

The Columbian



SERVING CLARK COUNTY, WASHINGTON

MONDAY, APRIL 13, 2015 \$1.00

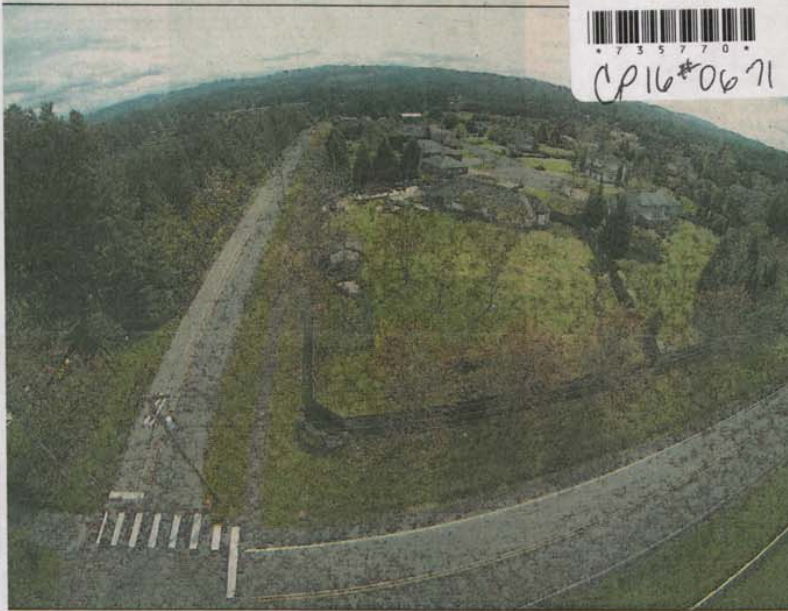
CLARK COUNTY, C1
Raising backyard chickens is hard work but can be rewarding



LIFE/HEALTH, D1
How walking almost daily helped a Camas man lose 140 pounds

CLARK COUNTY LAND-USE PLANNING

How small is big enough?



Barcode: 7 3 5 7 7 0
CP16*0671

JUSTIN RUNQUIST/The Columbian

Alternative 4 could change the minimum parcel size of rural lots, such as these at Northeast 164th Street and 202nd Avenue, east of Hockinson. This Rural-5 area would be zoned Rural-1 under Alternative 4, and parcels as small as one acre could be sold.

Landowners who want to subdivide confront planners hoping to attract industry

By KAITLIN ILLESPIE and JUSTIN RUNQUIST
Columbian Staff Writers

The future of Clark County rural lands is at a crossroads. The county council will consider Tuesday moving the comprehensive growth Management Plan update on to environmental review. The largest component of the plan, Alternative 4, has drawn controversy both in its content and in how it came to exist. Alternative 4 will reduce the minimum number of acres a lot can be, allowing landowners to subdivide their properties to sell, give to their families or develop.

Alternative 4's impacts

If Alternative 4 is adopted, Community Planning department staff estimate that 8,000 new lots could be created overnight. Assuming a home is built on each lot, that could mean more than 21,000 people — who will require new resources to accommodate them — in unincorporated Clark County.

Using United States Census data, The Columbian calculated how many additional people, including children and seniors, could make unincorporated Clark County their home under the new zoning proposed in Alternative 4. All figures are estimates.



Community planners say that could lead immediately to 8,000 new rural, agriculture and forest lots in unincorporated areas, with potential for more than 17,000 in the future if landowners subdivide their properties as far as allowed.

At Alternative 4's core is a cultural battle between rural residents and urban developers that Clark County Citizens United

representatives say they've been fighting for more than two decades. The group said the county failed to accommodate rural landowners with local implementation of the state Growth Management Act in 1994 and has continued to do so since.

The group, which claims to represent the interests of 6,000 rural landowners, has held nothing back, speaking out at council meetings, saying land was "stolen" from them in 1994 and even threatening to sue the county in response to earlier drafts of the plan update.

The Columbian

Drought

From Page A1

convinced that they are right. Like all ads, it was a mix of truth and what the ad-maker hopes to be true.

The hope-to-be-true part? That Gov. Jerry Brown in his new drought rules was asking city residents "to think about how they can reduce the water they use." Nope, it's actually a bit more punitive than that, with cut-backs ranging well into the double digits for local agencies, with fines attached.

But the more altruistic — and accurate — part of the ad, aired by the California Farm Water Coalition, was its effort to educate those who shower and water their lawns with abandon about the toll the drought already has taken on the vast and now stunningly dry Central Valley.

"In farm country, where hundreds of thousands of acres have already been shut down because of the drought, thousands have lost their jobs," the narrator said. "For those who can't afford to feed their families anymore, the local food banks are struggling to keep up with demand."

The ad noted that dealing with the drought is nothing new for farmers, beset for years by scarcity and skyrocketing water prices. (A separate coalition report, "Food Grows Where Water Flows," pointed out that almost 42 percent of irrigated farmland saw their water supply cut deeply this year.)

One line was both abundantly true and — given California's fractured politics — almost laughably optimistic: "We're all in this drought together."

Since Brown announced his water plan on April Fool's Day, some have argued that it didn't propose much hardship for agriculture — which uses most of the state's water — apart from requiring more data to be compiled. Questions

have roared: Should farmers grow only water-stingy crops? Are almonds too wasteful to grow? Who gets to decide?

Brown indicated sympathy with the farmers' long-standing suffering at the hands of Mother Nature, and suffering there is.

The great Central Valley sells far more than \$40 billion in crops yearly, making California the biggest ag state in the nation. It provides more than a third of the country's vegetables and two-thirds of its fruits and nuts. It is the only producer, to speak of, of 15 types of fruits and vegetables — the biggest in income being that pesky almond. Therein lies irony: one of the reasons the almond is so popular is that it is so profitable, providing more money to pay for increasing water bills.

If not awash in water, however, the Valley is awash in unemployment and poverty. On the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics' unemployment map, the counties in the biggest trouble are shaded a deep blue, the color of water. All of the state's big agricultural counties are deep blue.

Among urban counties, the jobless rate in February was 7.7 percent in Los Angeles; in San Francisco it was 3.8 percent, in Alameda 5 percent, in San Diego 5.3 percent.

Fresno, the state's biggest farm county, had a jobless rate of 11.6 percent, and every ag county was in double digits: Imperial 20 percent; Kern 11 percent; Tulare 13.4 percent; Merced 13.5 percent. In February, there were 30,000 fewer ag jobs than a year earlier.

Residents describe a rippling riot of failure: as farmlands go fallow because of lack of water, full-time jobs turn into part-time, part-time to nothing at all. Food banks get doubly hit, with more people needing them and fewer able to donate.

And the real "we're all in this together": Food prices go up for everyone everywhere.



Photos by JUSTIN RUNQUIST/The Columbian

Alternative 4 could change the minimum parcel size of agricultural lots, such as these at Northwest 291st Street, north of Ridgefield. These lots, currently zoned Agriculture-20 (minimum 20 acres), could be designated as Agriculture-10.

Land use

From Page A1

But it seems to have found its champion: Councilor David Madore.

In a bold move that county staff and the state have called unusual, Madore took over the development of Alternative 4 early this year, after county staff already developed the state-required three alternatives.

"He gave us a voice," CCCU President Susan Rasmussen said. "I can't tell you how profound that was."

Though he's had help from the county assessor's office and mapping staff in the Geographic Information Services office, Madore executed and developed the plan himself, according to county planning staff.

"Alternative 4 proposes to correct the massive mismatch between the actual rural land and the inappropriate zoning map that was imposed 20 years ago," Madore recently posted on his Facebook page. "As elected representatives of the people, our job is to listen and faithfully represent their interests in compliance with state law."

Opponents of the plan — which include land-use activists, farmers and Clark County's top city officials — say Alternative 4 could kill the potential for job growth, strain public resources, raise taxes and create thousands of "McMansions" across the county.

According to the Friends of Clark County, an organization fighting to keep growth close to urban centers and their resources, the county might be in violation of the Growth Management Act if it moves forward with Alternative 4 by creating sprawl.

"Sprawl was the reason the Growth Management Act was made in the first place," said Sydney Reisbick, president of Friends of Clark County.

Matt Ojennus, senior planner for the State Department of Commerce, said he couldn't comment specifically on Clark County's plan. He said, however,



Alternative 4 could change the minimum parcel size of forest lots, such as this one at Northeast 373rd Street and 21st Avenue, north of La Center. This lot, currently zoned Forest-40, could become a smaller Forest-10 property.

United members said the creation of Clark County's first Comprehensive Growth Plan in 1994 created too many large lots. Rural landowners with 100 acres zoned for 2.5-acre parcels, for example, suddenly had their land zoned 20 acres, severely limiting their ability to subdivide.

That means families who once planned to sell pieces of their property or designate a piece for their children were suddenly unable to do so.

"These lands are used as banks," Rasmussen said.

Having a nonconforming lot is not necessarily a bad thing, Euler said. Landowners with nonconforming lots can do all the same things on their land as conforming lots in terms of adding buildings, renovating their homes or selling their property.

The problems come when those lots suddenly become illegal, county assessor Peter Van Nortwick said. Take, for example, a 20-acre lot split in half by a creek. North of the creek is one school district. South of the creek is another. For tax purposes, a landowner could sell a piece of the property to simplify taxes, but doing so with a nonconforming lot will make it illegal.

The owner of an illegal lot loses the ability to sell the lot or build or renovate anything on that land, Van Nortwick said. When that happens, landowners often don't find out that they've inadvertently created an illegal lot until applying for a

urban areas."

Camas' officials aren't alone in that assessment of Alternative 4. Shortly after Madore proposed the plan, leaders from all seven of Clark County's major cities began signing onto a letter to county councilors demanding that they create a mile-deep buffer zone around each city's urban growth boundary where there could be no further subdivision. Without that compromise, the cities will not support Alternative 4, they warned.

The letter also cautions that Alternative 4 puts the county at risk of legal challenges over noncompliance with the Growth Management Act. Capell, who's familiar with rural land-use planning as the county's former public works director, added that violating the act puts the county in jeopardy of losing significant state funding.

"I question whether it would meet the intent of the GMA, and it would probably get appealed or remanded," he said. "It has delayed the process, and it wasn't very well received, especially because it really wasn't done by planning professionals."

La Center officials said they believe the greatest impact of Alternative 4 would be felt in their city. The focus for La Center's future commercial and industrial growth is less than 60 acres of land on the northeast corner of the Interstate 5 interchange at Exit 16, said Eric Eisemann, a longtime land-use planning consul-

Public Meeting

■ **What:** Clark County council. Public hearing to discuss which alternatives will undergo environmental review.

■ **When:** 10 a.m. Tuesday.

■ **Where:** Public Service Center, sixth floor hearing room, 1300 Franklin St., Vancouver.

■ **Information:** To see the Comprehensive Growth Management Plan update and all maps related to the four alternatives, visit www.clark.wa.gov/planning.

Center's three small cardrooms in question.

Traditionally, about three-quarters of the city's budget is built on tax revenue from the cardrooms. Bracing for a future with a tribal resort casino on the other side of the freeway, La Center officials say they realize they'll need more help to keep the city afloat.

Irish also said he is concerned with extending roads to new houses on thousands of smaller lots in unincorporated areas. City and school district officials don't have budgets to handle that kind of growth, he said.

"We're going to get all this growth out here and nothing to support the infrastructure with which to handle it," Irish said.

In Battle Ground, Community Development Director Erin Erdman said the Alternative 4 plan was thrust upon the city at the last minute with little explanation of the overall impact, and it could limit plans for new industrial complexes the city has in mind for the future.

"Our concern is how much more parcelization is this going to allow for, especially around our urban area," Erdman said. "And what's going to be the impact on traffic and schools? I feel like a lot of those questions haven't been answered."

Next steps

Euler, with the community planning staff, joked that those planning to come to Tuesday's hearing would

Lottery

Results for Sunday, April 12

Washington Daily Game: 6-6-5
Washington Keno:
1-2-3-5-12-13-14-18-22-30-32-39-
41-47-59-71-75-78-79-80
Washington Match 4: 5-7-12-22

Oregon Pick 4:
1 p.m., 9-8-2-9; 4 p.m., 2-3-9-7;
7 p.m., 7-4-3-7; 10 p.m., 6-1-1-2
Oregon Lucky Lines:
4-7-10-13-18-22-26-31

The Columbian www.columbian.com

Vol. 124 April 13, 2015

Issue 186

Subscriber services

360-694-2312

TDD: 360-735-4647

Fax: 360-735-4637

Email: circulation@columbian.com

Weekdays: 4:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Weekends: 6 a.m. to noon

Holidays: 4:30 a.m. to noon

DELIVERY DEADLINES:

Weekdays and holidays: Before

5 a.m.

Weekends: Before 6:30 a.m. in

most areas.

ADVERTISING INFORMATION

Private-party classifieds:

360-993-5050

9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays

Employment classifieds:

360-735-4483

9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays

Display advertising:

360-735-4497

9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays

Commercial classifieds:

360-735-4591

9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays

Evergreen Blvd.

Lottery Results for Sunday, April 12

Washington Daily Game: 6-6-5
Washington Keno:
1-2-3-5-12-13-14-18-22-30-32-39-
41-47-59-71-75-78-79-80
Washington Match 4: 5-7-12-22

Oregon Pick 4:
1 p.m., 9-8-2-9; 4 p.m., 2-3-9-7;
7 p.m., 7-4-3-7; 10 p.m., 6-1-1-2
Oregon Lucky Lines:
4-7-10-13-18-22-26-31

The Columbian www.columbian.com

Vol. 124 April 13, 2015 Issue 186

Subscriber services

360-694-2312
TDD: 360-735-4647
Fax: 360-735-4637
Email: circulation@columbian.com
Weekdays: 4:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Weekends: 6 a.m. to noon
Holidays: 4:30 a.m. to noon

DELIVERY DEADLINES:
Weekdays and holidays: Before 5 a.m.

Weekends: Before 6:30 a.m. in most areas.

RATES:

\$26 per month by carrier, \$27 per month for motor routes. By mail to all states, \$50 by month. For information on The Columbian's Easy Pay program, call Circulation: 360-694-2312 or online at www.columbian.com/services/management/subscription.cfm. Payments are due prior to expiration.

Main office:

360-694-3391: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays.

Newsroom:

360-735-4569: weekdays, evenings and weekends.
360-735-4598: newsroom fax number.
360-735-4484: to report sports scores.

Letters to the Editor:

Letters from readers
The Columbian
P.O. Box 180
Vancouver, WA 98666
Email: letters@columbian.com
Fax: 360-735-4598

METRO EDITOR:

Craig Brown, 360-735-4514
craig.brown@columbian.com

EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR:

Greg Jayne, 360-735-4531
greg.jayne@columbian.com

SPORTS EDITOR:

Micah Rice, 360-735-4548
micah.rice@columbian.com

BUSINESS EDITOR:

Gordon Oliver, 360-735-4699
gordon.oliver@columbian.com

NEWS EDITOR:

Merridee Hanson, 360-735-4527
merridee.hanson@columbian.com

VISUAL ARTS EDITOR:

John Hill, 360-735-4452
john.hill@columbian.com

For questions about the Life section: 360-735-4524

ADVERTISING INFORMATION

Private-party classifieds:

360-993-5050

9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays

Employment classifieds:

360-735-4483

9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays

Display advertising:

360-735-4497

9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays

Commercial classifieds:

360-735-4591

9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays



Printed on recycled paper.
For recycling information, call Clark County's recycling office at 360-397-6118, ext. 4352.

Postmasters: Send address changes to The Columbian, Circulation Division, P.O. Box 180, Vancouver, WA 98666.

Periodicals postage paid at Vancouver, Wash. Published and copyrighted daily by The Columbian Publishing Co., 701 W. Eighth St., P.O. Box 180, Vancouver, WA 98666. (ISSN 1043-4151)

PUBLISHER:

Scott Campbell
360-735-4500
scott.campbell@columbian.com

EDITOR:

Lou Brancaccio
360-735-4505
lou.brancaccio@columbian.com

CIRCULATION AND PRODUCTION DIRECTOR:

Marc Dailey
360-735-4601
marc.dailey@columbian.com

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR:

Teresa Keplinger
360-735-4470
teresa.keplinger@columbian.com

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER:

Douglas Ness
360-735-4502
douglas.ness@columbian.com

DIRECTOR/COMMUNITY SUPPORT:

Jody Campbell
360-735-4467
jody.campbell@columbian.com

activists, farmers and Clark County's top city officials — say Alternative 4 could kill the potential for job growth, strain public resources, raise taxes and create thousands of "McMansions" across the county.

According to the Friends of Clark County, an organization fighting to keep growth close to urban centers and their resources, the county might be in violation of the Growth Management Act if it moves forward with Alternative 4 by creating sprawl.

"Sprawl was the reason the Growth Management Act was made in the first place," said Sydney Reisbick, president of Friends of Clark County.

Matt Ojennus, senior planner for the State Department of Commerce, said he couldn't comment specifically on Clark County's plan. He said, however, that new lots come with a need for sufficient water, roads, schools and public safety services to accommodate those new households.

"It creates a whole bunch of issues," Ojennus said.

Those opposed to the plan also have questioned why Madore developed it in the first place. Madore is not a land-use expert by trade and has no background in urban planning.

It's too soon to say whether Alternative 4 is beneficial or harmful for Clark County, and it will take environmental analysts to determine its long-range impacts and challenges, community planner Gordy Euler said.

"What we need to do is go through the environmental process," Euler said. "You're going to have that many more potential wells, septic systems, traffic on the roadway. We have to show how we're going to pay for that."

Land banks

At two open houses in the past month, landowners flooded Ridgefield and Hockinson high schools to see what Alternative 4 meant for their land. It's an indication, Rasmussen said, of just how long people have wanted answers.

Clark County Citizens

lots can do all the same things on their land as conforming lots in terms of adding buildings, renovating their homes or selling their property.

The problems come when those lots suddenly become illegal, county assessor Peter Van Nortwick said. Take, for example, a 20-acre lot split in half by a creek. North of the creek is one school district. South of the creek is another. For tax purposes, a landowner could sell a piece of the property to simplify taxes, but doing so with a non-conforming lot will make it illegal.

The owner of an illegal lot loses the ability to sell the lot or build or renovate anything on that land, Van Nortwick said. When that happens, landowners often don't find out that they've inadvertently created an illegal lot until applying for a building permit.

"People are out there sitting on illegal lots that they don't even know about," Van Nortwick said.

'Noose' on future

There are, however, advantages to the county of requiring large lots, particularly for industrial development and long-term commercial job growth.

With the continuing decline of the paper products industry, employment in Camas has shifted away from the city's 132-year-old paper mill. Meanwhile, the city's economic base has grown in recent years, shifting to new commercial development and attracting a number of tech sector employers.

Having large lots available played a key role in that process, City Manager Pete Capell said. But Alternative 4 could suffocate Camas' potential for industrial and commercial development in the long run, he said.

"When you've got one- or two-acre parcels that have been built on, it's very difficult then to aggregate them and to be able to create the urban development that's going to be needed in the future," Capell said. "Potentially, 10 or 20 years from now, it could really limit what we're able to do in the

ment Act. Capell, who's familiar with rural land-use planning as the county's former public works director, added that violating the act puts the county in jeopardy of losing significant state funding.

"I question whether it would meet the intent of the GMA, and it would probably get appealed or remanded," he said. "It has delayed the process, and it wasn't very well received, especially because it really wasn't done by planning professionals."

La Center officials said they believe the greatest impact of Alternative 4 would be felt in their city. The focus for La Center's future commercial and industrial growth is less than 60 acres of land on the northeast corner of the Interstate 5 interchange at Exit 16, said Eric Eisemann, a longtime land-use planning consultant working with the city.

Alternative 4 proposes to divide that land into smaller agricultural lots, making it more challenging to attract larger commercial developers, Eisemann said. Furthermore, the plan restricts commercial development surrounding the entire city.

"I don't really want to put a noose around the city's long-term future," Eisemann said. "If Alt 4 ends up doing a lot of parcelization, that's exactly what happens."

La Center is in a unique position. No other Clark County city has lost so much land to court decisions in recent years.

"No other jurisdiction has a federal reservation that just got dropped on their interchange," Eisemann said in reference to the new Cowlitz Tribe land. "And that takes away jobs for the city. It takes away tax base. It's OK that it's happening, but we're just trying to get made whole."

Mayor Jim Irish has worked on diversifying La Center's economy for more than a decade, preparing to compete with a massive Cowlitz Tribe casino-resort just west of the city. Officials anticipate the tribe could begin building the resort in the next few years, leaving the future of La

nothing to support the infrastructure with which to handle it," Irish said.

In Battle Ground, Community Development Director Erin Erdman said the Alternative 4 plan was thrust upon the city at the last minute with little explanation of the overall impact, and it could limit plans for new industrial complexes the city has in mind for the future.

"Our concern is how much more parcelization is this going to allow for, especially around our urban area," Erdman said. "And what's going to be the impact on traffic and schools? I feel like a lot of those questions haven't been answered."

Next steps

Euler, with the community planning staff, joked that those planning to come to Tuesday's hearing would be wise to bring pajamas. He expects a full house at the meeting.

The most likely outcome is that the council will vote to push Alternative 4 into environmental review and approve an additional \$41,000 contract with ESA, an environmental analysis group based in Seattle. That's on top of a \$100,000 contract with the firm for analysis of Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 of the growth plan, which county staff finished several months ago.

Then again, the council could throw Alternative 4 out all together, Euler said. It also could recommend even more alternatives, which Euler said community planning will resist. Ultimately, however, the decision rests in the hands of the council.

After ESA's reviews come back, likely in late summer, the council will decide which pieces of the alternatives it will submit to the state, hearing public comments every step of the way.

County staffers are anxious to move on to the next steps, so a final growth plan update can be finalized, submitted and approved by the state by June 30, 2016.

"The clock is ticking in terms of us getting done," Euler said.