

# Oregon credits land-use plan with economic growth

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SALEM, Ore. — A dozen years ago, Oregon adopted the toughest land-use planning law in the nation — a legal blueprint outlining the future for 36 million acres of private property in the state.

Environmentalists, civic planners and some legislators wanted laws to prevent uncontrolled urban sprawl, particularly in the populous Willamette Valley where lush farmland butts up against cities.

Critics called the legislation communism, social engineering and an unconstitutional effort by the state to tell property owners what they could do with their land. They tried to repeal it three times at the ballot box but failed.

The blueprint was supposed to have been finished three years after the law was approved in 1973. But it has taken 12 years, \$200 million and a lot of hard work by local governments.

By the end of June, Oregon's 38 counties and 243 cities are expected to have received state approval of plans that will govern Oregon development from now until the year 2000.

The criticism continues, but backers say the law is starting to pay off and has become the cornerstone of Oregon's efforts to wean itself from the ups and downs of a timber-reliant economy by attracting stable high-technology industries.

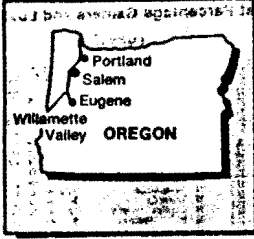
Gov. Victor Atiyeh has used the land-use program to lure Japanese electronics firms to the state, promising them specific industrial sites for their plants that are near affordable housing and recreation, yet free from confrontations with angry homeowners.

The governor credits land-use laws in part for decisions by NEC America, Fujitsu America and other electronics firms to locate in Oregon. It was also a major part of his pitch to General Motors Corp. to locate its new \$5 billion Saturn car manufacturing plant in Oregon.

"The land-use planning process has been worth it because we have assured ourselves that we can grow economically and still protect our livability," Atiyeh said. "No state in the union except Oregon can make that statement."

But farmers and ranchers still have mixed opinions about the land-use program.

"You talk to 12 farmers and you'll get 12 different opinions



Bob Berloff/Dallas Times Herald

but if you travel from Portland to Eugene you'll see a lot of agriculture land that is still agriculture land," said Jim Smart, a farmer in Polk County west of Salem. "Without land-use planning it would all be strip development."

The plans adopted by the local governments give each of Oregon's 36 million acres of privately owned land specific designations for use. Included in those plans are nearly 16 million acres of land set aside for exclusive farm use and another 13 million acres designated for forestry.

Of the remaining land, the plans confine most major development to urban and suburban city limits and to a surrounding urban growth boundary. Strict designations have been applied on where housing, commercial and industrial development can take place.

The law also set up the Land Conservation and Development Commission, a seven-member panel of land-use czars who have passed judgment on whether each of those plans has met a stringent 18-point state test.

In addition to protecting farm and forest land, the components of that test included a massive grassroots citizen participation program, protection of scenic areas, air and water pollution controls, the availability of housing commensurate with income levels, access to sewer and water, protection of estuaries, wetlands, beaches and rivers and preventing development on geologically unsound ground.

The program was initially aimed at the lush Willamette Valley, which includes Portland and Eugene and is home to 80 percent of the state's population. The valley also contains millions of acres of farmland.

But problems occurred when it was applied statewide and took in more politically conservative areas that were not facing the same kinds of developmental pressures

and were, in fact, hungry for growth.

Rural opposition spawned three statewide ballot measures that would have abolished the planning process. All three were defeated.

Realtors, home builders and rural landowners claim people are being forced to live in the city and forget their dreams of retiring to five acres in the country.

"What we have is a whole lot of mad people out there," said state Rep. Bill Markham, a Republican from Douglas County in southwest Oregon, one of the rural

areas where land-use planning has met its strongest resistance. "They're mad about the taking away of their property rights."

Jim Ross, director of the Department of Land Conservation and Development, acknowledged that restrictions have hampered rural development. But he contends private concerns are outweighed by the overall public good of the program.

Between 1975 and 1983, development in the state came to a virtual standstill as industries, some claiming frustration with the inability of local governments to fin-

ish their plans and make decision about where businesses could locate, went elsewhere.

"Once you embark on land-use planning you almost have a moratorium where no one can do anything" until it's completed, said Atiyeh, who was a state senator when the benchmark planning law was passed by the legislature and signed by Gov. Tom McCall.

"No other state will have the stamina or the political courage to withstand 12 years of that kind of stagnation," Atiyeh said.

"The problem was that there

was a question about whether we could move rapidly enough to meet the demands of a changing marketplace," said Allan Mann of the Department of Economic Development.

"All that has changed. Now we can assure that an inappropriate land use will not put something next to you that you don't want," he said.

"I suppose now that we're close to the end of this it's been worth it," said Bob Ohmart, president of the Oregon Association of Realtors. "But not without a lot of pain."