

Robert Liberty

METRO COUNCIL DISTRICT 6 NEWS



METRO

PEOPLE PLACES
OPEN SPACES

**Robert Liberty
represents
District 6, which
includes portions of
Northeast, Southeast
and Southwest
Portland.**



Measure 37 revives Metro’s responsibility to act for fairness and farmlands

On February 21 the Oregon Supreme Court found Measure 37 to be constitutional. Many friends and colleagues regard Measure 37 as the voters’ repudiation of the land use laws that have protected farm and forest lands from sprawl. They believe Measure 37’s revival spells inevitable doom for Metro’s plan for a compact and livable region, surrounded by green farm fields and forested foothills.

I don’t.

I believe most Oregonians support both fairness to property owners and government action to protect our quality of life from the potential bad effects of growth. Now that the Oregon Supreme Court has spoken, Metro has the opportunity, and responsibility, to respond to both sentiments.

An effort (currently called the Fair Growth and Farmlands project) I am undertaking with Councilor Carl Hosticka would reconcile Oregonians’ support for both fairness and regulations to protect our quality of life. When Metro expands the regional urban growth boundary, this government action greatly increases the value of the farmland added to the urban growth boundary because it allows it to be intensively developed. A tax on some of that farmland development windfall could create a compensation fund to pay some valid Measure 37 claims. It seems fair to match these government-created “givings” with reductions in land value caused by government regulations.

The funds could also be used to help protect farmland from development, pay for regional planning and help finance the community improvements (schools, roads, sewers, parks) needed to build new communities as our region grows. In other words, this arrangement would help development pay its own way.

We owe it to the voters to give them a constructive way to reconcile two deeply held values.

— Robert Liberty

“Boy, *nothing* is like it was thirty years ago!”

That was the comment made to me by David Douglas High School Principal Randy Hutchinson. He was referring to the social changes that have occurred since “mid-Multnomah County” was a monochrome sea of white, middle-class families, headed by a working father and a mother involved in the PTA. I visited David Douglas as part of my continuing efforts to learn about and understand the

changes taking place in the neighborhoods I represent on the Metro Council.

The District’s enrollment boomed in the years after World War II and then fell in the 1970s and 1980s. Today David Douglas High School is again the largest in Oregon, but its students bear little resemblance to the students of the Ozzie and Harriet era.

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“Nothing is the same”

continued from page 1

In 1991, only 14 percent of the students in the David Douglas School District were members of ethnic minority groups. Today, 38 percent of the students are African-American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander or Native American. Many of the “white” students are children of families recently emigrated from Eastern Europe. David Douglas students speak Spanish (10 percent), Russian (7 percent), Ukrainian (2.5 percent), Vietnamese (2 percent), Romanian (1 percent), Chinese and Cantonese (1 percent), Laotian, Chuuk, Turkish, Hmong, Serbo-Croatian, Creole and Samoan as their primary language.

The families have also been getting poorer. In the 1996-97 school year, 39 percent of the school children in the David Douglas School District qualified for free or reduced lunch; today, it is 69 percent.

One of the contributing factors to these changes has been the revival of the central Portland neighborhoods. As the housing in those neighborhoods became desirable again, prices rose, and families of more modest means moved further out to affordable housing. Meanwhile, the city of Portland had reduced land use regulations in east Portland in order to allow the construction of more houses and apartments. And it is being built; east Portland had as many new housing units built as the Pearl District in the same period. Some of the new houses and apartments are handsome additions to their neighborhoods; others seem poorly constructed and destined for decay.

Despite these waves of change, and the budget woes shared by other districts, the David Douglas School District has maintained a solid reputation for student achievement.

Superintendent Barbara Rommel and Principal Hutchinson hope Metro takes into account the ways in which our updates of the regional land use plans can help their district and students weather the changes and thrive.

New Look survey results compiled

As part of the Metro Council’s New Look at regional choices for managing growth, it commissioned an extensive public opinion survey as a means of getting accurate public input from a broad cross section of residents in the metro region.

In large part, residents’ attitudes about population growth, transportation and neighborhood density have remained remarkably consistent since similar research was done 10 years ago. The survey results show that a majority of area residents are supportive of local and regional planning for growth. This is important, as projections show that the region could see the population reach three million by 2030.

A majority of respondents – 83 percent – believe that planning is an essential tool for protecting the area’s quality of life. More than 70 percent said that their top priorities for planning are protecting rivers and streams, protecting air quality and preserving farm land and forests.

To see the entire questionnaire with results, and a version with county-by-county comparisons and other analysis, please visit www.metro-region.org/newlook.

Garden Naturally!

As part of its Nature in Neighborhoods program, Metro offers free natural gardening sessions. Workshops begin Saturday, March 4, and continue throughout the spring. For more information, see Metro’s web site, www.metro-region.org, or call Metro Recycling Information at (503) 234-3000.

About Metro

Clean air and clean water do not stop at city limits or county lines. Neither does the need for jobs, a thriving economy and good transportation choices for people and businesses in our region. Voters have asked Metro to help with the challenges that cross those lines and affect the 25 cities and three counties in the Portland metropolitan area.

A regional approach simply makes sense when it comes to protecting open space, caring for parks, planning for the best use of land, managing garbage disposal and increasing recycling. Metro oversees world-class facilities such as the Oregon Zoo, which contributes to conservation and education, and the Oregon Convention Center, which benefits the region’s economy.

Your Metro representatives

Metro Council President
David Bragdon

Metro Councilors
Rod Park, District 1
Brian Newman, District 2
Carl Hosticka, District 3
Susan McLain, District 4
Rex Burkholder, District 5
Robert Liberty, District 6

Auditor
Alexis Dow, CPA

Councilor Robert Liberty contact information

Address	600 NE Grand Ave. Portland, OR 97232
Phone	(503) 797-1552
Fax	(503) 797-1793
E-mail	libertyr@metro.dst.or.us
Assistant	Linnea Nelson
Phone	(503) 797-1886
E-mail	nelsonl@metro.dst.or.us
Web	www.metro-region.org

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