

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.



Sticker Shock

Biking home from a meeting in Gateway last month, I passed a new home built in the Montavilla neighborhood, just a few blocks west of 82nd Avenue. I couldn't resist looking at the advertising flyer which had "Price Reduced" hand-written on it. The price had been reduced ... to just under a half-million dollars. A few days ago I saw the price advertised for the new in-fill house nearing completion next door to us – \$675,000. (See my April 2007 column, "The Infill Next Door.")

Sticker shock was my reaction in both cases.

The silver lining (or is it gold lining?) on my sticker shock is that the price represents the revival of neighborhoods that once were struggling (including my own neighborhood). It represents the new demand for living in close-in neighborhoods and the popularity of our region. For the homeowners nearby, it represents a growth in the asset they need for retirement or to finance a child's education.

But that price also represents the sharply rising barriers to home ownership in Portland, a problem common to West Coast cities.

Some people believe that if only Metro would add land to the boundary we could assure affordable housing.

In 2002 the Metro Council added more than 18,000 acres to the urban growth boundary. That is more than 27 square miles, about a quarter more than the land in Gresham (population 97,000.) And what happened to home prices in the four years after the land was added to the boundary?

The average sale price for all types of houses increased by almost \$100,000.

Why? Two reasons are obvious. First, during a period of high demand buyers will pay whatever they can afford, no matter what the builder paid for land, or wood, or concrete or labor. That is one reason why the median price for an existing single-family home in Southern California – where there is no urban growth boundary to constrain outward sprawl – is \$727,000 (Orange County) compared to \$298,300 in Portland.

Second, although Metro can add land to the boundary, it cannot force taxpayers to pay more taxes for the new roads, the new water and sewer lines, the new schools, fire stations and parks that make new homes and apartments feasible. Without the new infrastructure and the new services, land can't be developed.

So what can we do? There is no simple solution, but there are many small things that can be done that will help.

Many government agencies and nonprofit organizations have been working hard to provide housing choices (rental and ownership) for families of modest means.

This month I am proposing an amendment to the Metro budget to provide \$1 million to be used as seed capital to leverage additional funds to establish a \$10 to \$20

continued

Sticker shock

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million regional revolving loan fund to help build housing for families with incomes below average. The fund, which would be independent from Metro, would help buy land, build new homes and apartments and protect existing housing choices in the region's various downtowns, near light rail stations and along streets with good transit service.

Even if that effort is successful, much more will need to be done by government, the private sector and nonprofits to keep our region affordable as well as livable and lovable.

Future columns will explore other responses that will help us cope with sticker shock.

— Robert Liberty

Concerned about what is happening in your neighborhood?

Then you need to attend the

2040 Match of the Century: Corridors vs. Centers

7 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 26
Metro Council Chamber
600 NE Grand Avenue, Portland

Get a ringside seat for a lively debate on different strategies for implementing the 2040 growth concept, our region's plan for the future – featuring heavy-weight professors Patrick (“Corridors”) Condon, University of British Columbia, and Gordon (“Centers”) Price, Simon Fraser University and refereed by Metro Councilor Robert Liberty.

Condon, professor of landscape architecture at UBC, favors low and mid-rise development along transit corridors – three and four story mixtures of housing, stores, restaurants, professional services and offices. Price, director of the City Program at SFU and former Vancouver BC city councilor, is a strong supporter of the strategy emphasizing growth in high-energy, high-density centers.

Both contenders are internationally recognized experts in their fields who are familiar with the Portland metropolitan region. Both approaches are consistent with our region's 2040 plan for growth. Will either strategy be victorious, or will it be a draw? Can both sides win? You be the judge.

We'll provide the popcorn.

This event is free and no reservations are required. The Metro Regional Center can be easily reached on the red and blue MAX lines from the Convention Center or NE 7th stops or by bus lines #6 and #9. It is just a few blocks from the Rose Quarter transit center. For more information, check Metro's online calendar at calendar.metro-region.org.

Metro Council considers options for convention center hotel

The Metro Council is evaluating alternatives to help the Oregon Convention Center maintain its financial health and fulfill its regional economic development objectives (by continuing to attract large conventions from outside the region). The Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission, which manages the OCC on behalf of Metro, has commissioned studies analyzing the following alternatives:

- Developing a 600-room, publicly owned, privately operated headquarters hotel
- Developing a small-scale privately owned and operated hotel with public financial support
- Providing enhanced financial incentives to prospective conventions, such as improved transportation and visitor service
- Changing the mission of the OCC to focus on regional and local meetings
- Maintaining the status quo and increasing the OCC's levels of financial support for operations

The consultants' studies are available via the Metro website at www.metro-region.org/hotel.

The Metro Council will hold a public hearing at its 2 p.m. Sept. 20 meeting and is scheduled to vote at its 2 p.m. Sept. 27 meeting. All meetings are in the Metro Council Chamber at 600 NE Grand Ave. in Portland.

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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.

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September 2007 dch/final
Printed on recycled paper