

AGO Report

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AGO Heads to the Legislature

Sarah Sameh

With the 2003 legislative session already underway, AGO is gearing up to take action. Working with schools, public safety officials, and non-profit and community organizations, AGO is poised to bring attention to three bills relating to growth. The first one is our top priority and will demand our full attention.

- Expanding Systems Development Charges (SDCs) to include schools, police and fire, libraries, and community colleges;
- Allowing communities to determine their own rate of growth; and
- Disclosing the true costs of growth associated with any new development.

In addition to partnering with numerous other reputable groups to address the issue of SDCs, AGO is proud to announce the addition of a part-time lobbyist, Richard Reid. A Salem resident and active member of City Watch, Reid brings years of experience, vast knowledge about growth issues, and an uncompromising passion for making growth pay its way. Founded in 1994, City Watch is a group of citizen volunteers who feel it is vitally important that growth pay its own way. Espousing a strong belief that it is possible for a community to grow without sacrificing its quality of life, the organization has been instrumental in raising community awareness about SDCs and even succeeded in putting an SDC-related measure on the local Salem ballot.

Reid recognizes that Salem's issues are widely identified as common problems among other Oregon cities. Today 30 Oregon cities have enacted charter changes requiring voter approval on annexations. Many of these cities are also interested in expanding the list of allowable SDCs, as they have not been able to keep pace with the infrastructure needed to accommodate the growth rate and are desperate for new growth to pay its way.

Reid will be working in concert with the broader coalition, which includes Senators Charlie Ringo and Kurt Schrader. Schrader hopes the recession and current local and statewide budget crises will create a more receptive atmosphere for revenue proposals that help lower future tax obligations. "The fairness issue is more paramount now than ever," states Schrader. "New residential growth must pay its own way. New school construction is a major cost to taxpayers—more than almost any other public facility. We already have SDCs for sewer water, storm water, transportation and parks. Adding schools is a no-brainer and helps us protect our most important resource, our children."

Schrader believes that before taxpayers are asked for new school bonds, developers should pay their fair share. "Washington and California do it and are better funded with better schools. This is not about

Alternatives to Growth Oregon

AGO strives to leave succeeding generations of Oregonians a more economically prosperous, environmentally healthy, and socially just State by encouraging progress toward a sustainable society, and discouraging growth focused on increased population and consumption.

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stopping progress, it's about making sure we have growth that pays its own way and keeps our communities livable."

A planning commissioner for

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Discussion Courses That Change Lives

The Northwest Earth Institute, NWEI, offers discussion courses that provide an enjoyable, supportive setting in which to examine personal values and habits, engage in stimulating discussion, and make personal changes on behalf of the earth. Courses consist of 7 to 12 people who meet weekly for about an hour to discuss readings from a course book. Course books contain a diverse collection of essays, articles, and book excerpts organized around weekly themes to create lively discussion. Courses offered:

- **Voluntary Simplicity** - Addresses the distractions of modern society that keep us from caring for ourselves, our relationships, and our environment.
- **Exploring Deep Ecology** - Examines how personal values affect the way we view and treat the Earth.
- **Discovering a Sense of Place** - Focuses on knowing and protecting our place.
- **Choices for Sustainable Living** - Explores the meaning of sustainable living and the ties between lifestyle choices and their impact on the Earth.

For more information see, www.nwei.org or call 503.227.2807

"NWEI discussion courses are a great opportunity for personal education and growth on several levels. Discussing the course topics at length with the group really deepened my learning and encouraged me to make real changes in my thoughts and actions."

-Brian Beinlich, AGO Board Member and NWEI course participant

Executive Director's Report

Sarah Sameh

It has been an exciting few months at AGO, as we've been preparing for the legislative session and positioning ourselves to put forth legislation addressing the true costs of growth. By collaborating with schools, police and fire departments, libraries, and non-profits, and by relying on the dedication of legislators Kurt Schrader and Charlie Ringo, AGO hopes to gain momentum and success on expanding the list of allowable SDCs. One of our greatest challenges, as always, is getting the word out to the public and letting our supporters and potential supporters know how to get involved. We hope this newsletter will give you the background information you need in order to motivate you to take action. We have all sorts of ways for you to help us push legislation—from writing letters to legislators and editors (which are conveniently located on our website at www.AGOregon.org), to getting involved in our lobbying efforts in Salem.

You may have seen our recent Opinion Editorial published on *The Oregonian's* website. We've re-printed it here at the request of some of our supporters. It's a sample of a letter that you, too, can submit to your local editors and elected officials to encourage them to start addressing Oregon's growth issues.

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There is a great deal of talk in the circles of power about the need to "lure" more economic growth to Oregon, to the Portland area in particular. In an oblique reference to spending taxpayer money and offering out-of-state corporations substantial financial incentives to move here, Mayor Vera Katz talks about Portland having to "pay to play." Never mind that the costs of such a policy fall

on the backs of average taxpayers while the benefits largely go to distant corporate executives and shareholders and a small select group of local "stakeholders."

Nationwide, cities find themselves in a vicious cycle of competition to see who can give away the most to a prospective new corporate resident. Once a city "wins" this competition by giving away more financial benefits than any of its competitors, it finds that it not only loses the revenue stream that a non-subsidized transaction would have brought, but it now must provide services and infrastructure to the new company in addition to all the new residents who moved here for the new jobs.

We always hear the familiar litany about the jobs that the new company will create. Conveniently omitted from this litany is any mention of the fact that over 50% of those new jobs will probably be filled not by local residents but by new residents who followed the jobs here. This reduces opportunities for current residents, and further compounds their discomfort by triggering tax increases to pay for increased government services required by the increased population, such as schools, police and fire stations, libraries, and parks.

The result is increased government spending beyond any new tax revenues generated by the company, as well as higher property taxes for current residents to pay for the growth spawned by the new company's arrival. Throw in more crowding in our schools, more congestion on local roads, and decreased levels of basic government services, and you might begin to conclude that it's not worth bringing the new corporation in after all. And will the new company remain sound and choose not to look for the next best deal after it burns through all of the financial incentives it received for locating here in the first place?

Our politicians and planners love to promise that when the next round of new companies arrives, our employment and economic problems will be solved. But if that is the case, why, after nearly a decade of unprecedented economic and population growth, is Oregon facing such horrific budgetary problems? Why, in a state that already boasts the shortest school year in the country, are we facing massive cuts to our education budget and to other social programs? If growth is such a financial boon, why are we facing a \$15 billion backlog of road and bridge maintenance? Why do we have record numbers of poor and hungry

The Growth Machine Targets West Linn and the Stafford Triangle

Chuck Adams, Outreach Director

An old Chinese curse says, "May you live in interesting times." Well, interesting times have certainly arrived for residents of West Linn and Lake Oswego.

The Stafford Triangle is an area of largely undeveloped rural land comprising more than 2000 acres lying between West Linn and Lake Oswego. Maintenance of the Stafford Triangle as a buffer between the communities is a key component in the West Linn comprehensive plan and is necessary to preserve the small town character and quality of life which are so valued by West Linn residents.

In late October and early November of 2002, with absolutely no warning, much less any time for significant public input, the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners and the Metro Council arbitrarily decided to include the Stafford Triangle in the UGB. This was done without consulting the cities of West Linn or Lake Oswego, both of which would be enormously impacted by any significant growth in this area.

After a storm of protest from both cities, Metro backpedaled and reduced the proposed addition from over 2000 acres to 373 acres. That was hardly a concession, however, as West Linn has stated repeatedly that it cannot afford to provide the urban services needed to develop this area, which is hard on West Linn's western boundary.

A casual observer might surmise that Metro was being reasonable by reducing the included area from 2000 acres down to 373 acres, but nothing could be further from the truth. The fact that Metro made this move with no advance notice to either the general public or the cities affected, coupled with the fact that developers have long cast covetous eyes on the triangle, makes the motives of county commissioners and Metro councilors suspect. In addition, by placing the 373 acres well away from Lake Oswego, Metro was able to dilute opposition from that city so that it only had to deal with the ire of one, smaller city.

They may have miscalculated. West Linn city officials are gearing up to appeal the Metro decision to the state Department of Land Conservation and Development. "The sheer capricious arrogance of this decision is breathtaking," said West Linn Mayor David Dodds.

The Stafford Triangle was one of nine areas around the region scheduled to be brought into the UGB. Interestingly, it was the only area for which Mike Burton, Metro's executive officer, did not hold public meetings.

The city of West Linn has been ahead of the curve on many issues of concern to AGO. The city has the highest level of SDCs in the state and requires voter approval of any proposed annexation of land by the city. The mayor and city council have

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Oregon Court Upholds Government's Ability to Charge SDCs

The Homebuilders Association of Metropolitan Portland recently challenged the Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District's ability to charge a system development charge to fund parks and recreation facilities. The Homebuilders Association claimed that the charges violate state and federal constitutional protections against taking private property "without just compensation."

The court disagreed and upheld a decision by Washington County Circuit Judge Gayle Nachtigal. In its ruling, the court found that SDCs do not deprive property owners of "all substantial beneficial or economically viable use of the property." The court also said that the home builders didn't provide any proof that the fees are "unreasonable or arbitrary."

SAVE THE DATE!

Monday, March 24, 2003
Environmental Lobby Day

Join over 300 activists from across the state in Salem to attend in-depth briefings about the hottest conservation issues and meet directly with your elected representatives. Also that day several population advocacy groups, AGO included, will be doing a Green Umbrella Walk around the capitol to advocate for Oregon's version of the Equity Prescription Act. For more information, watch for an email action alert, or call us at (503) 222-0282.

SDCs Make Growth Pay Its Way

Sarah Sameh, Executive Director

The past year of tremendous budget woes at the state level propelled AGO to once again take its message to the Oregon State Legislature. This time, however, AGO is joined by dozens of other organizations and Oregon cities. According to a report published by the League of Oregon Cities, population growth and development have increased the demand for city services, yet cities are hard-pressed to provide basic services such as police, fire, parks, and libraries.

SDCs, or impact fees, are fees collected by local governments to offset the costs of public improvements associated with new development. They are one-time fees that are collected at the time a building permit is issued. They are not a tax. The collected fees must be used for capital improvements for municipal services such as water supply, treatment, and distribution; waste water collection, transmission, treatment, and disposal; drainage and flood control; transportation; and parks and recreation. More than 15 cities have passed resolutions supporting the expansion of Systems Development Charges (SDCs), including Salem, Sherwood, West Linn, and Florence.

The basic premise behind SDCs is that taxes to existing residents should not increase because of new development. SDCs are generally supported by existing residents as a fair way to pay for new growth, as the costs of SDCs should fall on those who generate the need for new and expanded infrastructure. While SDCs

do generate more money to build much needed infrastructure, estimates show that 20 percent of the cost of residential development remains unfunded by local governments.

Bills to Address the SDC Issue

In past legislative sessions AGO has introduced bills to expand SDCs. One such bill proposed the addition of public schools, community colleges, library districts, and fire and police protection to the definition of capital improvements for which SDCs may be imposed. The bill never got a hearing. Two other bills proposed expanding SDCs to include other city services. Another bill proposed simply adding schools that provide primary and secondary education. It died in committee.

Studies have shown that Oregon cities have lower SDC fees than the national average—even while Oregon (and the Pacific Northwest in general) is growing at twice the national rate. In a state where development interests run high, it's not surprising that a strong lobby exists against SDCs, since SDCs raise the costs of development. But with 98 percent of Oregonians expressing sentiments that the state is big enough or too big already, whose voices are being heard by the Oregon Legislature?

AGO is grateful for legislators like Kurt Schrader, Charlie Ringo, and former legislator Chris Beck, all of whom have tried to pass laws letting cities charge developers the cost

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AGO Heads to OR Legislature

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16 years in Canby, Schrader saw the high cost new development had on taxpayers. "While developers paid their fair share for on-site hookups, they paid nothing for the long-term capital impact that development had on taxpayers who were left holding the bag for future sewer plants, collection systems, traffic signals, recreational areas, and schools."

Sharing similar beliefs, Senator Charlie Ringo says he observes firsthand the inability of communities to fund the construction of new infrastructure and maintain current service levels without increasing local taxes or running ever-larger deficits. Says Ringo, "Growth neutral policies—policies that require growth to pay its own way—are a key to the future ability of local governments to balance revenues

and expenses, maintain current service levels, and improve the quality of community life."

AGO believes the atmosphere in Oregon is ripe to make changes to the SDC law. Cities, non-profit groups, public safety officials, schools, and libraries have come together to voice a message that must be heard by legislators:

Unlimited growth in Oregon is not paying its way, and those suffering are schoolchildren, the elderly, families, and current residents. In other words, almost everyone is suffering from unlimited growth.

Citizen involvement is the cornerstone of public process. We cannot do it without you, and your help has never been as needed as it is now. Please join us as we push to make positive change in Oregon.

Executive Director's Report

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Oregonians? Why does it now take substantially longer to reach downtown than it did a decade ago?

Now take a moment to think about an Oregon that focuses on employing all of the people who already live here and supports locally owned businesses that actually have a stake in local communities and residents; an Oregon that no longer spends taxpayer dollars on subsidies to huge corporations with distant shareholders or squanders tax money on development that is not economically viable.

Let's study the true costs of growth and insist on growth impact statements that detail the full impacts of any proposed growth on our communities and on our state. Growth will not and need not cease overnight, but at least let's insist that it pay its full costs.

Finally, let's begin a public discussion of what we want a future Oregon to look like. Let's expand our discussion of how and where to grow to include the topic of when and how to stop growing. Physical growth will stop at some point, make no mistake about it; the only question is when. Do we grow until Portland becomes another Los Angeles? Do we grow until we lose many of the unique qualities of Oregon that brought us here in the first place? Or do we proactively plan for and begin talking about an optimum size for Oregon and how we can get there?

Most people want to improve their lives. Studies have indicated that there is no direct link between increasing the size of a city and increasing the income of the average inhabitant or improving their quality of life. Indeed there is growing evidence that beyond some optimal size just the opposite occurs; that is, when a city grows beyond certain limits, per capita income and quality of life decrease.

We need some answers and we need them soon. Let's begin the dialogue now.

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The Oregonian, December 16, 2002

Living Within Limits

Training in Ashland

This January we trained a team of volunteer presenters in Ashland. The 3-hour training provided participants with the necessary knowledge, skills, and materials to present the program in their community. The training included an introduction to the issues, teaching methods, and role-playing of activities. Volunteers were given curriculum packets and one "point person" took responsibility for the box of teaching materials that is provided for their use.

Reaching out to Middle Schools

We were thrilled to recently receive several inquires from middle school teachers who are interested in our program. While Living Within Limits was originally designed for high schoolers, it can easily be adapted for middle school students. This winter and spring we will be reaching out to more middle schools – and hopefully reaching more students!

Positive Feedback

Thank you very much for taking the time to present your "Living Within Limits" program to our Biology classes. We thoroughly enjoyed your presentation. It gave us a lot to think about in terms of population growth as well as distribution and use of resources. The follow-up activity of calculating our ecological footprint was also very informative – many of us have extremely large footprints! Hopefully we will be able to modify some of our lifestyle habits in order to reduce our footprint size.

Kathleen Sprague and her 2nd and 3rd period Biology classes, Aloha High School

From Here to There

Growth News From Around the Country

Nationwide

In the November 2002 election, voters in 79 communities from 22 states passed ballot measures to spend \$2.6 billion for protecting land for parks and open space.

Nevada

Nevada voters recently approved three significant initiatives to protect open lands from urban sprawl, including the biggest conservation bond measure in state history. The major reason given for the success of these initiatives: unchecked growth. Nevada has a whopping 4.7% annual rate, making it the nation's fastest growing state.

California

The November elections saw nearly two dozen municipalities in the state voting on measures designed to clamp down on development. Unfortunately, the state is adding 500,000 new residents each year at the same time that current residents are trying to curb growth.

Virginia

In Albemarle County, Virginia, a new organization was recently formed that mirrors much of the mission and goals of AGO. Advocates for a Sustainable Albemarle Population (ASAP) argues that Albemarle County, a community of 87,000 surrounding the small city of Charlottesville, must begin immediately to aim at a stationary population. For more information see www.stopgrowthASAP.org or email crijack@cville.net

AGO Launches New Website

Sarah Bidwell, Administrative Director

In the beginning of February AGO will be launching its new website—redesigned to be a more effective tool in communicating our message and facilitating action on growth issues. We hope that you find it useful and we encourage your suggestions for making it better. Some features to check out include:

Act Now!

This new section includes a list of actions you can take on growth issues, and has two special features to help you:

- **Letter-writing Tool** – Allows you to send letters to your state senators and representatives regarding growth-related legislation. We've written the letters—you just add your personal note, click, and send!
- **Toolkit for Local Growth Activists** – Includes practical tools to use in taking charge of growth in your community: model ordinances and resolutions, sample testimony and letters, growth research, polling data, and much more!

The Alternatives

This section is the why, what, and how of alternatives to growth. We describe how our current rates of population and consumption growth are unsustainable and we provide a listing of facts concerning the environmental, social, and financial costs of growth. You'll also find the 12 Myths of Growth and success stories that address the question—what are the alternatives to growth?

A collection of success stories from Oregon and around the nation—in addition to AGO's programs—is the beginning of how we, and others, are implementing the alternatives. This section will be constantly changing with new ideas and stories. We encourage your additions!

In the future, look for events listed on the calendar, more success stories from around the state and nation, and up-to-date news from the chapters.

SDCs Make Growth Pay Its Way

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of building the schools and libraries needed to accommodate the new residents their projects will attract. With a coalition of other groups and cities behind it, AGO hopes other like-minded legislators will work to push forward an expanded list of allowable SDCs. Until politicians recognize the need to make new growth pay its way, the costs and consequences of unlimited growth will continue to fall on existing residents...and ultimately, we'll all lose.

AGO Around the State

Chuck Adams, Outreach Director

Southern Oregon

At a November 2002 meeting in Ashland, participants discussed a wide range of growth related issues affecting the Ashland-Medford area. Future meetings will focus on prioritizing these issues and defining local efforts for member action.

Grants Pass

A diverse group of local activists, including members of the Siskiyou Project, The Pacific Green Party, AGO, and a local equestrian society, met to discuss issues related to growth, open space, and the environment.

Issues discussed included rampant development, big box stores and water quality. Strategies for dealing with these concerns were proposed and a future meeting was scheduled for early in 2003.

Salem

Several planning meetings, including a daylong open forum, led to the launching of a new coalition group, Citizens for Livable Communities (CLC). The new Salem group is a mix of progressive organizations from throughout Marion County.

Salem area AGO members were instrumental in creating the new entity and AGO has a seat on the Steering Committee. CLC's goal is to provide strong citizen input to local government on a number of issues, especially those emphasizing the impacts of growth. One of the goals of the coalition includes urging the city council to enact regulations requiring that all new development project applicants prepare a detailed Community/Growth Impact Statement.

PLANNED GIVING

Considering a planned gift? AGO has opportunities for supporters to contribute appreciated assets such as gifts of stock and real estate, or to support AGO through bequests in wills. These charitable giving mechanisms offer significant tax savings to the donor while providing serious support for the preservation of Oregon. If you are interested in making a planned gift and would like more information, please contact AGO's executive director, Sarah Sameh, at sarahsameh@agoregon.org or 541.488.1702 x108.

MEMBERSHIP / CONTRIBUTION FORM

Yes, I want to make Oregon better, not bigger and

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Stafford Triangle

Continued from page 3

passed resolutions urging the state legislature to allow communities to charge growth for more of its impact costs by including schools, libraries, police and fire protection on the list of allowable SDCs. And finally, the city has also urged the state legislature to repeal or modify the 20-year land supply law that forces local communities to plan for growth that they neither want nor can afford.

Is It Time for You to Renew?

Check out your renewal date that is printed above your name on the mailing label. Use the form on page 7 to continue your support!



Alternatives to Growth
Oregon

205 SE Grand Ave., Suite 203
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Aspirin is not a cure for cancer, although it may make the patient more comfortable. Growth management and planning are not a solution to continued growth, they simply allow us to feel less bad about it.

- PROFESSOR AL BARTLETT

AGO Member Meeting

Tues., February 25, 2003, 7:00 pm

Room 327, Smith Center, PSU

To kick off an exciting and hopefully successful legislative session, join other AGO members on Tuesday, February 25 at Portland State University to learn about and discuss AGO's legislative agenda. Richard Reid, active member of Salem City Watch and part-time lobbyist for AGO (see page 1), will present AGO's legislative goals for the 2003 Oregon Legislature and explain how you can participate in helping to pass our bills.

One of AGO's primary objectives over the next six months is passage of legislation allowing communities to charge the full cost of growth (see page 1). Your participation in making this happen is critical to our success! We hope to see you there!

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