

# PLANNING IN THE PORTLAND REGION: LESSONS AND LEGACY

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## Introduction

Metropolitan Portland has been receiving a lot of attention recently. In publications ranging from *The New Yorker* to *Newsweek*, the metropolitan area and the city of Portland have been lauded as examples of what seems to be working, or at least holds promise for working in urban areas in the future. The issue, of course, is the emptying out of cities into sprawling metropolitan areas, accompanied by devastating impacts on environmental quality and community cohesion. Although the Portland metropolitan area has not met and slain all the dragons of this particular story, it has managed to avoid some things and do others right, right enough to garner national and international attention.

However, it was less than 60 years ago, in 1938, when Lewis Mumford visited our region at the invitation of the Northwest Regional Council, a group drawn from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana to coordinate the efforts of "agencies concerned with the orderly development of the Pacific Northwest." Mr. Mumford, described as the "eminent author and publicist," was invited to critically review the development trends in the region in light of what the Council believed was his "penetrating examination of America's culture and regional planning disclosed in [his] criticisms of the New York Regional Plan and in his recent study, *The Culture of Cities*. . . ." In his report to the Council, Mumford had this to say about Portland:

. . . neither Portland nor Seattle show, from the standpoint of planning, more than metropolitan ambitions that have over-reached themselves. The melancholy plan to increase Portland's population from 300,000 to three million succeeded in disordering and unfocussing its growth: but it did little to give it the benefit of modern city planning practice; meanwhile, the apparent financial prospects of these port cities undermined the base of the sounder development that could well have been taking place in other parts of the region, on strictly modern lines.

Mumford went on to review the possible urbanizing results of the production of electric power at Bonneville Dam, and concluded that new development arising due to this new energy source ought not to be located in Portland.

This paper examines the path that Portland and its region has taken from being a place showing little evidence of “modern city planning practice” to its current and apparently much more attractive state. First, a cautionary note. We have probably been both more and less successful than it sounds. Stories of municipal accomplishment tend to take on greater dimension the further you get from home. Take this one with a grain of salt. From the outside looking in, condition what you see with the following: First, there are no silver bullets or supremely right answers. It takes a mix of many inter-related and complementary actions to be successful. Second, you must make your own successes wherever you find yourself. Use our experience as a reminder that much, truly, is possible. Third, recognize that we are not done yet. Issues of education, social equity, and public safety wait for thorough treatment. Much has been done, but much remains to be attended to.

### **The Portland Region . . .**

To begin, there are six main drivers for the physical and policy environment we inhabit today:

1. The landscape—today, prior to settlement by whites, and for some 10,000 years of Native American settlement, this has been an incredibly beautiful and abundant landscape. To the early settlers, this was promoted as an Eden, a garden, and it was! The landscape was and is inspiring, overpowering the works of man as many historians of the West have noted. Today, that connection to nature, and willingness to elevate environment to a pressing concern, is still central to the policy debates surrounding growth management and the future of our cities. Note, too, that this presents an incredible challenge, since there is very little of an urban nature that has been found to improve on Eden. Hence, although environment is an important and central value, we have yet to express a truly urban vision for our corner of the West. Most often we talk about what we want to avoid rather than what our city building can achieve. Nonetheless, the landscape of the Pacific Northwest, the spawning of the salmon and the iconic tall fir trees of the west side forests, is yet in the realm of the sacred in Oregon today, and exerts a strong influence on public opinion and expectations.
2. Agrarian Settlement—from about 1830 until 1880, the settlement of the Portland metropolitan area was accomplished by farmers arriving from the border states of the Midwest. Simply put, they came for health and wealth, and found themselves in a land of rich soils and forgiving climate. The challenge here has not been to get things to grow, but to cut them back fast enough. Our cities emerged as service centers to the farming economy of the territory south of the Columbia River. Oregon became a state in 1859, 30 years before Washington. By the time the major waves of industrialization hit our

shores, Portland was established along different lines with different sets of interests than Seattle, its neighbor to the north.

3. Speculative City Building—from about 1850 until World War II, the Oregon story was one of speculative city building with ever widening settlement based on the available transportation technology. Early Portland was simply referred to as “the Clearing,” a wide spot on the way between the fertile Tualatin Valley to the west and the territorial seat in Oregon City, to the south. From the start, with its original plat in the 1850s, Portland’s early speculators and boosters believed that they were building what would one day be a great city. They set aside a strip of “park blocks” running the length of the city at a time when the total population was only several hundred and there were more stumps than people in evidence.

Setting aside the park blocks was a testament to the vision of Portland’s early developers, and to their sense of legacy. After all, a great city had to have great parks, as was the experience of these mostly New England expatriates. However, don’t believe for a moment that these earnest city builders didn’t have their eye on the bottom line as well. Downtown Portland inherited its 200-foot by 200-foot blocks from the decisions made by these same folks to maximize the rent received from higher priced corner lots. The smaller the blocks, the more corners to rent per land claim. The small lots also aided flood drainage by providing more “channels” back to the river itself.

The city began its growth close to the river, but spread inland and across the river as trails became roads, street trolleys and railroads widened the ring, and bridges were built to replace ferries. In fact, roads were so bad prior to World War II that Portland’s interurban rail system was reputed to be the third largest in the nation by early in this century. In 1924 Portland adopted zoning after a series of defeats at the polls. The primary thrust of that initiative had to do with maintaining the exclusivity of residential and largely segregated neighborhoods.

Today, the legacy of small lots has left us with a walkable, pedestrian-scale downtown, and the park blocks form the core of a regional attraction. Our streetcar suburbs retain their value, enjoying a new life in this era of new urbanism. The blatant and, by the standards of today, outrageous segregation of then suburban neighborhoods has given way to the economic segregation within subdivision walls so common across our current metropolitan landscapes.

4. The car—from the late 1930s to the present, this region like every other in North America has been under the spell of the automobile. When the car was added to the settlement pattern of earlier years, the basic matrix didn’t change. Grid systems of streets, neighborhoods interspersed with commercial activity, parks, and public places, were and remain typical in these older parts of the region. However, in the post-war region, we have experienced the same pattern of strictly separated uses, underprovision of public space and parks, and overloading of old, radial farm-to-market roads and highways that

others have. The settlement pattern of the region reflects these trends although neither our rate of growth or extent of suburbanization can match that of other western metropolitan areas.

5. Downtown Reinvestment—In 1958, downtown business leaders, alarmed at the weakening of downtown’s historic retail focus, worked with the City of Portland to form the Portland Development Commission (PDC). The PDC initiated urban renewal and “slum clearance” measures in what is now south downtown, removing Portland’s Jewish and Italian communities from the downtown scene. This project resulted in the complete reshaping of the south end of downtown, adding two important fountains by Lawrence Halprin among other new public spaces. Perhaps most important was the development of a vital public-private partnership that resulted in the downtown plan of the early 1970s. The downtown plan was funded by both the business community and the city, and resulted in projects ranging from the transit mall to pedestrian improvements associated with every new building.

Also associated with the developments of this time was the removal of Harbor Drive and the creation of Waterfront Park. A young Neil Goldschmidt was elected mayor and his leadership led to the retention of downtown retailers and the addition of new ones, especially Nordstrom. The work of PDC helped to create several historic districts, contributed to the City’s efforts to retain and refurbish single room occupancy housing, and resulted in Pioneer Place, a Rouse development and the site of the only Saks Fifth Avenue store in the Pacific Northwest.

6. Public Policy and Land Use Planning—in the mid-1960s what was left of the garden-like landscape of the Willamette Valley was threatened by sprawl. The Willamette River itself was an unfortunate example of an unfishable, unswimable stream, and productive farms were passing into various forms of urban development. Resource exploitation had been central to the economy of the region for years, but its post-war manifestations were challenging the very soul of the state.

Key to this new era of intervention via policy and planning was Governor Tom McCall. Beginning with his work as a television news reporter, and then as the Republican Governor of the State, McCall was concerned with the fragility of the environment of Oregon in the face of urban sprawl and relatively high rates of growth. The history of the West and of this region has been one of escape and redemption, people leaving behind one life for a new start. The problem was that the form that redemption took was turning some of the most productive agricultural land in the world into unattractive, very low density, urban sprawl.

In 1973 the Oregon State Legislature passed Senate Bill 100 creating the Oregon Statewide Land Use Planning Program. The 1973 act required that every city and county in the state prepare a comprehensive land use plan, that the plans be prepared to respond to specific statewide land use goals,

and that all future land use decisions be made consistent with plans found to be in compliance with the goals. Zoning codes were specifically directed to implement the comprehensive plans, thereby becoming subservient to the plans.

In essence, the Oregon system is an agricultural land preservation program that strictly separates urban from rural land use. Chief among the reasons the program has been supported three times at the polls, and most recently in our very conservative legislature, is that it maintains farm and forest land for farm and forest uses while creating certainty for those engaged in urban development. In Oregon, planning actions have 120 days to be completed, a record rarely matched in states lacking any form of mandatory planning.

For the metropolitan area, the land use planning program has been extremely important in two ways. First, it has generated a metropolitan urban growth boundary in the Oregon portion of the region, thereby linking the fate of one jurisdiction to another. Second, it has ensured that the 24 cities and three counties within the urban growth boundary have all prepared comprehensive plans, all of those plans prepared according to the same goals, and all incorporating both minimum densities and a requirement for multifamily housing. Prior to land use planning, there was the potential for about 160,000 new housing units and an average lot size of about 13,200 square feet according to old plans. After land use planning, those numbers changed to 310,000 new units and an average lot size of 8700 square feet.

In addition to statewide land use planning, the other major policy innovation that has had a significant affect on the urban form of metropolitan Portland was the creation of the Metropolitan Service District, now simply called Metro, in 1979. Metro is a regional, directly elected unit of government. It has been delegated the task of managing the region's urban growth boundary, thereby controlling the supply of urban land. Although comprehensive land use planning is a task for cities and counties, Metro can require those local plans to change in order for them to be consistent with regional plans. It is also the metropolitan planning organization for federal transportation planning purposes, and has been instrumental in developing a constituency for regionwide transportation planning and the development of light rail.

From these experiences we can draw the following lessons. First, the Portland metropolitan area has experienced some but not all of the city shaping influences felt by other metropolitan areas. Our major city, Portland, was settled early by Pacific Northwest standards, and in service to an agrarian rather than industrial economy. Second, at key points in its development, our metropolitan area received the serendipitous gifts of leaders and city builders, some in the form of physical features, others in the form of leadership and collective action.

Third, nature plays an incredibly powerful and central role in the minds of the people who live here. Ed Whitelaw, a University of Oregon professor and economic consultant, describes our life here as involving two paychecks, one from your employer and one from the benefits of living in this landscape. Finally,

for much of our history we have been an economic and cultural hinterland to the rest of the nation. This, too, has left its mark on our urban landscape in the form of moderate amounts of almost everything, rather than vast tracts dedicated to one or another activity.

Today, however, the region, its ideas about itself, and its role in the world are all changing. The Portland metropolitan area today is home to some 1.62 million people. Our region crosses the Columbia River into Clark County, Washington, and includes a total of six counties. The urban parts of the three principal Oregon counties are home to about 70% of this population, with most of the remaining 30% in Clark County, Washington. We project a population of about 2.1 million in 2015 and about 2.5 million in 2040. Recent rapid population gains suggest that we might realize those projections sooner rather than later.

Within our urban growth boundary there are about 230,000 acres, or about 360 square miles. Our region's landscape is defined by rivers and mountains. Portland sits at the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia Rivers. To the west, over the Tualatin Mountains, is the Tualatin Valley and Washington County. Washington County is the fastest growing county in the state, and home to Nike, Intel, and our very own "silicon forest." It includes an area that Joel Garreau has described as an "emerging edge," though it physically bears little resemblance to Tysons Corner or other edge city archetypes.

To the south and east of Portland is Clackamas County, the site of early suburbanization, Oregon City, and the foothills of the Cascades. Portland itself is almost completely within Multnomah County, home to some 660,000 people and the site for most pre-World War II urbanization. Clark County, Washington lies to the north, across the Columbia, and is the fastest growing county in Washington state. It is developing according to a different set of policies, a markedly different cultural view of the natural environment and private property rights, and remains linked to the Oregon side of the region via two bridges.

Although both Washington and Clackamas Counties are growing extremely fast by Oregon standards, it's worth noting that Washington County is fifth in the state in farm gate receipts and Clackamas County is second. Further, despite agriculture and forestry being the two mainstays of the Oregon economy, high tech employment is about to eclipse forest and lumber products employment statewide for the first time. We also tend to be a region of small businesses. Today some 30% of the employment is either in firms of four or fewer or among those who are self-employed. In one of our wealthiest suburbs, a recent survey by the West Linn Chamber of Commerce found that 97% of the business licenses were granted to residential addresses.

In the early 1980's, the Portland region experienced a prolonged and severe recession. Our region actually lost both population and jobs in real terms. Since the mid-1980's, the Portland area economy has rebounded and in ways that have served to diversify the economy. As in many metropolitan areas, we've experience a boom in service and retail employment. Manufacturing, never more

than about 15% of total employment, has been holding its own. Most impressively, we've experienced a boom in high tech employment that has recently brought over three billion dollars of investment by major corporations in chip fabrication plants and equipment. Consequently, the economy of the region, the state, and the Pacific Northwest in general has been out-performing that of the nation. Although it appears that we are less prone to the boom-bust cycles associated with our resource extraction past, how long this current economy lasts, quite apart from what propels it, is anyone's guess.

Although Portland is a city of 460,000, the next largest city has a population of about 74,000. Unlike Phoenix or other fast growing urban regions, Portland is not surrounded by cities capable of inflicting great damage on the central city. Today, however, no single jurisdiction, including Portland, can get things done unilaterally. Single jurisdictions can stop things, but they cannot achieve their objectives without working collaboratively with others.

Racially and ethnically, the Portland metropolitan region has long had a reputation for being extremely homogeneous, second on some measures only to Minneapolis. Oregon has a long history of racial and ethnic intolerance, perhaps a consequence of its border state heritage, but incomprehensible given the always very low percentage of the population made up of people of color. The results of redlining African Americans into a select few neighborhoods in Portland can be seen today in the demographics of those neighborhoods and the concentration of poverty. Conscious and prolonged periods of disinvestment and isolation have left these communities outside of the prosperity that has come to the region. In recent years, our population has become more diverse, with dramatic gains in Hispanic and Asian populations in both the city and the suburbs. For example, Glencoe High School in suburban Hillsboro went from 5% minority enrollment in 1984 to 20% in 1993.

Downtown Portland remains the business and cultural heart of the region. Efforts of the city and the business community to revitalize downtown have resulted in it becoming a 24-hour hub of activity. It continues to maintain its share of employment in the region despite a dramatic increase in the amount of class A office space in suburban locations. In addition to being the location best served by transit, it is also the location best served by highways. Of all trips made into the downtown core, approximately 35% are made by public transit and another 10% are made by foot or by bicycle. However, despite the fact that some 45% of all trips into downtown are made by means other than the automobile, on a regional basis automobiles are used for close to 94% of all trips, with transit accounting for only 2% to 3%. As a region we have a long way to go.

### **Regional Planning . . .**

In the late 1980's, despite having planned like no other region in North America, we found ourselves with many of the same dilemmas: increasing traffic congestion, sprawl within the urban growth boundary, and an uncertain sense of the future. Questions began to be raised which challenged our assumptions about urban form, primarily because we lacked any firm set of principles with

which we could respond. In early 1989, Metro began the work that led to the adoption of the Region 2040 Growth Concept in December, 1994. This most recent round of regional planning began with the creation of the Regional Urban Growth Goals and Objectives (RUGGO), adopted in 1991.

The goals and objectives accomplished two important tasks. First, as the result of a year-long negotiation, they spelled out for the first time how regional planning would be done, when Metro would exercise its considerable powers, and what the roles would be for other jurisdictions and interests in the regional planning process. Second, the RUGGO's served as the "sketchbook" for the region, providing a common framework for the growth management challenges of the day.

The result of the RUGGO process was the creation of a regional planning partnership in the region. It was the jurisdictions within the urban growth boundary themselves that called for the next phase of planning, recognizing that the region's "sketchbook" needed further elaboration to serve as a vision. Region 2040 was developed specifically to add structure to the region's conception of its physical form. Through the Region 2040 planning process the region would:

1. specify the degree of expansion, if any, required of the urban growth boundary and the locations for any future expansions
2. identify the major components for the regional transportation system, especially transit components and the creation of a regional pedestrian system;
3. identify a hierarchy and system of places, ranging from downtown Portland to existing town centers to regional centers and neighborhoods; and
4. incorporate a system of greenspaces in the urban region, both for purposes of accommodating outdoor recreation and for maintaining the viability of wildlife habitat.

The Region 2040 process was financially supported initially by Metro, the metropolitan area counties, Tri-Met (the regional transit agency), and Portland General Electric. Representatives from each of these organizations constituted a management team which met regularly, sometimes weekly, to advise Metro on project strategy and content. In addition, the Regional Policy Advisory Committee, succeeded by the Metropolitan Policy Advisory Committee as the project proceeded, provided Metro with an advisory committee composed of local government officials, state agency heads, and citizen interests. The Metropolitan Technical Advisory Committee provided Metro with the advice of local planning directors for both 2040 and other ongoing planning efforts. Finally, the Regional Citizens Involvement Coordinating Committee at Metro provided 2040 staff with advice regarding citizen outreach and involvement.

The first step in the Region 2040 project was to characterize base conditions (beginning with the history of settlement in the region), community values and expectations, and to create what became known as the "base case," the probable future if nothing was done and existing development patterns and dynamics went unchecked. The information on base conditions and community values was

then used to propose three potential alternative urban form strategies for the region from which a preferred alternative could be constructed. Alternative A called for less urban growth boundary expansion than the base case along with changes in the land use-transportation relationships along major corridors. Alternative B called for no expansion of the urban growth boundary, a large expansion of the transit system, and major rezoning. Alternative C called for minor changes in the urban growth boundary, a large expansion of the transit system, and the creation of satellite cities outside of separate from the current urban growth boundary.

Each of the alternatives and the base case were evaluated using a set of criteria developed through a public process. Extensive modeling of the transportation system, air quality, and land use allocations accompanied each scenario. Throughout this process, numerous public hearings and workshops were held, the project was publicized on cable TV and through the news media, over 25,000 newsletters were mailed to area households, and hundreds of presentations were made to local governments and civic organizations. In addition, over 500,000 copies of a tabloid outlining the alternatives and the trade-offs involved in selecting different growth management techniques were mailed to every household in the region, resulting in over 17,000 citizen comments and suggestions.

Throughout the public involvement activities, Metro asked citizens to respond to four central growth management techniques: reducing average residential lot sizes, reducing parking, encouraging new growth to locate proximate to transit stations, and encouraging new growth to locate in existing city centers. In addition, six other management techniques, ranging from the establishment of greenbelts to encouraging growth in neighboring cities, were tested.

From the public involvement activities conducted over about a two year period, Metro learned that participating citizens generally supported:

- Holding the current urban growth boundary in place.
- Utilizing the growth management “building blocks” tested throughout the process, especially establishing greenbelts and encouraging development in existing neighborhoods and close to transit.
- Reducing traffic and encouraging alternative modes.
- Retaining open space both inside and outside the urban growth boundary.
- A combination of increasing density inside the urban growth boundary and encouraging some growth in neighboring cities.
- Ongoing public education and dialogue regarding the trade-offs inherent in growth management.

In addition, citizens questioned why growth had to occur, and whether planning to accommodate growth would only encourage it to happen. They were skeptical of using neighboring cities to accommodate growth, since they believed that it would be unlikely that enough jobs would be created in those locations to keep people employed close to home.

The preferred alternative resulted from a blend of public comment and aspects of each of the scenarios. What ultimately became the adopted 2040 regional growth concept called for very little urban growth boundary expansion over the next 50 years, amounting to about 7% of the existing total. These future expansions were targeted to parts of the region needing additional urban growth but avoided the use of lands protected for farm and forest use. In contrast, the base case and alternative A called for massive increases in the acreage devoted to urban use and expected very little in the way of redevelopment on existing urban land. Unlike alternative B, the adopted growth concept for 2040 calls for a minor amount of urban expansion, though it reflects an overall desire on the part of the public to limit urban expansion to the extent possible.

The transportation system called for additions to the light rail system backed up by higher expectations for pedestrian trips within and between important centers. Each center will likely serve different functions since this region cannot sustain a large number of places that offer the same things. Note that light rail is intended not so much as a replacement for the automobile, but as a device that allows people to inhabit the region as pedestrians. A system of greenspaces was identified to separate communities from each other and continue to protect open space resources within the urban area. Finally, specific expectations were stated for the relationship between the urban area inside Metro’s urban growth boundary and small rural communities outside the urban growth boundary. The following chart summarizes a number of the measurable differences between the alternatives and the preferred alternative as would be expected in the year 2040:

	1990	Base	A	B	C	Preferred
Single-family/Multi-family (%)	70/30	70/30	74/26	60/40	69/31	65/35
% Growth in 1990 UGB	100	83	71	100	63	87
% Growth via Redevelopment	0	6	18	8	19	
Farmland Acres to Urban Use	63,900	17,200	0	11,400	3,545	
VMT per Capita	12.4	13.04	10.86	11.92	11.76	
Mode Split (Auto/Transit/Ped-Bike)	92/3/5	92/3/5	91/4/5	88/6/6	89/5/6	88/6/6
Congested Road Miles	151	506	682	643	404	454
Transit Riders (1000s)	137	338	372	528	437	570

The preferred alternative and what became the final adopted growth concept received extensive public review using the same techniques outlined above. A video outlining the preferred alternative and its impact on the region was developed and available to the public for no charge through Blockbuster Video outlets, a chain of video rental stores. Architect Peter Calthorpe, retained earlier in the process, developed a series of "regional design images," "before-and-after" elevations and site plans for locations throughout the region helpful for making the potential affects of the plan more tangible to a broader audience. In December of 1994, after two-and-a-half years, the Metro Council adopted the Metro 2040 Growth Concept at the urging of local governments, citizens, and business interests.

Two subsequent actions suggest that the public is supportive of the 2040 concept. First, Oregon residents of the region voted to approve a \$425 million dollar bond measure for the local match for the next leg of the light rail system. Second, in the spring of 1995, voters overwhelmingly approved a \$138 million dollar levy to buy about 6000 acres of open space and make improvements to many more acres of parks, open space, and river corridors already in public ownership. Nonetheless, the planning continues with major implementing steps for Region 2040 expected to be before the Metro Council beginning in the fall of 1995. In addition, the Metro Council will be expected by a number of its constituents to act soon to address affordable housing and poverty issues not dealt with in the 2040 process.

### **Remaining Challenges . . .**

Despite what seems to be an unparalleled level of support and collective effort on behalf of regional objectives, there are a number of outstanding issues that will challenge the commitment of Metro and other jurisdictions in the years ahead. First, holding the line on the urban growth boundary is going to be an extremely contentious issue. Most agree that we have plenty of land for all but one category of future land use: single-family detached housing. Although the development industry has so far not prevailed in their effort to secure large and immediate expansions of the boundary, they will not stop trying. Politicians will be tested at every turn, and time will tell whether we have the fortitude to stick with the plan.

In fact, first major test of the growth concept is already occurring. In August of 1995, Metro reviewed its growth projections based on current levels of activity, and significantly revised those projections upward for the period 1995-2015. The implication of this increased rate of projected growth is a need for both rapid implementation of the 2040 ideas, through their incorporation in regional and local land use plans, and an increase in the urban land supply. Both of these actions are testing the coalition of interests that put the growth concept in place, and led to the election of a number of Metro officials. To some, any expansion of the urban growth boundary at this point signals a departure from the values-based planning underlying the growth concept. To others, it is a pragmatic response to new conditions.

The Metro Council is currently scheduled to make a series of decisions in March and May of 1996 that will signal to many the strength of their commitment to the ideas adopted in the 2040 growth concept. Similarly, the willingness of local governments to begin the process of altering their own local plans will be widely viewed as a test of their commitment to a shared, regional future.

Second, our modeling of the transportation system has convinced us of one central fact: simply arranging things intelligently in space is not enough. We cannot achieve our objectives for the transportation system unless people change their use of the transportation system. It's a question of behavior, and therefore a long-term concern with, in this country, an uncertain future. The concept will be tested again in early 1996 with the adoption of a new regional transportation plan.

Finally, urban historian and planner Carl Abbott, in a recent presentation to the Urban Affairs Association conference, described the Oregon policymaking style in recent years as moralistic, "interwoven with strong fibers of status quo conservatism." In the classic mold of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century progressives, our innovations have been designed to preserve the past, rather than to create a future.

Our approach to problems has been managerial, and ultimately rationalistic. Abbott goes on to identify three weaknesses in the Oregon style. First, the rationalistic approach to problems is vulnerable to political partisanship. It requires compromise, something unlikely in a politically polarized environment. Second, the compromises that get struck can be "undermined and overwhelmed" by self-righteousness simply because they are compromises and by definition imperfect from anywhere but the middle. Third, the Oregon approach to governance and policymaking needs to be learned and relearned, relying on a shared sense of the rules of the game and the values of the community.

This last point is perhaps the most telling, since Oregon's growth has historically and to this day resulted in the most part from waves of in-migration, rather than natural increase. In the past, most of the people coming to Oregon and to the Portland metropolitan area owed their livelihood to some form of employment tied to an economy based on timber and agricultural production. Hence, the landscape served as a common bond, and provided a common point of reference. Today, as noted above, our economic growth is due primarily to activities that are not extensions of the State's natural resource base. The split between urban and rural interests is perhaps wider than ever. Our population is diversifying at, in some locations, a dramatic rate.

All of these observations suggest that Oregon is at a critical watershed in its cultural history since white settlement, namely that the connections between communities and between communities and the natural environment are undergoing substantial change. Holding together a consensus about the values that bind us together and to this place represents a challenge that the state has never had to face before, and which will be crucial to our success. The transition continues and with it comes the challenge of forming a new and shared

perspective on what matters. Our region today is still one where it is possible to take a day-trip to the wilderness. Will it be so in 10 years? Will we still care?

### **Five Lessons . . .**

In conclusion, there are five lessons from our experience that are relevant to those trying to wrestle with the challenges of growth and change in their own metropolitan areas. First, planning matters. It really does make a difference to try to consciously intervene in the patterns that “rule” your future. However, plans only represent the consensus of the moment. Realizing plans is an ongoing task. Therefore, make your plans about what you care about most, since the time will come when your commitment will be tested. There are lots of things in our region, downtown particularly, that didn’t happen by accident but by intention.

Second, participation matters . . . inclusion works! More to the point, exclusion doesn’t. We are seeing that dramatically in our recent ability to do regional planning in a way that was unthinkable five years ago. In addition, light rail, the convention center, and greenspaces are other examples of projects that work only because everyone is at the table. It has been particularly important for Portland and access to governance processes is a quality that we value and enjoy.

However, today it is not enough to simply do a good job within your borders. In addition to cultivating involvement locally, regions need to develop their links with surrounding communities, states, the nation, and the world. As many have noted, metropolitan areas and their inhabitants operate on a world scale, just as metropolitan economies stretch ever further into the countryside and on to the next city. At least on an international scale, the idea of “Cascadia” is a way for the Portland metropolitan area to begin to internationalize its outlook. Just as Cascadia is important to Portland, Portland is important to Cascadia. Our air and marine port facilities, burgeoning high tech sector, and metropolitan strength are assets that make Cascadia stronger and more competitive on a world scale. Perhaps most exciting is that the idea and promise of Cascadia opens a wholenew way of thinking about who we are and where we’re going that tempers the parochial nature of our past interactions.

Third, leadership matters. McCall and Goldschmidt were and continue to be key. Acting to preserve the legacy while preserving or sustaining choices for the future were important themes. Their ability was to create coalitions that crossed organizational boundaries, defining structure based on the topic or challenge. In some ways, their ability to mobilize communities behind an agenda stands as proof that people want to be part of a success. Creating and selling successes remains a viable strategy for enlisting people in the task of saving a region. In our case, by creating a culture of planning, and then committing to live by the plan, we’ve created an expectation that success can stem from conscious choices and collective action. One new twist on leadership in this land of regional planning is our recent recognition of the importance of neutral forums. When government makes an observation, it’s interpreted as an agenda, doubly so when the observing entity is a regional government. Neutral forums that span the

breadth of metropolitan interests and territory are in short supply and need to be identified and utilized.

Fourth, good things take time. History is made incrementally, plans succeed or fail over time, and most changes take generations. Things launched in the 1950's and 1960's are now bearing fruit. Portland, for example, experienced a building boom at the depths of the recession of the early 1980's because of the choices made beginning in the late 1950's. We are now, in some sense, living off the legacy of those earlier actions. Things we most revere in our region—the park blocks, forest park, clean rivers—were often initiated by folks who never enjoyed them.

Fifth, you can't regulate quality of life into existence. There really is no substitute for collective action for some things. Nonetheless, today there are lots of private sector alternatives for things we used to only be able to acquire collectively. Rather than relying on public parks, people live on large lots, or within the envelope of huge houses. Rather than relying on the "cop on the beat," people subscribe to private security firms. Rather than exercising at a community center, people retreat to the "Nordic Trac" in the basement. Rather than depending on the public schools, we are seeing a dramatic increase in home-schooled children. However, quality of life can't be achieved a household at a time, even in the exurbs. Roads don't work, wildlife disappears, and families find themselves cut off from systems of support that stem only from living in community. Make no mistake, regulation has been and continues to be extremely important, but it has relatively narrow purposes. Ultimately, achieving livable metropolitan environments requires changes in behavior which, in this society must come from the heart rather than from the law.

The Portland metropolitan area has come a long way since Mumford's visit in 1938, but we have a long way to go. There are certainly successes of a kind unimaginable in many North American communities. However, we are perhaps more acutely aware than outside observers of the limitations of those successes. Carlos Schwantes, in his *The Pacific Northwest; An Interpretive History*, after reviewing the history of settlement in the Northwest identifies a dramatic shift in the role of the region from serving as an economic and cultural hinterland to, at least in its metropolitan areas, selectively becoming a national and international trend-setter. Schwantes comments that:

The juxtaposition of metropolitan trend-setter and hinterland is, in fact, the defining quality of life in the modern Northwest. The accessibility of the hinterland from metropolitan centers remains the key feature of what residents regard as a desirable lifestyle. . . the feeling that in some remote part of the region an unsolved mystery of nature may still await the persistent searcher.

The Portland region today is a blend of ideas, both trend-setter and hinterland. Clearly, much remains to be done in our region both physically and

conceptually. Whether efforts like Region 2040 are the answer, much less an answer to the requirements of building just and healthy cities remains to be seen. It is a hopeful place to start, and for that reason alone justifies close attention in the years ahead.

**A Note on Key Sources**—Much has been written about Portland, its history, and its planning. Those interested in pursuing the projects and ideas discussed here in greater detail are directed to the following references:

Abbott, Carl “Historical Development of the Metropolitan Service District” Metro; May, 1991

Abbott, Carl “Oregon as a Public Policy Innovator” Remarks presented to the Urban Affairs Association Annual Meeting, Portland, Oregon May 4, 1995

Abbott, Carl *Portland: Planning, Politics, and Growth in a Twentieth-Century City* University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1983

Abbott, Carl “Settlement Patterns in the Portland Region: A Historical Overview” Metro; January, 1994

Metro “Region 2040 Public Involvement Report” August, 1994

Metro “Metro 2040 Growth Concept” December 8, 1994

Metro “Region 2040: Recommended Alternative Technical Appendix” September 15, 1994

Metro “Concepts for Growth: Report to the Council” June, 1994

Metro “Regional Urban Growth Goals and Objectives” September, 1991

Mumford, Lewis “Regional Planning in the Pacific Northwest” Northwest Regional Council, Portland, 1939

Schwantes, Carlos *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History* University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1989

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