

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

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Urban Growth Boundary Hearing

Medford City Council, August 6, 7 p.m.

I am Caren Caldwell, Associate Minister at the Medford Congregational United Church of Christ. And I am with Teddie Hight, a member of the church.

We thank you for holding these hearings with the intention of listening to all who would speak to you about the proposed Urban Growth Boundary expansion. Your commitment shows that you appreciate the importance of having community members' input in a process which will affect all of us for decades to come as well as future generations of Medford residents.

Today we are representing the Green Ministry Team of our church. The United Church of Christ has served the Medford community on E. Jackson Street for 62 years. Our congregation engages in such ministries as serving at-risk and homeless youth, participating in Habitat for Humanity, partnering in local emergency preparation, as well as advocating on justice, peace, environmental and climate concerns.

As people of faith, we value community that practices love of neighbor and stewardship of creation. The next fifty years constitute a critical period in human history. We must meet human needs while using our finite resources in a way that will maintain a healthy planet Earth. At the local level, the critical element over the next half century will be the City's development decisions.

Our Green Ministry Team has examined the original City staff proposal to expand Medford's UGB as well as the amended Planning Commission proposal. We have held those proposals up to the light of our values, the goals of Oregon's Land Use Law, and Medford's Comprehensive.

This is what we've concluded: The primary criteria for deciding the number and location of acres to add to the UGB must be how those acres will be used.

We support the development of neighborhoods that include homes that will be affordable to a diverse population and close to work places, schools, retail, community services, and parks.

And we support a mix that is environmentally sustainable and equitable in its impact on all Medford's people, whatever their income level, race, or culture.

We do not support establishing more monoculture neighborhoods that permit land speculation, build-in permanent inequality, and cause residents and workers to depend on personal cars which produce more and more greenhouse gas emissions and pollute air and water.

We'd like to emphasize three main points. We will be citing a publication from the United States Environmental Protection Agency titled "Creating Equitable, Healthy, and Sustainable Communities" published in February 2013.

First, before developing new properties, we ask the City to strengthen existing neighborhoods and promote infill of acres already within the city limits. This is called the "Fix-It First" Model.

For example, many concrete-covered properties once used to showcase vehicles for sale are vacant and need to be recycled and reused in a better ecological way to meet the needs of people for affordable housing and jobs that pay living wages.

These acres are located on public transportation routes. What creative solutions can rejuvenate ugly blighted areas into something we can be proud of and will convince residents that they have found their new home or a place to start a business?

Taking care of what we have in our current UGB is a wise first step. In the next 50 years, our community will have to provide homes, businesses, and infrastructure to a growing population. We will also see climate change challenges that will increase demands on clean water, air and energy sources. We will have to conserve land and resources to meet those goals.

Second, we urge the City to provide diverse housing choices that accommodate people of modest means and in varied stages of life from birth to young adult to retirement. For us, affordable housing is a top social justice concern.

There is a building boom in MD-5, the parcel located between Barnett and Cherry Lane. But the cost of those homes is not affordable for many Medford residents. The average selling price is currently about \$400,000 with some in the \$700,000 range. We've been told by a local realtor that the cost of those homes has risen 12-15% in the past 7-8 months, or about 2% per month.

Currently we have a shortage of rentals. There is a less than 2% vacancy rate in Medford and surrounding communities. At the same time, one thousand plus Medford School District students are without secure housing for themselves and their families. And a whopping 33% of Medford's population are low income, according to Medford's Comprehensive Plan.

The demand for affordable housing exceeds what we are currently providing and what we will need in the future. We have a shortage of over 4,400 affordable housing units right now. So, the UGB plan needs to include the right types of land in the right places to make sure that this problem is resolved.

Third, we support neighborhood designs that provide residents, students, workers, and shoppers with a variety of transportation options, including public transit. That kind of development requires densities and infill adequate to sustain bus routes as well as accommodating safe walking and biking paths.

Anyone living in any of the proposed new developments will need transportation. We know that RVTD has no bus routes now nor are any planned in the future for the SE part of the city.

Fact: The average American family spends 18% of their household income on transportation. Very low income households can spend 55% or more! So affordable public transit is vital to low income families as well as to a clean environment.

People living furthest from the city center are isolated geographically and often physically and socially. Health should be a consideration for planners. Sidewalks and bike lanes get people moving. Our population can be healthier if physical activity is part of their daily routine.

Using our resources to create safe ways of transporting ourselves rather than developing outlying new subdivisions serves more residents and creates stronger community.

In summary, inclusive communities with residents of all ages, races, incomes and ethnicities are richer places for people to live and raise their families. It is important to provide decent homes in safe neighborhoods, convenient to jobs, good schools, and daily necessities for people of all income levels, family size, and stages of life.

Therefore, we urge you to only add acres to the UGB that come with a pre-determined goal to design equitable, healthy, and sustainably mixed neighborhoods with affordable housing and diverse transportation options. And that only after employing a "fix-it first" policy for revitalizing existing neighborhoods. Thank you.