

The Underminers

The Draft Bill from the Big Look Task Force

So what's their design strategy, the how behind what they are trying to do? We know their goal. It's the same one we've voted against over and over again. Cripple Oregon's unique land use planning program. And do it quietly this time so that hardly anybody else notices and takes their own Big Look.

First, reassure the people.

"The Oregon's Land Use Program is fine, just fine, but times have changed since the Tom McCall 1970s when Senate Bill 100 was passed. And it's long past time the program underwent a modest facelift. So to bring it up to date, the Big Look Committee is proposing a few tucks here and there to iron out some of the wrinkles. Nothing drastic, of course – the program is fine, just fine – but it does need a few miner – whoops! I mean - minor changes."

Second, create some new overarching "guiding" principles.

Why? Because principals are higher and more general than goals and can be used to provide a new legal way to override and regulate the force and effectiveness of the 19 – hard won - Land Use Goals that are the foundation of the program.

Third, expand the authority for regional land use planning. Authorize "the establishment of regional definitions of "agricultural land" and "forest land" for purposes of land use goal setting."

Why? So that the main programmatic definitions become regional economically driven definitions and state control is effectively given over to the counties banding together as "regions". "Sorry, DLCDC," we can imagine the conversation going, "but that's not the way we define forest land over here."

Fourth, direct the Land Conservation and Development Commission to carry out policy-neutral reviews and audits of the land use system to reduce complexity.

Yes, yes, we must reduce complexity. Never mind that it takes 1" of fertile topsoil 400-1000 years to develop or that forests are complex ecosystems, systems we will increasingly depend on to help sequester carbon to slow global warming. Dumbing things down does usually work: "Owls or jobs." Or how about, "You can't eat ecology with a fork."

And policy neutral reviews and audits should probably read policy-neutered reviews, since that is the intention. There is no such thing as a policy neutral review, since that is the purpose of the review – to see that a policy, for example, preserving agricultural land or establishing urban growth boundaries, is actually being followed in a proposed plan.

Fifth, provide "for [a] state strategic plan integrating land use, transportation and economic development priorities," and direct the DLCDC "to develop performance measures for each statewide land use goal."

In other words, make the land use program more responsive to state economic development priorities and keep the state planners busy measuring things so that they don't have as much time to be interfering with "progress" in the counties.

Sixth, declare it an emergency, so that the bill becomes effective on passage.

Translation: don't let them catch their breath or someone will notice that the time for this form of Bush Era deregulation has past.

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You have to give them credit, the underminers. It's a very clever and well-coordinated strategy – a professional piece of work. They undermine both from above and below. They undermine the language while they redefine the Land Use Program's purpose as subservient to economic development in the state. They undermine state supervision by shifting power back to the counties - where the most supervision has been needed - under the subterfuge that they are now "regions" with special needs under the guiding principle D. Provide fairness and equity to all Oregonians." If only we really meant that.

They hope that no one will notice their digging, or that hardly anyone will look up at their new guiding, policy-neutering principles from on high.

Take a Big Look up and under, Oregon, and hold on once more to the land of your McCall-given heritage.