

# Can We Get a Greenbelt?

By Dean Apostol, Marcia Sinclair, Les Otto, The Boring Community Planning Organization  
for The Damascus Boring Observer

In the July and October issues of the Observer, we wrote about the efforts of the Boring Community Planning Organization (BCPO) to develop an alternative vision for how the Damascus-Boring area might accept urban growth, while also retaining important attributes of the community that attracted many of us here. The name of this vision is the Greenbelt and Small Town Concept, or Greenbelt for short.

The Greenbelt concept would focus urbanization within the two rural centers of Damascus and Boring, with the former developed first. Each of these would eventually become small towns – Damascus up to 30,000 people, Boring up to 15,000. Both would be nested within a mixed farm and natural open space greenbelt, separating them from each other, Gresham to the north and Happy Valley to the west. The concept was developed as a way to allow a fair share of growth in our rural neighborhoods, while preserving the core values that most of us share.

Members of the Boring CPO and other proponents of this plan offered written and oral testimony to Metro in favor of the greenbelt concept, and managed to secure 237 signatures on a petition in less than a month. The Metro Council politely heard our ideas, but in the end failed to even acknowledge our plea for recognition in their final decision. They drew a new urban growth boundary line around our hills and valleys, and essentially have said it is up to Clackamas County to decide how plan development.

Now that the UGB expansion is determined, what are the prospects for the Small Town and Greenbelt concept? In our opinion, we have some things working for us, and some against, as follows.

Things in Favor:

The Greenbelt concept resonated with the local community. The Boring CPO voted unanimously in favor of it, and the Committee for the Future of Damascus endorsed it as an option that must be considered in concept planning. The idea appeals to a broad cross section of local citizens regardless of their political leanings. We believe that this support exists because the concept is consistent with community values that are rooted in the quality of life provided by small towns and rural living. Who among us does not love our green fields, forested buttes, free-flowing creeks, wildlife, and fresh seasonal produce? The Greenbelt concept retains the features of the landscape that we cherish. Full scale, stem to stern urbanization does not.

Secondly, we are not powerless. We own the land, are active voters, and anticipate two of our county commission seats up for election in two short years. This means that if we work together, continue to support the Greenbelt concept, and avoid letting ourselves

become divided, we can prevail. Third, we have a tremendous reservoir of talent in our local community. Some of our neighbors are architects, transportation experts, planners, watershed specialists, and natural resource professionals, not to mention farmers and wood lot owners who know the land best. We do not need to be intimidated by outside experts who may be manipulated to serve other interests. Fourth, we have become well organized. The Boring CPO has 30 active members. The Committee for the Future of Damascus has at least that many pitching in regularly. And the Damascus Community Planning Organization has started up again. And lastly, no irreversible decisions have been made yet. The plan for how this area is to urbanize has yet to be drawn and adopted, which means we have time to act.

#### Things Against:

First, establishing a permanent greenbelt within our urban growth boundary has never been done in Oregon. Our land use system was essentially designed to separate urban from rural, not to mix these together. Innovative strategies, such as transfer of development rights zoning, will be needed in order to fairly compensate landowners within the greenbelt. It may be expensive to run sewer or water lines from the new town centers through a greenbelt to connect with the larger urban area. We are likely to have some landowners within the greenbelt who would rather sell their land for development, and conversely some within proposed town centers who would rather stay rural. It will be impossible to satisfy everyone.

Second, Gresham, Happy Valley, Clackamas County, and a prospective new City of Damascus all desire land zoned for industrial development in order to help fund local services. Our property tax limitation system and absence of state or local sales taxes has forced communities to favor industrial development, (which pays more property taxes than it needs in local services) in order to finance basic services to residents. Relatively level, valley-bottom land within a greenbelt will be coveted as potential industrial land, which according to economic development experts, required large acreage with few obstructions.

Third, Metro and Clackamas County have stated that their planners will develop the plans for this area. This means that the local community will not select a team of planners but will have government staff assigned to this task. Although Metro stated that their role ended with determination of the Urban Growth Boundary they have since determined they will be active participants in planning our area. Metro and County planners will no doubt pursue a different set of objectives for this area than current residents would. As we go to press, representatives of Metro, Clackamas County, Happy Valley and Gresham are staking out territory in the Damascus area. If we don't organize and speak out for what we want, the future of our area will surely be determined by others.

So, where do we go from here?

We believe we can succeed in protecting what we value about this area by developing and implementing the Small Town and Greenbelt concept. But this is only feasible if a

solid majority of the local community expresses support for it and enough of us demonstrate the desire to make it happen. At this point the Greenbelt concept is a work-in-progress. The community (that means you!) has to take the time to learn more about it, help develop it, and speak up for it during the upcoming concept planning process. We have an uphill journey, but we can get there if we really want this. Most importantly, we have to be diligent in communicating support for this concept to our county commissioners. Michael Jordan has taken a lead role in land planning issues. He has met with us on several occasions, and expressed interest.

In addition to working together within our community, we need to build alliances with other organizations that have a stake in the outcome of growth in this area. These include: the Johnson Creek and Clackamas Basin watershed councils, Clackamas and Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation Districts, sustainable farm and forest advocates, and our neighbors in Gresham and Happy Valley who want to retain a green edge to their communities. If you are connected with any of these groups, please become an advocate and key contact for us.

We can secure a future for this area that will work for us. We can create a new model for growth that integrates rural and urban land uses in a truly sustainable way, rather than simply overwhelming one with the other. This is the Oregon vision that we believe most of us want to see. Small, compact, manageable towns set within a tapestry of fields and forests. Help us in this quest. Contact us for more information.

The future of your neighborhood depends on your participation!

Dean Apostol & Marcia Sinclair  
Singing Salads Farm, Boring, OR  
503-661-6152  
[wordland@aracnet.com](mailto:wordland@aracnet.com)

Les Otto  
Chair; Boring CPO  
503-663-1297  
[eso@effectnet.com](mailto:eso@effectnet.com)