

Save Helvetia

From: Cherry Amabisca
13260 NW Bishop Road
Hillsboro, OR 97124

Date: June 14, 2010

To: Chair Brian and Washington County Board of Commissioners

RE: Objections to 556 acres north of Highway 26 receiving “UNdesignated” status
Exhibit A to A-Engrossed Ordinance No. 733
Findings of Fact dated June 15, 2010

This objection refers to an area adjacent and directly west of Area 8B. It is a large block of Foundation Agricultural Land that totals 556.5 acres. It is bordered by NW West Union Road on the north, NW Helvetia Road on the east, NW Groveland Drive and Highway 26 on the south and a line of trees on the west. Attached is a map from Issue Paper #4 dated May 6, 2010.

Washington County staff ranked this area favorably for rural reserves. It is Foundation Agriculture Land with high crop productivity. Yet, it was left “UNdesignated” in Ordinance No. 733.

Ordinance No. 733 fails to satisfy OAR 660-027-0040(2). There are no findings which suggest that this area is needed to accommodate the estimated urban population and employment growth.

Ordinance No. 733 fails to satisfy Goal 3 - Agricultural Lands (OAR 660-015-000(3)) - To preserve and maintain agricultural lands.

There are no findings that justify NOT designating this area as “rural reserves”.

Ordinance No. 733 fails to satisfy Goal 3 and OAR Section 660, Division 33.

The findings fail to apply Goal 3. To be effective, the urban/rural reserve designations that affect Goal 3 lands requires the application of the goal and findings analyzing that the goal is met.

Ordinance No. 733 fails to satisfy OAR 660-027-0040(11) because the findings and statement of reason does not explain why this Foundation Agricultural Land was chosen for designation as “UNdesignated” rather than other land considered under this division.

Ordinance No. 733 fails to satisfy Goal 2 - adequate factual base.

The ordinance lacks an adequate factual base to establish compliance with OAR 660-027. Neither the findings nor the referenced Issue Paper #4 describe the rationale or any reasons for leaving this area “UNdesignated”. What is the justification for leaving this large block of Foundation Ag Land “UNdesignated”?

Ordinance No. 733 fails to satisfy Goal 3 - Agricultural Lands (OAR 660-015-000(3)) - Urban growth should be separated from agricultural lands by buffer or transitional areas of open space.

This area is primarily composed of productive farming operations containing some of the most fertile, well-drained soils in the Metro area. Ordinance No. 733 sandwiches this area of 556 acres in between an urban reserves and a rural reserve area for no apparent reason. Property lines, or worse, arbitrary lines drawn on maps, make extremely poor boundaries between urban, rural and undesignated lands. It is impossible to make the case that the eastern portion of this arbitrary line qualifies as urban reserve and the western portion of the line qualifies for a rural designation when there are no physical or logical boundaries between the three areas. For a boundary to exist, it must provide a rational dividing line based on the factors contained in OR 660-027-0005. No physical or natural topographic exists in the area north of U.S. 26 and west of NW Helvetia Road that could provide the same hard boundary currently provided by U.S> 26, a four-land highway, and NW Helvetia Road.

This ordinance creates an island of agricultural land that lacks buffers on the east and west sides. Property lines are poor buffers. Ordinance No. 733 will cause development to occur in adjacent Area 8B: development creates houses, people, traffic. There is no edge or buffer between Area 8B and the adjacent “UNdesignated” Foundation Agriculture Lands which are being actively farmed. With no buffer, farming activities on adjacent farmland will be impacted. Cars from urban areas bring in microscopic noxious weed seeds, contaminating the purity of the grass seed crops on adjoining farmlands. People in housing developments will object to the dust and noise from disking, plowing and tilling (especially during nighttime harvesting) and will object to spraying, limiting the activities of the adjacent farms. Commuter traffic will increase on NW Helvetia Road, NW Groveland Road and NW West Union Road with the addition of 600 homes in Area 8. Additional traffic, traveling at high speeds on rural roads, are a hazard to the slow-moving farm equipment.

Leaving this large block of Foundation Agricultural Land “UNdesignated” will have an adverse impact on farming activities in that block of land. The perception that this land is next in line to be included in the UGB causes speculation and drives land prices higher (see memo attached). Farmers will dis-invest in crops and infrastructure. Landlords will sign them to a shorter lease, if they lease land, in case the land will come into the UGB. Farmers need certainty to continue to invest in farming and leaving land “UNdesignated” creates uncertainty.

This area meets numerous Rural Reserve Factors OAR 660-027-0060 and should be designated as Rural Reserves for the following reasons:

(2)(a) This area is otherwise potentially subject to urbanization since its eastern edge is within a few hundred feet of a UGB zoned for industrial use and it is adjacent to Area 8B, which is proposed for urban reserves. The evidence submitted shows that giving these lands “UNdesignated” status has already resulted in a large increase in the per acre pricing of recent parcels going up for sale, making it difficult for adjacent farmers to buy additional farmland or for other farmers to buy this property. Similarly, this increased value decreases the incentive for existing farmers to continue farming and in turn, reduces the overall local food supply.

(2)(b) This area is capable of sustaining long-term agricultural operations for agricultural land, having been farmed successfully, and to the present, for well over a century (150 years seems to be the consensus figure). One parcel of 125 acres, owned by the Grossen family, has been farmed continuously and profitably for over 100 years.

(2)(c) This area is in grass seed production, hazelnut orchards and nursery stock. It has 17.6% Class 1 soils and 66.9% Class 2 soils (total 84.5% Class 1 and 2 soils) as classified by the Web Soil Survey of the Natural Resources Conservation Service branch of USDA. It is entirely Foundation farmland (as classified by the Oregon State Department of Agriculture) and it has suitable, available water (as evidenced by the historical, extensive system of sub-surface drainage that exists throughout all of this area).

(2)(d) This area is part of a large block of agricultural land with a concentration of farm operations.

(3)(c) This area contains important wildlife habitat. Testimony has been submitted by Save Helvetia showing the use of the area by Helvetia’s Roosevelt elk herds for foraging and grazing during the fall and winter months, providing an essential element of their survival.

(3)(e) This area provides a sense of place for the region. It contains at least one burial site for the Atfalati people, dating from the pre-settlement era. Today, it is regarded as a sacred cultural site by the inheritors of the Atfalati people, the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde.

(3)(h) This area provides easy access to recreational opportunities in the rural area of Helvetia. Testimony has been provided by Save Helvetia of the thousands of runners and bicyclists who use West Union Road and Groveland Drive and Groveland Road surrounding this area throughout the year, not only as individuals, but as members of recognized clubs from throughout the Portland Metropolitan area. Leaving this area “UNdesignated” will open the agricultural properties up to developers as prices per acre increase in response to the market perception that “UNdesignated” areas will be the next areas to be urbanized, destroying the rural character of the area and creating traffic that will endanger the thousands of runners and bicyclists who use the rural two-land roads of West Union, Helvetia, Groveland.

(4) This area is within a few hundred yards of the UGB. As such, it qualifies for designation as rural reserves under section (2) without further explanation under OAR 660-027-0040(10). It is most in danger of urbanization and should be protected as rural reserves.

Respectfully,

Cherry Amabisca
Save Helvetia
13260 NW Bishop Road
Hillsboro, OR 97124

Attachments

1. Map (subject area in blue)
2. Testimony letter dated May 20, 2010 to Metro Council regarding land prices
3. Testimony dated December 15, 2009 from Don Schoen, Hazelnut grower
4. Testimony letter dated November 22, 2009 from 5 owners
5. Testimony letter dated December 8, 2009 from DeLoris Grossen
6. Testimony letter dated January 20, 2010 from DeLoris Grossen

