

Getting off the fence about Damascus

Opinion by Julie Wagner
The Damascus Boring Observer

Last week I came down from the fence on whether Damascus should form a city. I thought the reason I couldn't decide was that there wasn't enough information. But I was wrong. I didn't know how I felt until I sat down with Dee Wescott and it became clear. I needed to hear it from someone who most certainly has Damascus' best interest at heart.

Mike Hammons and I spoke frequently over the year but I just couldn't commit. How can I, a newcomer to Damascus, participate in an incorporation drive with someone who lived in Sandy? It isn't so much that Hammons and Wescott aren't saying the same things, because, for the most part, they are.

It seems clear from the facts that we must seize our opportunity to keep Damascus on the map. Clackamas County Commissioner Jordan is right; we do live in heaven out here. But with all the eyes on us, something big will probably happen. I've seen a lot of changes in 6 years, many more of you have seen decades of change. It's time to start getting serious about forming a city of Damascus.

Through the Clackamas County "Conversations with Damascus/Boring" I had the privilege to listen to residents talk about their concerns about the expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary and urbanization of the area. It was great to see so many people come out to the meetings. People had many comments and questions, more than I could accurately cover right here, but here is a short discussion on some of the things you might find of interest.

First and foremost, there are concerns about all of the costs of urbanization — sewers, taxes, SDC's and roads. Currently, sewer, water and storm drainage are primarily paid for by developers through System Development Charges (SDCs). Federal and state grants pay for some road improvements and state gas taxes revenues make up a large share of the maintenance funds. Any additional monies would have to be approved by the voters.

We all want the traffic situation taken care of. We are the best drivers around; every one of us knows how to shoot the gap when pulling out of our neighborhoods. Safety is a concern. Maintenance of the roads is too. Especially with the rain these past few days, it has been more evident how much needs to be done. The Sunrise Corridor is an integral part of urbanization, but what are the plans for it? The last Environmental Impact Statement was done in 1993, the first step will be for the statement to be updated and finalized and then a financing plan will be developed. No doubt, the issues over traffic will be an economic challenge.

We wanted to know how soon we would start to see changes. While Commissioner Jordan predicted 5 years, Metro Councilor Rod Park thought more like 10 years would pass. Those numbers don't jibe with the fact that once we're urban-zoned the county can only hold off the developers for a couple of years before the developers can sue for the right to develop. The county cites Pleasant Valley's deliberate planning process as reason to believe it will be years away.

It's a bit uncomfortable to think about building for jobs out here when Fujitsu lays off an entire plant in a city just a few short miles from us. Councilor Parks thinks that in 10 years, 80% of us will be commuting to jobs out of the area. That's up from 60% today.

Maybe it will increase, maybe it won't. But if we did get jobs, wouldn't it be nice to have the city of Damascus reap the economic benefits? Having jobs could actually keep our taxes at a reasonable rate.

At most every meeting the question came up about incorporation, annexation and keeping control of our destiny. If you haven't read the city of Damascus story on page 1, I urge you to do so. Incorporation may be the only way for us to get some of what we want and now is the time to take a stand on forming the city.

I've been looking around Damascus with a keener eye these days. I keep hearing these words in my head, "I wonder what that would look like, if...?" I'm still sad thinking about that beautiful valley that now is Anderegg Parc. Recently I saw a wild bunny behind a soon-to-be-relocated building on Sunnyside road and wondered where he will live. Yesterday I zipped along the new Monterey overpass and marveled at its beauty and efficiency. My hope is that in Damascus we can find happiness somewhere in between.