

Informational Meeting on LC 109

Tuesday, January 13 at 11:30AM

House Interim Committee On Economic Development, Small Business, and Trade

Governor's Prosperity Roadmap - Preview of LC 109

- Sarah Means; Workforce, Higher Education, and Economic Development Advisor; Office of Governor Tina Kotek
 - Kaarin Knudson, Mayor, City of Eugene
 - Mark Kujala, Chair, Clatsop County Commission
 - Jon Stark, CEO, Economic Development for Central Oregon
-

Clatsop County Chair Mark Kujala Testimony

Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chairs Isadore and Skarlatos, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on a top priority for the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners – the expansion of our local economy and creation of more family-wage jobs.

We appreciate the Governor's leadership in developing the Oregon Prosperity Roadmap and for the tacit acknowledgment that economic development is, by its very nature, a team sport. For Clatsop County, one of the most promising elements of LC 109 in advancing that Roadmap is the proposed FastTrack Permitting Program.

Although FastTrack is currently framed for large-scale projects – Clatsop County supports expansion to include regionally significant industrial lands in rural counties as well. These smaller, but regionally critical projects, are vital for the economic health and resilience of rural communities.

Even in the best circumstances, economic development is difficult in rural communities. In Clatsop County, inadequate infrastructure, complex and sometimes conflicting state and federal regulations, and a scarcity of buildable lots all constrain developable land, creating significant barriers to well-intentioned, good-faith projects supporting economic growth.

With 80% of Clatsop County designated as forest and farmland, and the remaining 20% encumbered by wetlands, steep slopes, and dunes, the limited land available for job creation is time consuming, unpredictable, and expensive to develop. In practice, this means that projects capable of delivering family-wage jobs can spend years navigating regulatory processes without ever reaching a clear answer—much less a “yes.”

To fulfil our vision of being a community where multiple generations can live and thrive, we need consistent job growth and sustained capital investment. That requires not just compliance with regulations, but a collaborative, proactive approach to navigating them—one where agencies are aligned around shared outcomes and realistic timelines.

A recent Economic Opportunities Analysis prepared by the County focuses on several sectors, including the blue marine, healthcare and wellness, construction and resource, and food processing. As we take active steps to implement that analysis, we are keenly aware that success depends on having the right partners at the table early, working together to resolve issues.

The proposed FastTrack Program offers an effective approach to navigating these complexities by removing barriers and incentivizing timely investment. It’s an approach which has shown success in other states and communities to identify solutions and get to “yes”.

A prime early candidate for this Program is the long-idle 130-acre site optimistically named the North Coast Business Park, the largest industrially zoned parcel in Clatsop County. Over many decades, this property has been the focus of numerous development proposals, all of which have stalled due to a complex and evolving set of regulatory challenges.

Although previously designated as a site of regional significance, Clatsop County has been unsuccessful in navigating the regulatory and permitting process to move development forward in a cost effective or timely manner. The absence of a coordinated pathway has repeatedly turned opportunity into inertia.

The concept and promise of a multi-agency, multi-sector shared table, with agreed upon goals, outcomes, and timelines, and a collective commitment to problem-solving—offers something we have not had before: a realistic chance to propel a long-stalled site into a source of family-wage jobs and meaningful capital investment. In short, it offers a way to move from uncertainty to “yes.”

Clatsop County supports the State’s goals to retain and grow Oregon businesses, catalyze job creation, and accelerate economic growth.

Removing barriers and creating efficiencies means State and local agencies must interact differently, with greater coordination, institutional flexibility, and shared accountability. FastTrack represents an important step toward aligning economic, environmental, and community values in a balanced and practical way.

As we work in coordination to meet the economic challenges of this great state, I ask for all partners and stakeholders to be resolute in the focus on family wage jobs and economic growth, and the processes and relationships truly required to move economic development forward in every community.

Clatsop County is ready to do our part.