

I am writing in opposition to HB 2255.

There exists a simple, two-step measure to evaluate any proposed public policy. Public policy must first show equal concern for the fate of every person affected by the policy, and second it must respect fully the responsibility and right of each person to decide how to make something valuable of his life. HB 2255 fails this test.

HB 2255 makes it easier for local governments to designate farm land as industrial reserve. A municipality could request to super-site for industrial use on 150 acres or more outside and near its UGB if a specific employer promises to provide 500 jobs for five years. This bill allows local governments to convert job growth and population trends into demand for land for employment purposes. Reliance on growth estimates from those who would profit from those estimates require a prudent person to be very, very suspicious.

Communities in the Willamette Valley emerged as agricultural hubs. The pearls they have become started out as shipping, marketing, and processing entrepôts for the surrounding agricultural land. The value of the community eventually came to exceed the value of the agricultural base that spawned the towns. Yet these municipalities occupy space on some of the best farmland in the world.

Communities mutate with time. They grow, change in nature, and even die. Not so the agricultural and forest lands girdling our municipalities. Nonetheless, these lands, too, die when they are transformed into something other than agriculture or forest. The climate of the world is changing and we live in a region whose agriculture and forest value will rise as the inventory of land elsewhere diminishes due to climate changes we have induced.

Forty years ago we had the foresight to collectively reign in the destruction of these lands caused by conversion to nonagricultural purposes. These restrictions enhanced the value of our communities as places to live. These protections insured the survival of agriculture and forestry at a time when farm and forest land is declining worldwide.

We established UGB's to rationally control growth so as to preserve our fragile agricultural foundations. HB 2255 proposes communities perform economic triage on surrounding agricultural land. Yet the Bill does not require a similar triage for land within the UGB prior to seeking additional land as industrial reserve. The bill has no provision for the involvement of the Department of Agriculture or other knowledgeable groups in the process of screening lands proposed for industrial reserve.

There appears to be no provision that would forbid creation of industrial reserves if there already exists land within an UGB that could be developed. Nor does there appear to be adequate protections against conversion of the land to other uses after being designated as an industrial reserve, such as has happened with Keizer Station.

HB 2255 is a solution in search of a problem. Current law has not been a barrier to including farm land in urban reserves. The bill permits municipalities to estimate the amount of land they need but fails to adequately balance a perceived need with unbiased evidence by sources independent of the municipality.

The ability of the bill to accelerate the designation process is appealing the very groups citizens in Oregon and citizens living in the affected communities should most distrust: developers and politicians who would profit from such designations. The Bill requires extensive rule-making, the very process of which works against citizen involvement. The bill utterly ignores that local decisions have statewide impacts and diminishes the ability of the average Oregonian to participate in decisions that reflect on the State as a whole.

Finally, it is ironic that a Bill intended to apply to all of Oregon is based upon a demonstration project in a part of the State that has long argued that what works in the Willamette Valley does not work in Southern Oregon, Central Oregon, or Eastern Oregon. In the quest to make the land use process work more like a business process, what gets lost is the role of the average citizen as a stakeholder.

Sincerely,

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