



Save Helvetia

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SaveHelvetia.org

Advancing policies, leaders and actions that protect Helvetia's treasured resources.

April 4, 2013

House Committee on Land Use: House Bill 2255

Chair Clem, Vice-Chairs Frederick and Cameron, and Committee Members

Good afternoon. I am Robert Bailey here representing Save Helvetia, a farmland preservation organization in northwestern Washington County. We reside in farm and forest lands, have experience with a recent urban and rural reserves process, and here provide comment. Our case for Helvetia's farm land preservation and testimony are archived and available through our website: www.savehelvetia.org. We presented our reserves appeal to the State Court of Appeals in January of this year and continue to await the court's findings.

We marked the 100th year birth of Governor Tom McCall recently, author of the OREGON STORY. Are we here so quick to write another chapter in that story or to begin a new story altogether? We do not read HB 2255 as a recognizable chapter in McCall's Story.

- The post mortem of the metro urban-rural reserves process is not yet complete. Multiple issues remain under appeal. HB 2255 is premature without access to lessons learned.
- Cities and counties have substantial conflict of interest with increased tax base and may not be well qualified to undertake the comprehensive analysis expected. Where is the expertise of the State Department of Agriculture, among other departments with expertise?
- Once land speculation begins, land prices escalate and this prevents land returning to agriculture. Noxious weeds become the crop of vacant parcels, constraining agricultural operations on adjacent lands. We have seen Hillsboro "leap frog" across already designated industrial lands to get at less parcelized lands, easier to

aggregate, but creating islands of unused acreage. Infrastructure costs go up, development sprawls, and growth moves away from the core. Foundation farm land is forever lost.

- Midway through the metro reserves process, citizens asked why **public meeting laws** were not being followed. We were informed that it was because the legislature mandated their (governments') response. Will HB 2255 assure transparency and adherence to our public meeting laws? With so minimal a hearing process, it does not appear so.
- During the metro reserves process, **citizen involvement** goals were most often ignored in Washington County. Citizens were left to witness "roll outs" of predetermined plans from behind closed doors. HB 2255 subtracts from citizen involvement with more restrictive notice, a minimal hearings process, and limited grounds of appeal and review.
- HB 2255 creates extraordinary temptations for land speculation and selection, as did the metro reserves process. In Washington County, failures to disclose possible conflicts of interest occurred. There are no extraordinary safeguards for conflict of interest in HB 2255, yet you are again putting extraordinary temptation on the table.

Geologically, the Tualatin and Willamette Valleys are beneficiaries of the glacial Lake Missoula floods and the soil deposits brought from Eastern Washington. These farm soils are more irreplaceable than our old growth fir lost to clear cutting of decades past. They should not be given up without due consideration, process, and explicit citizen approval.

HB 2255 offers up irreplaceable resources on a plate to lure corporate interest, but with inadequate safeguards, an inadequate process, and sidelines citizen involvement. There are already existing laws and procedures to allow cities to grow and create the context for industry.

Respectfully,

Robert Bailey
for Save Helvetia