

RAND FISHER

Tape 4, Side 1

October 7, 1996

M.O'R.: This is a continuation of the interview with Rand Fisher on October the 7th of 1996.

One measure that's been enacted is that Metro has gotten involved with the urban growth boundary, and this is an attempt, at least, to restrict urban growth to within a certain geography. What do you think of the Metro plan? Is that a plus, and how well do you think it's going over out here in the county?

R.F.: Well, there's certainly benefits and drawbacks and things that some people like and don't like about whatever kind of limitations or restrictions or guidance you put on growth. But I think if you want to see whether it's good or bad, then compare Portland area growth with Houston or Los Angeles or someplace where they don't have any kind of management plan, where it's basically if you want to build it, build it, wherever you want and however you want. I've talked to some people there, and I've seen it in California myself, where it's just a mess. It's just spread out every place, and there's no orchards, there's no farms, there's nothing left there. And I think for most people, other than the people who made money by building and selling the houses, that's not desirable, that's not the way that we want to go. So I'm very much in favor in general of the Metro growth plan and the decision they've made to try to intensify the density of growth inside the urban growth boundary.

Now, of course with that there are some problems because as you get more intense, less lawns and that sort of thing, you get less trees, so you have more runoff, and more people means more water quality problems inside the urban area. I think that's a lot

less than if you spread them out so that you had, you know, another 4,000 acres of suburbs out there, I think you'd have more and worse water quality problems than you'll have by squeezing them tighter, but there will certainly be consequences of increasing density in the urban area.

I think that for people in the city, though some of them would like larger yards, some of them that I've talked to like not having so much lawn to mow and not having to worry about so many plants around. Now, some people like gardens and like to have a lot of land to do that on, but there are some people who would rather just have 200 square feet and they can do real nice things with it, and they don't have to worry about it much. And so that's less problem for them that they really didn't want to have, anyway.

And I think the majority of urban residents very much appreciate having a rural area close to them that they can drive to work through it or they can go out on their bicycle from their home in an hour or a half an hour and get out into the country and enjoy the farm scenery, the open air, the trees, the plants growing and whatever is out there in the rural area. So I think that's a positive for the city people. Most of the farm operators that I know of want to protect their farms, they don't want the urban growth to be out there, they don't want to have it pushing out and pushing them out of business. They want to be able to keep farming and to not have the problems that occur as that boundary pushes out further and further into their lands.

Now, of course there's a little drawback, you know, if someone's getting where they're ready to retire, it would be nice for them to be able to sell their land for 70 or \$80,000 an acre and go off and live happily ever after wherever they wanted to in the world. Now they probably can't do that because they can't get that much money per acre if it's just going for agriculture.

But I haven't talked to many people who really seem to mind that much. They either want to keep farming themselves or they have children that would like to farm when Dad quits farming, and they've got more kids that would like to farm than they're able to give it to, so there's certainly a demand for people who want to farm and want to have that lifestyle out there, and they want a stronger barrier to that urban growth is what most of them are working for. They like that boundary. So I see that as a positive in almost all ways.

M.O'R.: Stronger than exist now, you mean, when you say they want a stronger barrier?

R.F.: Yeah. They want something that isn't going to be modified in 10 or 15 years to push it out past where it is right now.

M.O'R.: Right. Which I guess is ...

R.F.: It's always a possibility because there will always be demands for that. So they just want to get it as safe and secure as they can that their farming operation is going to be protected from that kind of expansion by the city.

M.O'R.: In terms of the urban growth here in Washington County, do you think that that's manageable in the future in terms of water quality issues? Do you think that the county is in a position to provide services in a way that will be environmentally sustainable?

R.F.: Well, I'm not as familiar with the urban programs nearly as much as I am with the rural, and of course the county in particular doesn't deal with water quality issues near as much as Unified Sewerage Agency as the primary ones who manage that inside the urban area.

But I think that for the most part Unified Sewerage Agency is working well to manage water quality issues inside the urban area,

and I think they're taking some progressive steps. You know, Unified Sewerage Agency doesn't just manage sewage; they manage surface waters, also, surface water quality, and they're doing some things to try and improve that water quality. They've got some programs for several areas, sort of their big pilot programs for Bronson Creek and Rock Creek and Willow Creek and different watersheds in the county. They've got groups of citizens and specialists working on developing plans and programs so that water quality can be improved and then kept in a good condition in those various streams and watersheds. So I think they've got a good approach that they're working at.

I think there will always be some challenges to improve water quality, as you put in more and more streets and roofs and sidewalks and construction development and erosion and cutting down trees and that sort of thing, it's always going to be a difficulty, but I think that for the most part that can be managed to hopefully improve or at least maintain water quality without any serious problems in that from inside the urban area.

M.O'R.: And apart from the growth that they spur, do you see any difficulties with the expansion of the high tech industry out here in the valley?

R.F.: Well, growth is the major concern, and you put in roofs and you put in pavement and parking lots, so you've got a lot more runoff and the problems associated with that. Also, one of the serious concerns, and again, I don't have the figures on it, I just sort of vaguely wonder about the high volumes of water that are used in the semiconductor industry. You know, our sources of water are somewhat limited. Certainly you can't take much more out of the Tualatin; that can't be a source of water for any more extensive use.

We're going to get some additional water from Barney Reservoir shortly as that dam goes up higher, then they're going to be putting some more cubic feet in there, but I don't think that will meet all the already increased demands from the plants that are just under construction right now. That won't be enough water for that, and I'm not sure where they're getting their additional water. There is a pipe plan from somewhere in the Coast Range out here to get some more water there.

So I worry about the volumes of water that those industries need, and along with industries, as you get more and more people moving here, of course they need more water, and apart from the water quality, I just think there's going to be a difficulty in this area supplying the volume of water that people need. We certainly have a lot more resources than they do down in Phoenix or Los Angeles or something, but I would hope we wouldn't have to get the kind of projects they have there where you're pulling in water from 300 miles away to provide water for the people in the Tualatin Valley.

I've heard people talking about, well, the next place to get water from is the Willamette River. We'll just pull it out near Wilsonville and pump it up here. I would question that with the reports that I've just in the last month heard about. I don't know if you've heard about all the deformed fish they're finding in the Willamette River, in that particular stretch of river, where they're finding fish with fins growing out of their heads, and I mean, they're just grossly deformed fish and sick and everything, and nobody knows why. Well, I would certainly assume it has something to do with the water, and if they don't know what's causing the problem for the fish, I certainly don't want to be drinking it myself.

So I just wonder what source of water we might be able to use, and I'd hate to see us start to draw more from the groundwater because that's a limited resource, and a lot of places I'm sure you're aware of the problems they've had with depleting groundwater, going down and down and down, like out in Kansas it's gone down to 800 feet, the groundwater level, and California it's gone down so much that the Salinas Valley area the actual elevation of the ground has sunk 36 feet because they've pumped so much water out that the ground has settled 36 feet deeper than it used to be 50 years ago. And of course you end up with - this area you've got saltwater underneath, and so we could start to pull up saltwater to contaminate the water table here. Oh, there's just a multitude of problems with that. I just would not want to have major tapping into the groundwater in this area. I think there are going to be some real problems in that.

M.O'R.: You think we'd suck saltwater from coastal waters, then?

R.F.: Well, it's old geologic saltwater in the rocks from, you know, millions of years ago is where that's coming from.

M.O'R.: I see.

R.F.: And of course whenever you start to pull it in right now, if we have a surface contamination problem, you know, the water table is up so high that it doesn't go down very deep if there are some chemicals or pesticides or something that gets in the water, we don't have real significant chemical problems in our groundwater, but if the water starts getting pulled out so the water table goes lower and lower, so you've got this dry layer of soil, then if you have gasoline or pesticides or chemicals or something fall in, it's going to go down deep and get in the groundwater, and so you've damaged the whole groundwater table.

So I would not like to see them use groundwater as a major source of water for this area. There are a lot of problems involved in it. So it's a dilemma, but certainly people and industries need water, and I don't know how we're going to deal with that, but of course we need to go with what we're working on right now, which is to keep our present existing surface water as clean as possible so that that's not an additional problem we have to work with.

M.O'R.: It might be time for another water project along the line of Scoggins for the area. I guess there are sites that could be developed.

R.F.: Oh, there certainly are. There are proposed sites, and a lot of people pushing for several sites for reservoirs in the Tualatin Basin, but you know, there's a lot of difference of opinion on the merits of whether or not that should be. You know, you look at migratory fish runs, which it stops. You look at habitat. You look at destruction of productive farmland because you can't farm if it's under 60 feet of water. You know, in different areas there are some real drawbacks to that. I'm not certain that I personally agree with all of the opposition that some people have. Many places we don't have any or very significant fish runs to damage by putting in water projects, dams of some sort, and it looks to me like some of the lands that they would propose putting that on, you would cover up some farm land, in some cases not the best productive farmland around, but it would cover that up.

It would certainly have the - well, provide extra recreation. I mean, Hagg Lake gets pretty high use in the summer, and you know, 25 years ago that wasn't there, and people sort of wondered, "Well, will they use it much?" Well, it certainly is used an awful lot in the summer for fishing and boating and recreation. And I think

that another reservoir certainly could provide another recreation alternative for people, and of course could add to flood control capabilities.

Last winter a lot of people were complaining about Wally Otto - I don't know if you've interviewed him, but they were complaining about him causing the floods because of letting too much water through the dam. Well, the Scoggins drainage is, what, less than I think eight percent of the whole watershed, and they're blaming him for causing the floods when he can only control eight percent of it, and he had to let the water out or the dam would blow out. But if we had more reservoir capability, of course you could have greater control of flooding as you have more reservoirs to hold some of that water back. So there would be the benefits there.

Of course that was the real flag-waving gung-ho, let's do it for water quality, water quantity and flood control, back in the 50's. You know, they were building dams right and left because that was the best thing there is, and now we of course know that there's some consequences and some problems with those, but I just wonder if in the Tualatin Basin with our high population and situation if we wouldn't be better off with some additional water management projects. And I tend to think that those would be more valuable, more positives than negatives on those.

M.O'R.: You just mentioned a little bit ago about a plan that the high tech industry has specifically to pipe water down from the Coast Range?

R.F.: Oh, I don't know the details on that. I've just heard someplace, and I don't even know where it's from, it might be Forest Grove or something, but there's some kind of project, you'd have to talk to USA to know just what it is, but they're planning on putting in, as I understand it, a four- or five-foot pipeline

from out west here somewhere going essentially to the new Intel and all those high tech plants there.

M.O'R.: So it would be a source specifically dedicated to their use?

R.F.: Yes. That's what I understand. I don't know the details on where it's going to be coming from. There's supposed to be some water there, and there's also some question about what they're going to do with the water once they're through with it because supposedly it's going to be extremely clean water with - of course the people that are producing it say that there won't be any harmful chemicals involved in that, it will all be clean water. I don't know, but they don't want to use it for drinking water, but it would supposedly be good for irrigation, so they're trying to perhaps expand the Irrigation District to use it for irrigating farmland, and that's all just little bits and pieces. I don't know any of the details, so I can't tell you much about that program, but there's something going on where there's some talk now about what they're going to do with their high tech water once they're done with it, rather than just dump it into the sewerage agency so they have to process a lot more water, and it's probably as clean before it goes into it as it would be when it came out, so why put it in the system when you can make other use of it, is what they're thinking.

M.O'R.: Well, anything else you want to say, or any subject you want to return to?

R.F.: Oh, I think you've covered it pretty well. We've got a lot of things going on, and as you know, there's always been interest in the river and what's going on, and we still have that today, just looking at it in different ways, and what we're doing.

I think that what you're doing can be an important part of water quality because different things motivate different people,

and you know, for some people it's the economics, and some people it's the fish and some people it's the scenery or canoeing on it, and for some people, and I think a part of it for everybody, is knowing that there's some history, that there's a tradition that people have been involved in the river for a long time and that we want to recognize what's been going on there with the river and not make it a sewage dump or just a muddy pile like a Los Angeles concrete trough going through. By what you're doing you make people more aware of what the river has been and what its capabilities are and what people want for it, so we all develop sort of a sense of community for that river, and that's what it takes is a sense of community of people caring about the river and how it affects other people and what's going on with it.

M.O'R.: Well, I hope this project can contribute to that. And thank you very much for the interview and for your own contribution.

[End of Tape 4, Side 1]