

Parable of Fischer Mill

Built before SB 100 took effect, a development of 26 homes on a rural parcel between Redland and Springwater Road. Served by a collective septic and sand filter onsite treatment system. The system is sited approximately ¼ mile from a bend in Clear Creek, a tributary of the Clackamas River.

After some years the system was no longer performing adequately. The developer was either unavailable or unwilling to take action. No municipal systems had been built in the area for them to connect to. The Clackamas County Board of Commissioners agreed to take over the system. Depending on who is telling the story they were persuaded by graft, cronyism, public relations, concern for environmental and public health, or some combination. Repair and maintenance were assigned to what was then known as the Department of Utilities within the Roads Division.

Growth and the Clean Water Act come along. New Special District treatment facilities were built in Milwaukie and Oregon City. Subsequent Commissioners have had other priorities. One board would want every rate to be based on actual cost of service. Another would be concerned that rates were equalized across all districts. Rates and revenue fluctuated.

When I came to work for the county in 2000 it was Water Environment Services that ran and maintained Fischer Mill as well as the other larger service districts within the UBG. This is also when I first became aware of the operation. Among the capital planning discussions underway at the time was the need to make a significant capital investment because the original system did not meet current clean water standards. There was no way that the 26 homeowners could fund the work. This put the matter into the complex system of public finance.

Decades on the costs from this poorly planned and executed development are being underwritten by others. Developers and public officials come and go but once these things get built, they do not ever go away.

Back on March 5th this committee held hearings on SB 756 and SB 884, grappling with the cost and responsibility of helping remedy these legacy problems. Please do not approve SB 88 which will allow increased residential density outside of the reach of urban infrastructure – including public sanitary sewer and water services. It is said that prevention is the best medicine and I ask you to take such action here.

Respectfully Submitted,

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