

Save Helvetia

From: Cherry Amabisca
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Date: June 10, 2010

To: Chair Brian and Washington County Board of Commissioners

RE: Objections to Washington County A-Engrossed Ordinance No. 733
Final Findings dated June 15, 2010

Below are Save Helvetia's objections to Ordinance No. 733:

Oregon's Statewide Planning Goals & Guidelines **Goal 1: Citizen Involvement - OAR 660-015-0000(1)**

Washington County failed to comply with Goal 1: 1. Citizen Involvement - To provide for widespread citizen involvement.

While a CCI exists in Washington County, it was an ineffective voice for citizens. Most citizens do not know of its existence and in the few cases when the CCI sent letters to the Washington County Reserves Coordinating Committee about the reserves process, *they* never received responses. The CCI did not give the general public an opportunity to be involved in data collection, in plan preparation, in the adoption process, in implementation, in evaluation or in revision of the proposed changes in comprehensive land-use plans. The CCI themselves were not given the opportunity to *participate* in the planning phases, either.

Washington County failed to comply with Goal 1: 2. Communication - To assure effective two-way communication with citizens.

Two-way communication with elected and appointed officials of Washington County during the reserves planning process was non-existent. Citizens wrote emails and letters to elected officials and received no response to the issues raised. Instead, officials expressed frustration with the number of emails and letters they received. In hearings, officials listened to testimony but asked no questions of citizens nor engaged in any interaction. Twice, county staff responded with an issue report included in a staff report that concerns raised by citizens on a specific topic but the response was to deny the merit of the concerns. In the December 15, 2009, hearing to hear testimony on the proposed map of reserves, the public was not informed that the testimony would be limited to the Bragdon-Hosticka map that was available for the first time at the hearing. The Board of Commissioners cut off testimony after hearing elected

officials and groups and only 31 of the 65 citizens who had signed up to testify at the first and only evening hearing held on the reserves by the Board of Commissioners to that date. The Chair later referred to testimony he had heard as the only testimony he had heard on a particular issue, when there were many citizens prepared to testify in opposition but who were not given the opportunity.

Washington County failed to comply with Goal 1: 3. Citizen Influence - To provide the opportunity for citizens to be involved in all phases of the planning process.

Throughout the planning process leading to the adoption of A-Engrossed Ordinance No. 733, citizens were not given the opportunity to be involved in the *planning* process, including Preparation of Plans and Implementation Measures, Plan Content, Plan Adoption, Minor Changes and Major Revisions in the Plan and Implementation Measures.

The Washington County Planning Directors meetings were closed to the public; this body developed reserves recommendations which were adopted by the Washington County Reserves Coordinating Committee mostly unchanged.

The Washington County Reserves Coordinating Committee, which reviewed the recommendations prepared by the Planning Directors, was composed of elected officials (mayors), who all wanted extensive urban reserves added to their cities. There was one vote given to the Washington County Farm Bureau, which was consistently outvoted due to the unbalanced composition of the RCC. These meetings were all held during the day, which made it difficult for working citizens to attend. Furthermore, “input” was limited to three minutes at the end of the meeting, with no interaction.

Washington County did not establish a Citizen Advisory Committee to make recommendations about urban and rural reserves during the planning phases, unlike Clackamas and Multnomah Counties. As a result of having no participation in the planning process, grass roots citizens groups formed, such as “Save Helvetia” to give citizens a voice.

Washington County failed to comply with Goal 1: 4. Technical Information - to assure that technical information is available in an understandable form.

County staff utilized a sophisticated array of software, GIS mapping, screens and filters to analyze the study area at various levels. This software was not available to the general public. The general public, and even citizens with advanced degrees, were unable to penetrate the various layers and levels and overlays to understand how the county staff determined the various attributes of the study areas.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Washington County failed to comply with key elements of Goal 1 - they never planned for citizen involvement *in the planning process* from the beginning. The Coordinated Public Involvement Plan for Urban and Rural Reserves Planning in Washington County 2008-2009 describes the planning process. It does not involve citizens in the planning process, except to “provide opportunities for public input on key elements of the project” and to “hold public hearings on final recommendations for Rural and Urban Reserves in Washington County.”

Because the citizen involvement process did not involve citizens in the planning process in Washington County, the recommendations for urban reserves made by the county’s planning groups reflect the interests of the Planning Directors (who represent their local elected officials), the county planning staff (whose Land Use and Development Department’s budget is derived almost solely from development fees) and the Reserves Coordinating Committee (who are the mayors of local cities). These interests are overwhelming in favor of a broad expansion of urban reserves, while the public’s response on opinion polls consistently showed 65% of the public supported keeping farmland from being urbanized. The citizens of Washington County were given “opportunities for input”, but not around the planning tables. Input was limited to 2 to 3 minutes at selected venues and rarely, if ever, was there a dialog between a citizen and a member of any of the planning groups.

Ordinance No. 733 was developed without complying with key elements of Goal 1: its findings are flawed as a result of the urban interests of the government groups who controlled the planning process.