

# Damascus concept planning set to begin

By Marty Beaudet  
for The Damascus Boring Observer

With Metro's recent Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) expansion decision behind us the focus of Damascus area residents is now shifting to the concept planning process that will begin soon. The present UGB expansion is the largest since the boundary was established in the early 1970's and includes the entire Damascus area, from Happy Valley to Boring on the east and from the Multnomah County line to the Clackamas River on the south.

A primary reason for including such a large area in a single expansion is to allow Damascus to be planned as a "complete community" rather than falling victim to the familiar willy-nilly urban sprawl that has overburdened other cities. A smaller expansion of the UGB would have resulted in narrowly focused planning processes that considered only parts, but not the whole. It would also have promoted piece-meal annexation of Damascus lands into neighboring cities.

Instead, the current expansion means that Damascus can now be planned from the center outward with a concept that will reflect a measured balance for the entire area. It also gives local residents an additional option: incorporating a City of Damascus that would be responsible for defining the area's comprehensive plan, rather than leaving those decisions to others outside of Damascus.

Because the affected area is currently unincorporated, the responsibility for the concept planning process falls to Clackamas County. In addition, Metro, which oversees the regional growth process, will be heavily involved. All entities must abide by laws and rules that set parameters for the concept planning process. The law also requires that the public – specifically, area residents and landowners – be informed of and involved in the development of a concept plan for the area.

## **A proposal to represent the public.**

In order to facilitate the required public outreach process, the CFD recently submitted a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to Clackamas County in which it proposes the formation of a Committee for Public Involvement (CPI). The purpose of the proposed CPI is to represent area's residents in the concept planning process set to begin later this year. As defined in the memorandum, the CPI would comprise the following entities: the Boring CPO, Damascus CPO, Rock Creek CPO, and the Committee for the Future of Damascus. The proposal states that these four organizations "shall be recognized jointly as a single entity by Clackamas County [and] Metro" for the purpose of fulfilling the county's legal obligation to seek "citizen involvement" in the process.

As of press time the memorandum has not yet been agreed to by all concerned parties. Most notably the Boring CPO is concerned that the language of the document does not

explicitly assure that the county will honor the wishes of the local community, only that it will “listen” to public input. In addition, some believe the current MOU does not make the CPOs and CFD a partner at all but a conduit of information.

The Boring CPO’s position, which is also shared by some members of the CFD, was hotly debated at the CFD’s March 10 meeting. Those with a different point of view believe that demanding this written guarantee going into the process is counterproductive and may start things off on the wrong foot. Legally, it was argued, the County is under no obligation to deal with these groups, let alone guarantee that their members will be pleased with the outcome. Others, however, call this a doctrine of appeasement and fear the CPI will become merely a rubber-stamp body.

Whatever language is finally adopted, those citizens who live within this newly enlarged UGB should actively participate in the concept planning process to have their preference heard, even though they will be fully represented by their respective CPOs and by the CFD. To maximize the CPI’s impact, it is important that in the end the community speak with a unified voice.

### **What is a CPO and who is the CFD?**

CPO’s – or Citizen Planning Organizations – are legally defined citizen advisory groups, with membership open to any land owner or business within the CPO boundaries, which exist to involve local residents in land-use decisions made by the county. The three CPO’s named in the memorandum represent, collectively, the area from the existing UGB to Highway 26 and beyond. This coverage means that every citizen within Metro’s proposed UGB expansion area will be represented in the concept planning process.

The CFD, on the other hand, is a non-profit study group organized by local citizens in Damascus and Boring to explore possible governance options for the area and educate the community about advantages and disadvantages of each. Clackamas County’s policy is that any new areas to be developed at urban densities will be in a city. Options include annexation into neighboring cities Gresham and Happy Valley, or incorporation of a new City of Damascus. (The majority of Boring is currently outside the proposed expansion of the UGB.) The CFD is researching these possibilities.

### **The role of the proposed CPI.**

The memorandum drafted by the CFD states that the “CPI, in conjunction with Clackamas County shall be responsible for the implementation of the citizen involvement program” and the document lays out specific ways in which the newly created CPI will interact with Clackamas County and Metro.

It states, in part, that “the citizen involvement program shall involve a cross-section of affected citizens in all phases of the planning process and ... there shall be convenient and frequent opportunities for affected citizens to become engaged in the planning process.”

It would be the responsibility of the CPI, in conjunction with the county to “publicize” the program for citizen involvement and clearly define the procedure by which the general public will be involved in the on-going land-use planning process.” The proposal further states that “mechanisms shall be established which provide for effective communication between CPI, Clackamas County/Metro, and the citizens of the area. A website, newsletters, mailings, posters, mailback questionnaires, and other available media should be used in the citizen involvement program.”

Currently, the CFD’s charter instructs it to study the options open to the Damascus community and explain them to its citizens in a way that will help local residents make informed decisions. In its proposed expanded role in as part of the CPI, the committee would accept the further obligation to represent the wishes of the community in discussions with Metro and Clackamas County.

The challenge for the proposed CPI will be to find the voice of the community and reconcile disparate points of view so that a unified set of values will emerge and guide decisions in the concept plan. This will undoubtedly require much public debate and a willingness to hammer out compromise. The goal is to assure that the future of Damascus reflects the wishes of those who live here.

Ongoing information about these and other issues pertaining to the UGB expansion into Damascus can be found at the CFD website ([www.damascusstudy.org](http://www.damascusstudy.org)). Answers to many previously asked questions can be found on the FAQ (frequently asked questions) page. Agendas and minutes of CFD meetings, which are held most Mondays at 7:00pm at the Assembly of God church at 19080 SE Sunnyside Road in Damascus, can also be found on the site.

For CFD information by phone, call 503-658-8545. For more information about the Damascus CPO, call Barb Ledbury at 503-658-3823. For more information about the Boring CPO, call Les Otto at 503-663-1297. For more information about the Rock Creek CPO contact Sandy Van Bemmell 503-658-3904.