

Foreword

We are pleased to present this summary report of the results of the Damascus Community Design Workshop. This project represents a new effort by 1000 Friends of Oregon and the Coalition for a Livable Future, the project sponsors; to translate our values and principles into a positive alternative for the region's urban development.

The results of the project is a design model that illustrates urban development that uses land efficiently, protects our natural resources and fish and wildlife habitat, provides for a fair share of the region's jobs, and includes a full range of choices in types of housing and transportation, that meet the needs of families of all incomes and types. Although we focused our project on the likeliest area for urban expansion, we believe our ideas, principles and design insights will be relevant no matter where or when the urban growth boundary is expanded.

We hope this design inspires a regional discussion that focuses on the quality of urban development and not just the quantity, and we look forward to your contributions to that regional discussion.

Sincerely,
Robert Liberty

Jill Fuglister

The Project Sponsors wish to extend our deep appreciation and thanks to our grantors for their valued support, without which this project would not have been possible.

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

The Meyer Memorial Trust

We also extend our thanks to the many who have contributed to this project, and have given generously of their time, money, and/or materials towards its success.

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New Seasons Market

On the cover: Aerial perspective view of a characteristic neighborhood, showing mixed-use high density buildings at the top, residential streets including many housing options in the center, and green infrastructure (in the form of parks, green streets, and natural areas) brought deep into the neighborhood from below.
Drawing by Stacy Moriarty, Moriarty Condon Ltd.

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Metro Must Decide Where and How Much to Expand the UGB. Damascus is the Most Likely Candidate Area

The Portland metropolitan area regional planning authority (Metro) is considering a substantial expansion of the Portland area urban growth boundary (UGB)¹. Metro must make this decision to comply with a law passed by the Oregon Legislature in 1995. This law requires Metro to ensure enough land inside the UGB such that there is a twenty-year supply of land available for development. Metro is similarly obligated to consider lands called “exception lands” first, before allowing urbanization of productive farm or forestlands. Exception lands were identified in 1974 when the Oregon Senate passed Bill 100, the legislation that created Oregon’s land use planning program. The lands identified were not easily classified as farm, forest, or urban land, and thus were considered “exception” lands. By far the largest single area of exception lands are in the 25 square miles immediately southeast of the Portland UGB – lands within Pleasant Valley and Sunshine Valley that converge at the village of Damascus. If the UGB expands in this area and present policies for urbanization are applied, these valley landscapes will be dramatically altered. One hopes they will be altered for the better, but recent experience leaves many in doubt.

Thirty-eight people who had never worked with each other before, and who had no direct responsibility for this momentous decision, came together to answer one overarching question: *If the Damascus area was included within the UGB and*



The Study Area in the Portland metropolitan region.

subsequently urbanized, could it become a better place in the process? Their responses and ideas are captured in this report.

All of the plans shown in this report were produced in the six days between May 29 and June 3, 2002. Participants came from many places and from many walks of life. Many participants, including the project sponsors, are concerned about the proposed UGB expansion. Many have fought against expansion in the past, and greet the prospect of an expansion many times larger than those of the past with grave misgivings. Their experience has shown them, over and over again, that opening new land to urbanization inevitably leads to sprawling development, unaffordable housing, traffic congestion, a proliferation of strip malls, and natural resource destruction, producing a world of “land use” and “infrastructure” instead of a community to belong to.

So it was that this group assembled to suggest another way. They began by asking: If the UGB does expand in the Damascus area, is there any way to avoid this all too familiar outcome? Is there a way to create a real community, a place to belong to, with decent homes for people of all incomes, with adequate family wage jobs nearby, where you can get around without a car if you choose, where you can readily access healthful, locally grown food, and where nature is a part of your everyday experience?

The answer arrived at after six exhausting days is a qualified yes. Yes it is possible to have such a place, but only if the community grows from the valuable features that are there, and not bury them under a proliferation of homogenous subdivisions. Yes, it is possible to have such a place, but only by insisting on a network of streets, paths and riparian areas that unite the community, not impenetrable barriers that divide it. Yes, it is possible, but only if the people who serve your coffee at your local café, patrol your street, and teach your kids to read can live nearby, not forced to live in far off districts because they cannot afford to live in yours. Yes, it is possible, but only if important natural features are preserved and cherished, not buried under concrete or locked behind a fence. Yes, it is possible, but only by creating and preserving land for growing food. Yes, it is possible, but only if family wage jobs are integrated into the fabric of the community and not isolated to areas beyond transit lines or located a frustrating hour's drive away.

If all of these conditions can be met, then the urbanization of this beautiful pair of valleys might constitute an upward trade: the emergence of a fair, green, and affordable community as equitable compensation for the loss of open fields and rural residential parcels.

If, however, a business as usual approach is maintained, where UGB expansion is followed by the all too familiar process of dividing up the landscape like so many cuts of beef, to be sold by the pound, then no such consensus would exist. Workshop participants would likely advise against expanding the UGB in the Damascus area.

At the same time, should Metro propose expansion into any *other* candidate landscape, workshop participants most probably could not accept there that which they could not condone for Damascus. Wherever the UGB expands, the expansion should only be allowed if there are sufficient assurances that whatever is built will conform to publicly approved policies for green, fair, and affordable communities. In the pages that follow is a collective vision for just such a community.