

# Opinion: Frustrated with decades of Oak Lodge in limbo

Jane Civiletti  
April 13 2021

**Jane Civiletti has 'front-row seat to the endless frustrations' of neighbors, business owners**

Location and sense of place have always been important to me. I grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania, where every location had a name and an identity. After living in Portland for 10 years, I moved to Oak Grove, an unincorporated area of Clackamas County. I made it a point to figure out just how my new home related to local jurisdictions and found a patchwork of precincts and service districts surrounded by clearly defined cities. It's been over 30 years since relocating to Oak Grove and I'm still explaining to people where I live. When I worked in downtown Portland, my home's location was a mystery to most of my colleagues.

I find it frustrating that new neighbors often think they bought property in Milwaukie, not realizing they now lived in an unincorporated portion of Clackamas County. Just recently I suggested to a friend that we meet somewhere in Oak Lodge. She has lived in West Linn for years and commutes on 99E most days, but didn't know where I meant. I needed to explain, "It's the space between Milwaukie and Gladstone."



Jane Civiletti

I began attending meetings in the early 1990s at the Oak Grove Community Council (OGCC), the local community planning organization (CPO), under the auspices of Clackamas County. I had some hope that this body would provide a structure which would allow my neighbors to attend to local issues regarding code writing and enforcement, development, zoning, etc. It didn't take long to learn that CPOs are solely advisory groups that may offer opinions to the county's board of commissioners, managers or staff, but have no authority whatsoever. I currently serve on the board of the OGCC as its treasurer, so have a front-row seat to the endless frustrations of our neighbors and business owners who come to the council meetings hoping for an opportunity to have their desires acted upon, only to be told we can ask and suggest, but hold no power to affect change.

Many years ago I trained to join the Milwaukie Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). The city of Milwaukie and its agencies provided us financial support for equipment, continued training and liability insurance when responding to civic needs. Later, when a CERT formed in Oak Lodge, I transferred to the more local response team. Without a city to act as an umbrella agency, my new team spent over two years petitioning Clackamas Fire District #1 for the financial support needed to act as an adjunct when public safety organizations were overwhelmed. The CERTs in Milwaukie, Happy Valley and Gladstone had the structure of a city available to support their volunteer efforts.

Having watched and taken part in local community activities over the past decades, I am aware of certain discussions which come up every few years proposing to alter the governmental structure in my area from being an unincorporated area to a city, town, hamlet — something. So, it seemed natural to at last become involved in a discussion of what my locale could be other than an ill-defined spot between Milwaukie and Gladstone. This group evolved into the Oak Lodge Governance Project (OLGP), a group of residents who received funding for a grant that would produce actual figures regarding finance and important details about what options might be available for the area when discussions regarding our lack of local control come up again. And, I know it will come up again.

The unincorporated area around me is heavily populated and growing. We have an urban business core running through a hodgepodge of commercial and residential areas whose zoning is totally overseen by county employees miles away in Oregon City. Nowhere is there the ability to seek local assistance regarding issues large or small; be it the neighbor's dogs barking incessantly all summer to the complete reconfiguration of a natural area filled with mature trees into a barren, paved housing development meant for wealthy buyers only. I look forward to the results of the OLGP's economic study and sharing them with my community.

To learn more with the Oak Lodge Governance Project contact us at: [aklodgegovernance@gmail.com](mailto:aklodgegovernance@gmail.com), Facebook: Oak Lodge Governance Project, Instagram: @Oaklodgeproject: Twitter: @Oaklodgegp. A website will be up soon.

Jane Civiletti is a member of the Oak Lodge Governance Project Steering Committee.