

An Open Letter to Clackamas County Commissioners

July 9, 2020

Board of County Commissioners
2051 Kaen Road
Oregon City, OR 97045

Dear Chairman Bernard and County Commissioners:

Before the current pandemic came along, Clackamas County was already facing a significant budget shortfall. Since that time, the financial position of the County – and indeed all jurisdictions – has become more unsure. We suggest that this is the perfect time for the County to put actions behind the longstanding goal, expressed by prior Boards, of “getting out of the urban services business.”

Metro estimates the urban unincorporated population of the County at 106,552, which is larger than the combined population of the County’s three largest cities. The County spends a lot of staff time and funding on planning, building infrastructure and other tasks that should fall to a city government. While residents of most cities in Clackamas County pay a monthly street fee ranging from \$4 to \$14 per month for upkeep of city streets, residents of the unincorporated area expect upkeep of their streets from County coffers.

We recently learned about an effort by the Jennings Lodge CPO to lobby for funding from the upcoming Get Moving 2020 transportation ballot measure to fund sidewalks in the Jennings Lodge area. Again, sidewalks are commonly the responsibility of cities, and in a growing number of cities, including Milwaukie, Sherwood and Corvallis, residents pay a monthly fee to support the construction of more sidewalks. Milwaukie even bonded against this fee to speed up the construction of sidewalks, hired additional engineers, and a robust program for building sidewalks to connect neighborhoods to schools and commercial areas is underway. See <https://www.milwaukieoregon.gov/engineering/safe>

We are, frankly, fairly convinced that those of us living in cities are subsidizing urban services and infrastructure for the unincorporated area with the County share on our tax bills. Confirming or ruling that out is not easily done from looking at the County’s budget, and we encourage you to provide some real analysis of that ahead of your next budget cycle.

But in addition to the financial ramifications, it is simply logical that a city government can be more in tune with the needs and desires of local residents, and better able to help move those goals forward, than the Board of County Commissioners, which has responsibility for very disparate areas and interests across the County.

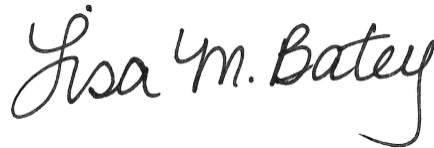
We encourage you to develop a strategic plan for the incorporation or annexation of the urban unincorporated areas. The County has Urban Growth Management Agreements with some cities, identifying areas that should annex to those cities. Other areas, such as Oak Grove and

Jennings Lodge, could choose to annex to an adjacent city, or to incorporate. Were Oak Grove and Jennings Lodge to incorporate as one city, it would be by far the largest city in Clackamas County.

A group of citizens is actively studying options for incorporation, and the County should support those efforts. Moreover, the County should work with cities and the legislature to create mechanisms to incentivize incorporation and annexation.

Getting out of the urban services business is not an overnight phenomenon, but planning and moving toward that goal would be an important step toward treating County residents equitably as well as putting the County budget on a more secure footing.

Regards,



Lisa Batey, Milwaukie City Councilor



Angelene Falconer, Milwaukie City Council
President

Cc: Clackamas Review
Christine Lewis, Metro Councilor
City Councils of Gladstone, Happy Valley, Lake Oswego, Oregon City, Tualatin,
West Linn and Wilsonville
Mayor Mark Gamba, Milwaukie
Wilda Parks, City Councilor, Milwaukie
Katharine Hyzy, City Councilor, Milwaukie