

# Opinion: Piecemeal government structure a barrier for Oak Lodge

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**Mitra Anoushiravani: I find it patently ridiculous that it takes years of work from private citizens to account for pedestrian safety**



As a member of the Steering Committee for the Oak Lodge Governance Project, I want to share the personal experience that motivated me to become involved in the project.

In the summer of 2017, I received a form letter from Clackamas County, providing requisite legal information about nearby land-use changes. As a property owner abutting the Boardman Creek wetlands, I learned of Oak Lodge Water Service District's (OLWSD) plan to develop a nature park in what amounted to my backyard. As a parent of three small children, I was thrilled, but had a key concern that anyone from the area would be aware of.



The neighborhood around the proposed park and the street on which the park entrance has since been created is notoriously dangerous for pedestrians. Incomplete sidewalks, narrow shoulders and a nearby bar with sometimes inebriated patrons driving home are the obvious issues. I didn't feel safe walking my family an eighth of a mile to access the entrance. Fearing I was overexaggerating the danger, I shared my concerns with a sheriff in the Traffic Enforcement Unit. They agreed with me and said they wouldn't feel safe making that walk either, let alone with children.

So, I went to OLWSD with my concerns. Both staff and the board agreed with me, but made it clear traffic safety wasn't in their purview. They do water, not cars. I get it.

One senior staff member noted that if we were a city, they'd essentially be able to swivel their chair and discuss co-planning between departments with their colleague in the next cubicle over. But, we're unincorporated. So, even though OLWSD was building a much-needed park for children and families, safe pedestrian access to the attraction was out of their scope.

I then took my concerns to a third agency, the county Department of Transportation and Development, where I was told that without a commissioner-directed plan to prioritize resources, staff was rendered impotent to help.

To mobilize neighborhood support, I voiced my concerns to the Jennings Lodge Community Planning Organization (JLCPO). While no one disagreed with me, there was nothing the JLCPO could do, either. CPOs are merely advisory and lack real teeth.

Folks referred me to Fred Sawyer, a longstanding community transportation activist in Oak Grove experienced in the complex process of sidewalk funding. We developed a plan to apply for state dollars from the highly competitive Safe Routes to School funds, thinking that in addition to increasing much-needed safety for the children attending Jennings Lodge and Candy Lane elementary schools, we could prove that Addie, the street where the park currently exists, would become a pedestrian route for the dozens of families packed into our corner of Jennings Lodge. We were just at the beginning of this multiyear grant process when the pandemic hit. State funding is far from guaranteed, even unlikely. And if we do get it, it will be years before anything actually materializes.

I find it patently ridiculous that it takes this much time (years) and work from private citizens to account for pedestrian safety of children around a park. Safe passage should be intrinsic to any park development. And years into this, there's still no guaranteed path forward. And it's not the fault of any of the entities with whom I spoke; they are all doing all they can within their limitations.

Why is this process so hard? Is this the best our community can offer our children? A lovely park nestled among a walkable deathtrap? Reflecting on the comment from OLWSD staff about the potential ease of departmental collaboration within a city-structure, I wondered how much truth existed in those words.

Finding other community members asking similar questions, I joined a group that has now become the Oak Lodge Governance Project (OLGP). We seek data to guide community conversations about whether there is a better, more comprehensive way to govern our area. If trying to improve children's safety around a park is this hard, I wonder what else we're not considering because the barriers to consideration, participation and execution are too great with our unincorporated, piecemeal government structure.

One of the commonalities among the steering group members is that our commitment to the OLGP is seeped in personal experiences. We think it's important that our community understands why each of us are working toward OLGP's goals, and we hope within the varied experiences among us, community members will find that some of our stories reflect their own perspectives.

In coming weeks, expect to hear more from individual OLGP folks about their motivation in this work.

If you want to know more about OLGP, please connect with us at [oaklodgegovernance@gmail.com](mailto:oaklodgegovernance@gmail.com), Facebook, Twitter @Oaklodgegp and Instagram @Oaklodgeproject.

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