

Opinion: Oak Lodge deserves government responsive to its needs

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Eleanore Hunter: Area suffers from 'woeful lack of adequate service levels' and attention to housing, zoning and transportation

I became active in the Oak Grove community when I found out about CPOs, or Community Planning Organizations. And the exasperation I still carry after my years of experience with the Oak Grove Community Council, (the CPO for the Oak Grove area) is what motivates me to participate in the Oak Lodge Governance Project.

CPOs are the vehicle that Clackamas County uses to satisfy a state mandate for residents to be able to participate in land use planning. Unlike cities, which often engage neighborhood associations to ensure residents are involved, unincorporated areas of Clackamas County have CPOs. I only learned of their existence in 2006 when a letter from the county informed me that a neighbor was planning to build a new garage within 300 feet of my property, and if I had any concerns I could contact the CPO.

I attended the monthly meetings of the Oak Grove Community Council, (OGCC) and asked neighbors to attend to encourage greater participation. I served on the OGCC board from 2007-15 as secretary, chair and vice-chair. Through this involvement I became acutely aware of the labyrinthian procedures and time consuming protocols of the county's land-use process as well as the utter lack of true agency for the CPO.

Month after month, land-use applications sent from the county to the CPO were researched and studied by a committee of concerned residents, and month after month members voted to support the same values: maintain the quality of the neighborhoods, retain as many mature trees as possible, encourage pedestrian-centered transportation and safety, keep buildings away from watersheds and streams, be sensitive to existing topography. We voted against applications that violated these values as well as applications that served only the developer and not the area being

developed. And time and time again the applications we rejected were approved by the county over the objections of the residents. You see, the official county entity for community involvement serves only an advisory role and has no actual authority over what takes place in the community it's supposed to be representing. At many meetings there were more than 60 people voicing their concerns for their community based on collective, generative values. Concerns and values that continue to be dismissed to this day.

My turning point was sometime around 2012, the exact timing blurred by so many endless land-use losses. It was the evening a Planning Department staff member was a guest speaker at the CPO. He was asked about Metro's 2040 plan, which stipulates that all development keep within the character of the neighborhood. The question: why were there so many things being built in Oak Grove that so egregiously violated this stipulation and the values of our community? "Well," he said, "that is aspirational and I can only deal with what is implementable." He explained that since the 2040 plan had yet to be written into Clackamas County's zoning code, they had no bearing whatsoever. Metro's 2040 plan was regionally adopted in 1995, and many aspects of it have yet to be adopted into Clackamas County zoning code.

Oak Lodge is an urban area with a rural government of five commissioners who oversee all aspects of a region larger than Rhode Island. The population of Oak Lodge is estimated to be between 22,000 and 30,000. This is a profound mismatch. A rural form of government cannot adequately address the specific, intertwined and interdependent needs of the densely populated Oak Lodge area. The result is a woeful lack of adequate service levels and attention to the unique social, economic, housing, zoning and transportation needs of this area.

I'm involved with the Oak Lodge Governance Project (OLGP) because I believe people deserve governance that is responsive to their needs and desires. I believe the Oak Grove and Jennings Lodge communities deserve a form of governance that fosters a sense of identity, pride and belonging for the people who live and work here. I believe in governance



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that values equity, justice, fairness and inclusion.

I want local people to make decisions about how to utilize, allocate and prioritize local resources — people who have direct, long-term commitment to this community. I want a vision and a plan for McLoughlin Boulevard crafted by people who call this area home, people who intimately understand and value our communal assets — land, trees, water, air quality, habitat, wildlife — and who care for the individual well-being of all the people who live and work here.

I urge you to learn more about the Oak Lodge Governance Project and to reach out to your neighbors, and participate in helping create a community to be proud of, by connecting with us at oaklodgegovernance@gmail.com, Facebook: Oak Lodge Governance Project, Twitter: @Oaklodgegp and Instagram: @Oaklodgeproject. Our website is forthcoming.

Eleanore Hunter is a member of the OLGP steering committee. She has served on innumerable committees including vice-chair of a committee for the county's McLoughlin-area planning, and as an Oak Grove representative on TriMet's Orange Line Art Advisory Committee.