

A Greenbelt and Small Town Concept for Damascus-Boring

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In the July issue of the Observer, we presented 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. In this article, we want to further articulate the idea, which we have unofficially named the *Greenbelt and Small Towns Concept*, or *Greenbelt* for short.

Our reason for creating this *Greenbelt* concept is that extending the present urban growth boundary out to encompass our beloved hills and valleys will likely result in a loss of open land, as it succumbs to a larger network of sprawl. While we support efforts to incorporate Damascus in order to insure local control over future development, we also support protection of the rural tapestry of fields and farms nestled among forested buttes. We do not support the conventional view of growth which assumes urbanization moving into Damascus from the north and west, blurring the edges between this area and greater Portland, as they are now between Portland and Gresham, or between Milwaukie and Sunnyside. This view is demonstrated in Gresham’s recently unveiled “Springwater” proposal, which would annex the entire Sunshine Valley for industrial use and “executive housing”.

The Boring Community Planning Organization voted to support six principles that form the basis for the *Greenbelt* concept. These principles are summarized below:

- 1) Damascus – Boring residents must accept a “fair share” of regional growth.**
- 2) Proposed urban development must not irretrievably alter the character of existing rural neighborhoods.**
- 3) Future development must promote conservation and improvement of the environmental and economic services that this area provides. These include: sustainably produced fresh food, landscape plants, agricultural jobs, rural recreation, functional stream ecosystems, and wildlife habitat.**
- 4) All planning must follow an open and inclusive process that respects local values, insuring that we have opportunities to be heard and to shape development.**
- 5) The pace of urban development must not exceed the necessary public infrastructure – transportation, sewer, water, parks, police, fire, schools, environmental protection.**
- 6) A system of local governance must be in place before urbanization proceeds.**

Our alternative is quite simple, yet compelling. We would like to see future growth directed outward from existing centers of Damascus and Boring, which would retain their separate identities. The existing urban edge to the north and west would remain, except for minor adjustments. A permanent greenbelt would be established between Boring, Damascus and the greater urban area. The end result will be two relatively small, compact communities nestled within the tapestry of rural land that we have come to love and enjoy. The greenbelt would be managed in a way that improves its service to the greater Metro area as a provider of sustainably grown fresh food, wildlife habitat, clean water and recreation. We see the need to compensate greenbelt landowners, either through land trust tax advantages or through the sale of “development rights” to adjacent urban areas, or both. Only through this approach would we be able to establish a permanent greenbelt. We believe that this form of development is consistent with local values, and would also meet the intent of Oregon’s land use program to conserve rural landscapes. But to make the vision a reality a number of things have to fall in place.

First, a critical mass of local residents have to learn about this alternative, and speak up in favor of it. The concept is only a work in progress. We have deliberately left the ultimate boundaries of developed and greenbelt areas vague, since we believe these have to be established with the widest possible involvement of both local landowners and outside interests. Metro will make its decision on the urban growth boundary in December, and public input will be taken only until November. This means there is little time to make our voices heard. We plan to circulate a petition, most likely via e-mail, in favor of the “Small Towns and Greenbelt” concept. Please take the time to review this petition and add your names to it. *The future of your neighborhood depends on your participation.*

Second, please consider attending as many of the upcoming meetings on urban growth in our area that you can. Meet your neighbors, ask about the greenbelt alternative, and lend your support. Write or call County Commissioner Michael Jordan, Metro Executive Mike Burton, and our Metro Representative, Rod Park expressing your support for a *Greenbelt and Small Town* alternative.

Third, we have to build alliances with other organizations that have a stake in the outcome of growth in this area. These include: the Committee for the Future of Damascus, Johnson Creek and Clackamas Basin watershed councils, local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Coalition for a Livable Future, Cities of Gresham and Happy Valley, the Food Alliance, the Grange, Local service providers and others.

Our goal is that when the Metro Council makes its decision on urban growth expansion for this area, they will not just mark lines on a map, but will articulate support for the *Greenbelt and Small Town Concept* as the most promising way to develop the area. We also want our County Commissioners to express their support. To gain official recognition and support, we must demonstrate that local citizens and partners are behind the idea and will work together to make it happen.

We have very little time to do this, so please, get on board. 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.

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