

Gresham and Happy Valley Mayors talk about annexation and Damascus

By Julie Wagner
for The Damascus Boring Observer

Recently I sat down with Happy Valley Mayor Gene Grant and Gresham Mayor Chuck Becker and asked, “What was the city’s interest in Damascus?”

Mayor Gene Grant
Happy Valley

“We voted in November on a measure for the voters within the current city limits to authorize the city council to annex to the area east of the city limits. What they approved was to go to approximately 180th (where 180th would be) from the county line all the way down to 212 and slightly below 212. That passed by a wide majority, roughly, 2 to 1 voted in favor. That is a pretty good indication as far as what people inside the city think they feel that is an area of significant interest.

We did not want to see Gresham come down into Clackamas County. We would prefer to control the planning of that area. Also part of it was the desire to have the economic benefit to the city employment areas. The employment area we have now is the Albertson’s Shopping Center, so we would like to become a more balanced city. Everything below there is relatively flat and everybody recognizes is going to be an extension of the Highway 212 industrial corridor. From the standpoint of city finances, an industrial area pays a lot of property taxes because it’s a higher assessed value and they demand hardly any services so that money can go into the city to support services to your residential areas. It’s a net plus to city finances. That’s why Gresham would like it, that’s why the future of Damascus would like it.

Part of the reason we are anxious to maintain our growth area down around 212 is so that we have the ability to eventually annex down Hwy 212 all the way up to 82nd Drive and become one nice well-rounded city. It would give you a natural boundary, the freeway is one natural boundary, the Clackamas River is a boundary and the county line as the north boundary and then the question is what should the east boundary be. It should be some sort of geographic boundary that makes sense, and the reasons we picked 180th is we are already into the Rock Creek drainage basin, we’ve got Happy Valley, then Rock Creek and then you go over a ridge into the existing Damascus.

Gresham never adopted a voter approval requirement so they can do annexations just by the city council vote. Now we’re on an equal level with them. Now it’s shifted to the possibility of a city of Damascus and it doesn’t exist yet so it’s not on an equal playing field. The county is trying to get Gresham, Happy Valley, Damascus and all the special districts to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) saying that no one will annex

anything until November of 2004 when the vote is held to see if Damascus is going to incorporate. Sort of like a moratorium, Happy Valley has taken the position from the very beginning that we feel there is a certain portion of this newly added area to the UGB that's appropriately a growth area for Happy Valley and it's not appropriate for a new city."

Mayor Chuck Becker
Gresham

"We do not have an annexation policy at this time. The Council will have to discuss that in the future. The city of Gresham at this time is looking at areas that are contiguous and particularly the entire area that lies within the Johnson Creek drainage. When you look at Pleasant Valley and you look at Springwater II it's best serviced by one entity. How can it best be serviced by Gresham? We haven't formalized it.

Right now, we aren't interested in going into Damascus. I believe in self-determination. I think if the people in Damascus feel that they should be part of a Damascus incorporation (then they should) but I don't think that the people of Damascus really know what their boundaries are.

We're waiting to find out how receptive people are to forming their own city and knowing what their options are. If we are providing services to that area, we'd like to have it incorporated into a city. We feel it would be more cost effective. We all are asking how do we get good paying jobs so that our citizens don't have to go across the river or somewhere else to get jobs that pay well. We have this area in the UGB for a reason. The UGB is to make an urban community; it wasn't brought in for the purposes of keeping it as a rural community."