

Readers' letters

O'Toole was incorrect

To the Editors:

There are several specific points in Randall O'Toole's piece "2040: A Vision Flawed" (Winter 1998) that I believe are incorrect and therefore add to the level of misinformation circulating in the Portland region.

"Metro ... makes homeowners pay property taxes to build light rail." Taxes for light rail have been and will be voted on by the residents of the region. Metro does not have the authority to impose property taxes on homeowners.

"Metro ... wants cities to re-zone many neighborhoods of single family homes for multi-family housing." The regional vision provides that most of the increases in density will occur in concentrations along major transportation routes, such as in regional centers and corridors; and each jurisdiction in the region has flexibility in how it addresses the management of growth within its community. In my experience, most or all cities in the region are highly unlikely to rezone single family neighborhoods for multi-family housing.

"The Top o' Scott golf course ... is slated now for high-density housing and office developments." One of several options being discussed as part of the Clackamas Regional Center Area planning effort proposed a mix of housing types, including single family units, open space and office development; another option was to retain the open space designation. Incidentally, the advisory committee for the plan has recommended retention of that designation.

"Most [of the greenspaces, parks, and streams purchased are] dedicated to wildlife habitat; almost none will be parks and playgrounds." This is correct and these are the lands that Metro described and included in the bond measure which was passed by voters to purchase these spaces; the focus was never on parks and playgrounds.

"Metro wants to use [light rail] as a wedge to redevelop neighborhoods to high densities." Metro and many jurisdictions in the region are encouraging or allowing for higher density development near light rail stations to provide opportunities for the use of alternative transportation modes for more people. In addition, Metro does not have the authority to redevelop neighborhoods, with or without a "wedge."

Sumner Sharpe,
Pacific Rim Resources, Portland

Tax incentives not enough

To the Editors:

Having been involved in environmental activism the last 20 years, I took special interest in the environmental economics theme in your last edition. Inherent in the arguments presented were the ideas that we need to work with—not against—natural resource extractors, polluters, and stake holders to find solutions, while using tax incentives to correct environmental problems and produce revenue. While embracing these proactive techniques as worthy, I do not believe they will get us where we want to go without the help of grass roots environmentalists to serve as watch dogs by filing law suits when necessary and cutting through the corporate "green screen" that pretends most environmental problems have been solved already.

I doubt that many corporations would be willing to discuss environmental issues with us if activists had not fought for tough environmental laws and did not continue to push for enforcement. When we get the corporate representatives to the negotiating table, we must remember that they are there to protect their profits. Make no mistake, the corporations that are the worst environmental abusers are too often the very corporations that generate the largest profits. If we allow the corporations to simply pass along environmental taxes to the public, we may get some grudging acceptance from corporate leaders for those taxes. This, however, will do little to solve environmental problems, since the public has little control over bad production processes and is provided with few real alternatives to the products that are marketed. The real decisions are made in the boardrooms of corporate America, and those decisions are unlikely to change unless the often huge corporate profits that result from environmental abuses are taxed. Try to do that, and you will quickly see why simply working with these folks will not solve environmental problems.

A few of the articles in your environmental economics forum assumed that wind power is a green energy solution. Our experience with wind-power developers in the Gorge has shown that that is not necessarily so. The Gorge is well-known for its winds, but it is also prime bird habitat, and wind-power generators kill birds. When the wind-power industry first announced it wanted to do business in the Northwest, it met with wildlife agencies and environmental groups and agreed to five voluntary siting criteria in

order to garner support. Those siting criteria would have gone far to protect birds and their habitat, plus protect Native American sacred sites and food gathering areas and address other environmental concerns. However, when actual siting of industrial wind farms occurred it became apparent that the developers' only concern was to find the most windy sites closest to power lines. Virtually every siting criterion was violated. The solution to the bird kills was to secure bird kill permits to take federally protected birds. The solution to bad siting was to offer inadequate mitigation, and when the permit for one wind farm was secured, the company immediately applied for relief from their promised mitigation measures. These are not acceptable patterns for a green energy solution.

Neither should we simply accept that all environmental groups are sincere and vigorous defenders of the environment. Too many of them are funded by grants that ultimately come from the corporations that cause our environmental problems. You might wonder how the environmental groups reacted when their voluntary siting criteria for wind farms were trampled on. Most of them ignored it, some of them tried to deny the problem and cover it up, but a few "loose cannons" like us are pushing for mandatory siting criteria and regional planning before wind power is allowed to proceed in the Northwest.

We must face the fact that "win-win" environmental solutions are rare, and that true confrontation and advocacy for the environment will always be a necessary component of a healthy environmental movement.

Dave Thies, President, Columbia Gorge Audubon Society

O'Toole Was Unconvincing

To the Editors:

Mr. O'Toole correctly articulates some of the significant challenges faced by the 2040 plan. However, I found his argument on population density unconvincing.

It appears that Metro's design is for population density of about 5,000 people per square mile. While such density may be higher than metro New York City, it is downright spacious compared with the City of San Francisco. The latter, with 735,000 residents over a land area of 46 square miles, has an average density of 16,000 individuals per square mile.

Andrew Kaser, Portland, Oregon

other group in the city, publicizes the life-affirming changes of community development." This summer, 12 years after Pitcairn moved into her bungalow on Northeast 14th Place, she and her family threw a traditional Habitat "mortgage-burning party" when she completed her financial obligation to the organization. Her original investment has matured into a home worth more than \$100,000, and her neighborhood has prospered for it. As the first Portlander to pay off her mortgage in full, Pitcairn is an important part of the Habitat for Humanity success story.

Darcy Varney served for two years as a VISTA volunteer with Portland Habitat for Humanity, one of 30 Habitat for Humanity affiliates in Oregon. For the affiliate nearest you, call 800/365-4637.

(1) Lincoln Bates, "Building a Strong Foundation: Habitat for Humanity's Millard Fuller," *Hemispheres*, March 1998, p. 18.

(2) Millard Fuller, "Reaching Out in Faith and Love," *Habitat World*, February/March 1998, p. 16.

(3) Metro, Growth Management Services Department. *Housing Needs Analysis, Discussion Draft*, March 1996, pp. 7-8.

(4) The standard rate of affordability stipulates that individuals pay less than 30 percent of household income on housing. Metro, *Housing Needs Analysis*, p. 7.

(5) Kim Maria Koscianski, "Habitat for Humanity: Does the Home Make a Difference?" *Sociology* 363, Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minn. May 1993.

(6) Richard K. Green and Michelle J. White, "Measuring the Benefits of Homeowning: Effects on Children," Department of Economics, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, January 1994.

(7) Lincoln, *Hemispheres*, p. 18.

(8) Metro, *Housing Needs Analysis*, p. 7.

In order to create a vigorous state-wide debate on topics important to Oregonians we need the immediate assistance of people who know those issues well. They can help us identify topics and authors and thread our way through the controversies that generate headlines.

Are you an expert in family law? A business person who has been trading in Pacific Rim markets for many years? A labor organizer helping the staff of a non-profit start a union? A social worker who knows the faces and the rules of Oregon's welfare agencies? A scientist studying the habitat of an endangered species? An engineer designing cars for light rail? A high school teacher struggling to implement Oregon's educational reforms? A town librarian making tough choices in the wake of budget cuts?

Whatever your profession and political orientation, we would like to publish your knowledgeable opinions on topics that matter to you. From time to time, we would also like to ask you to review an article we received that falls within your area of expertise or to point us to a good source on a topic.

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