

Sustainable Redevelopment in the Rogue Valley

Focus on the Illinois Valley

Jerry Allen 2022

The Illinois Valley is known for incredible scenic beauty, heritage forests, clear streams, salmon and steelhead fish and diverse wildlife. Rangers call it one of the ten hotspots of biodiversity on the whole planet. It is also known for serious poverty, lack of industries and jobs, lack of housing and very little affordable housing, a single highway access that is one of the most dangerous in the United States, few public transit options, and water scarcity to name a few problems. The pressure of climate change and increasing heat and fires are bearing down upon us. These call for development options to simultaneously address these problems, and protect our precious environment. The Illinois Valley is inextricably linked to Grants Pass, requiring joint planning.

At the same time there are macro-forces, described in the article below from The New York Times:

The Next Affordable City Is Already Too Expensive

In Spokane, Wash., home prices jumped 60 percent in the past two years. The increase is fueled by buyers fleeing the boom in cities like Austin. Who will have to flee next?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/business/economy/spokane-housing-expensive-cities.html?smid=em-share>.

When you read that article, consider how it might impact Josephine County and the Illinois Valley. No one that I've talked to wants to see urban sprawl here, similar to Los Angeles or what Boise is becoming or the destruction of our environmental heritage. Yet if we don't plan now, those forces will be upon us. Right now the hospitals, clinics, and other industries need livable homes for the hundreds of staff they want to bring in. How does having 500-2000 more car trips a day on highway 199 sound to you? How does that impact our climate problem?

There are a few optimal building spaces to build houses and villages. Cutting down forests to build is not a sustainable option. Some proposals under discussion involve building sustainable, solar-ready, super energy efficient villages from O'Brien, to Cave Junction, to Kirby, to Selma, to possibly Wilderville, linked to Grants Pass initially by rapid electric buses, with e-cars, community bikes and electric shuttle buses in Grants Pass to facilitate commerce and jobs without single-rider cars proliferating. ODOT does not want to build more lanes on 199, with the problems the above article talks about.

Villages with live-work stores and restaurants can greatly reduce a car-centric community focus and support local business owners and jobs. These villages could feature substantial multi-family housing, including live/work duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes. Affordability is key in order to feature owner occupants. Owner purchasers could utilize rentable attached units to make mortgages feasible, provide the security of on-site owners, and make rental units available for those who cannot afford ownership. Small-sized multi-family

development provides a reasonably rapid return for developers/investors. The locally/regionally owned banking and investment community is ready to provide funding.

Addressing the need for business incubator facilities is important. Most jobs in the US are provided by small businesses. Eureka has pioneered development of maker/business incubator facilities which led to a surge of small business development. By simultaneously developing housing and work spaces both needs can be addressed, and jobs can be created. At the same time, it would be possible to integrate larger community gathering facilities like large pavilions that could make possible gathering spaces for community events and farmer/crafter markets, again supporting small businesses.

A re-design of public transit options needs to go hand in hand with these developments. Environmentally we need to move to a less car-dependent system with shared e-cars like in Hood River, and much more nimble public transit. Planning transit early allows factoring it into community designs. The scarcity of water and thrifty, wise, use of it also must be factored into all the plans, as well as sewer planning.

The complexity of all these parts of sustainable development must involve a planning process that brings together many stakeholders to fashion a viable, sustainable, regional plan. By partnering with interested landowners, developers, government, environmental groups and industries we can bring all key groups to the table. By seeking start-up assistance from public funders, investment groups and banks, this kind of development could be possible on a relatively rapid time frame. The need is so great that it makes sense to not wait 5 years to get this off the ground. How about now? This kind of climate friendly development is needed all across our rural areas in our country. How about we become a model of excellence.

First Steps

I suggest we refine/improve this introductory paper as needed, convene a planning meeting and invite key stakeholders to introduce the concept, get feedback and buy-in, and define next steps. Once a core working group is formed, task and research lists can be assembled and various stakeholders can serve as ambassadors to reach out and bring in more key groups. Early on we will need to identify key opposing groups and seek to understand and address their concerns.