

# Opinion: Oak Lodge residents ready for self-governance

Chips Janger

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**Chips Janger: It's time for Oak Grove, Jennings Lodge citizens to control our own destiny.**

There are many reasons why I decided to be part of the Oak Lodge Governance Project to explore future possibilities of local governance, and I'm happy to share a few.

Twelve years ago a real estate developer from out of state bought a piece of property in the center of our neighborhood (Fairoaks), and immediately proceeded to cut down all the oaks, maples and everything else growing on the property. He then built three very large two- and three-story side-by-side homes. A few neighbors came together to talk about it, investigated it with the county, and realized there was nothing we could do or that the county would do to stop it, and the entire Oak Grove canopy and ecosystem could be at risk.

We created Clackamas County Urban Green to write and introduce a tree-protection ordinance that would cease (or at least slow) the removal of mature oak trees from our unique forest. This effort became a several-year project involving speaking to local groups throughout the county to establish a "groundswell" of support to protect the county's trees and habitat. It also involved gathering numerous letters from neighborhood, community and environmental groups, as well as testifying at county governmental hearings.

Although the Board of County Commissioners agreed to support a tree ordinance, the final product written by the planning department was "voluntary" and offered virtually no protection to the tree canopy, an

example of a primarily rural county unable to effectively address the issues an urban area.

However, as a result of the widespread support this effort generated throughout the unincorporated area of the county, TriMet and Metro asked Urban Green to help garner support for the proposed Orange Line, the light rail line that would terminate in Oak Grove on Park Avenue.

In the fall of 2009, Urban Green co-hosted two community design charrettes to gather ideas for how this might be done, inviting participants from three neighboring CPOs, neighborhood groups, business owners and active citizens. Attendance was very good, and many good ideas were collected for a project. A "collective vision" was created that would include a native forest and multiple ecosystems.

Urban Green and TriMet, together, applied for (and received) a Metro Nature in Neighborhoods Grant for the purpose of creating a new oak savannah forest with a light rail station in it. Acres of hardscape cement and asphalt were removed, as well as old degraded industrial buildings and car lots. Over 100 local residents helped plant trees and shrubs at planting events with music and food.

The Park Avenue Light Rail Station on McLoughlin Boulevard is situated at the end of a \$1.5 billion investment (the Orange Line), and the county government has yet to create any kind of station-area zoning that would take advantage of that investment. Local self governance, either as a unique independent city or merging with an already existing city could (and would) address that important need.

There are acres and acres of concrete and hardscape along the McLoughlin corridor where apartments, cafes and shops could be developed. Because of antiquated county zoning laws, new residents are forced to move into our neighborhoods and our tree canopy is continually diminishing. We've learned that it takes longer to change zoning codes on McLoughlin Boulevard (or anywhere else in the unincorporated area) than it takes to create an entire new city of Oak Grove and Jennings Lodge. The Clackamas County government has been hesitant or unwilling to confront these important issues, and local self-governance could offer new solutions to these continual challenges.

During the last decade, as part of a unique program conducted by Portland State University, over 100 government managers and academics from cities and villages throughout Japan, have visited the Park Avenue station and spoken with Oak Grove residents to learn how a local community can work with government entities to create a vision for a project like the Park Avenue station and forest. They learned that throughout the project, Urban Green drew power and guidance from its primary resource pool: the Oak Lodge community. Local residents provided the important input to the project, their advice and recommendations about the way the project should look and how it would connect with the values and character of their community. It's time for local residents and citizens of Oak Grove and Jennings Lodge address the important issues of local self-governance and controlling our own destiny.



[Chips Janger](#)

Chips Janger has been an Oak Grove resident since 2004. He was a co-founder of Urban Green (ccurbangreen.org), served as chair of the Clackamas County Library Board of Trustees and the county's Transportation System Plan advisory committee, served on Metro's high-capacity transit committee and is a senior fellow at the Mark Hatfield School of Public Service at Portland State University.

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