved in perpetuity, or at least for about a half-century, as rural reserves.

Under Hughes' plan, the agencies charged with establishing the reserves will determine what agricultural areas are important to protect, based not only on the quality of the soil on the farms, but also on the proximity of the farms to other agricultural industries.

"It's a tremendous opportunity to say once and for all, we want to save the agricultural industry," Hughes said.

Once those areas are set aside, Metro and its partners can determine where growth should go in the next 40 years.

Lehan said that's similar to what is done in coastal communities, where beaches are off-limits for development and communities must plan around those restrictions.

The pitch was met skeptically by Tualatin City Councilor Chris Barhyte, who represents Forest Grove, Cornelius, Tigard, Sherwood, Durham, King City and Tualatin on the steering committee.

Barhyte is worried that setting rural reserves first will create an even harder line of growth restrictions around the metropolitan area.

"There's obviously a clear line of people that want to go up as high as they can and have us all in high rises," he said. "I want a balance. People understand we need space to live. We can't continue to go up."

Barhyte also questioned the significance of agricultural land in the area, especially when many of the protected areas are covered with graded, gravel-covered and sealed nurseries.

But Jim Johnson, the committee's representative from the Oregon Department of Agriculture, warned about underestimating the importance of the northern Willamette Valley's bounty.

"We are the OPEC of food in the United States," Johnson said.

The committee will meet again on Sept. 10 to determine what areas will officially be included in the reserve study.

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