Envision the Rogue Valley

Creating a more livable and sustainable
Jackson County through responsible land use planning

ROGUE advocates

Advocating for a more livable & sustainable
Rogue Valley through responsible land use.
Rogue Advocates is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization working to make the Rogue Valley a more livable and sustainable place to live. We focus our efforts on preserving farmland and forestland as well as maintaining the high quality of life that draws so many to visit and to live in Rogue Valley communities. We accomplish this work through education, outreach and advocacy in the land use planning arena in Jackson and Josephine counties.

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Rogue Advocates thanks its tireless collaborator, 1000 Friends of Oregon, plus the many community members and leaders who took the time out of their busy schedules to engage in this important process. Thanks also to the many people involved in all of the previous hard work that has been undertaken to keep the region’s rural landscape intact.

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Executive Summary

Around 80% of the land in Jackson County is forestland, a large fraction of which is owned by the federal government. The remaining 20% of land in the county is available for residential, agriculture, forestry, industrial and commercial uses. We have a limited supply of land in Jackson County and must use it wisely, especially given that the population is projected to double over the next 50 years.

With this limited supply of land and growing population, local residents have long been concerned about keeping our rural landscape intact and maintaining the high quality of life prevalent in many of the region’s towns and cities. Regional efforts such as Our Region, Envision Oregon and the Greater Bear Creek Regional Problem Solving Plan have all made considerable progress on this issue. However, the work is not yet done.

Envision the Rogue Valley picks up where these other efforts have left off. Through this project, we have sought community feedback concerning land use planning policies to help achieve what local residents care about most: Preserving farmland, reducing our dependence on the automobile and making our communities safer, healthier and more livable.

This Envision the Rogue Valley report synthesizes the emerging trends from months of community discussions, and creates a set of recommendations for implementing more responsible land use planning policies in Jackson County. We recommend implementing two main land use policies, plus a third policy that is not specifically a land use policy, but still is a necessary component of farmland protection, and does include some land use aspects.

The first land use policy we recommend implementing is to concentrate the majority of future urban growth within existing urban areas. The second land use policy is to ensure that as we do concentrate our growth, using higher density development, that we are doing this type of development well.

The third policy is to develop strategies to make farming more viable. As Jackson County is a resource-based economy, with farming being an integral part of our local economy, we would be remiss to develop a strategy for conserving our rural landscape that does not take into account the need to make farming itself more viable. We recommend that the county tackles a range of issues pertaining to the economic success of local agriculture.

Implementing these recommendations, which came from community members and have significant local support, can lead to creating a more livable, sustainable Jackson County, even as we experience tremendous population growth. Our hope is that this report serves as a useful tool for community members and decision-makers dedicated to make Jackson County an even better place to live than it is now.
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Note about scope of this report:
This report focuses just on Jackson County. While the Rogue Valley also encompasses Josephine County, the biggest population center is in Jackson County (and actually within Jackson County, the Bear Creek Valley), as are the biggest threats to our rural landscape and quality of urban life. This is why we chose to focus on Jackson County for this phase of the Envision project. Still, much of what holds true for Jackson County also is true for Josephine County, and many of the recommendations can also be applied to Josephine County. If funding permits, we plan to do a similar effort focusing on Josephine County next.
Introduction

In your imagination, climb with me to the top of one of the great vantage points in our valley, such as Roxy Ann or Grizzly peaks. Looking out, what do we see? In the distance are the dark conifer forests of the mountains: U.S. Bureau of Land Management and national forestland. At our feet are the spreading towns and developments clustered along Bear Creek and the Interstate 5 corridor. And in between, we see a varied, pleasing and productive rural landscape of farms, orchards, vineyards, pastures and ranches . . .


A growing population flocks to Jackson County

Captured in the above passage is the essence of what makes Jackson County so special. As the author goes on to state, “Without any doubt, this rural countryside is fundamental to the quality of life that we enjoy in Southern Oregon. It is essential to our economic health, our agricultural productivity and our regional identity.”

The rural nature of Jackson County is what draws so many people to the area, not only to visit but also to make a permanent home. This becomes clear when we examine our population growth rates. For decades now, the county has experienced growth rates higher than the national average and higher than Oregon’s average.1 The population doubled in the last 30 years and is projected to double again in the next 50 years. This is why, as Dr. Trail also states in his essay, the rural countryside of Jackson County is also “the most threatened part of our landscape.”2

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1 Between 2000 and 2010 the United States’ population grew by 12 percent while Oregon’s grew by 9.7 percent. Jackson County’s population grew by 12.1 percent during that same time. While this is only slightly higher than Oregon’s average, it is far higher than most Oregon counties’ population growth (Deschutes County’s growth, at over 36%, skews the state’s average). See U.S. Census Bureau at: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/41000.html and http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/41/41029.html.

2 Obviously population growth is not a local phenomenon. An exploding population is a global concern where we have a fixed amount of resources in the world. Rogue Advocates recognizes that endless growth threatens the preservation of farmland, forestland, open space, wildlife habitat and livability that we treasure in the Rogue Valley. However, this report focuses not on attempting to limit population growth in Jackson County, but instead on how to direct our growing population to the places where it makes the most sense.
Our ability to fit a growing population is limited by the physical parameters of the county: Of the nearly 1.8 million acres in the county, 80% of that land is forested (mainly the grey areas on the map to the right) leaving only 366,000 acres of “usable” land. The remaining 20% of this “usable” land is highly sought after for residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural and park use. Not only is there little land available for these other uses, but these uses are often in conflict. See, for example, the map to the right, which shows all of the agricultural land in the county. The agricultural land (green areas) is mainly within the Bear Creek Valley, which is also the most heavily populated area of the county, including the towns along the I-5 corridor, from Ashland to Central Point.

It is already very challenging to accommodate these varied uses for our existing population on the available land base. Imagine trying to fit in twice as many people as we have now – how will we do that without compromising our rural landscape?

**Local efforts to conserve the county’s rural nature**

Jackson County residents have been grappling with the loss of rural lands for several decades. Jackson County first adopted a policy in 1980 to preserve open space, forestlands and agricultural areas, and to maintain the overall rural character of the county. After seeing the county grow by 20,000 since the adoption of the its Comprehensive Plan in 1972, during its Comprehensive Plan revision in 1980 Jackson County solicited and received extensive comment from residents about how they wanted growth to occur. Four alternative futures were outlined and the predominant response was to avoid filling in the valleys with development by limiting growth to cities and to control rural sprawl. Based on this, the county adopted a policy to preserve open space, forestlands and agricultural areas and maintain the overall rural character of the county.³

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³ Jackson County Comprehensive Plan, “Alternative Futures” Element was adopted by Ordinance 80-17, effective 10-28-80 (File 80-1-ZOA).
The first serious effort to actually determine how to effectively conserve farmland in Jackson County in the face of a growing population did not occur until the mid 1990s. This effort was Our Region, a process led by local farmers, agricultural experts, and other community leaders.\(^4\)

This process developed a set of recommendations, but they were never carried out under the auspices of Our Region, as the Our Region effort eventually morphed into the Bear Creek Regional Problem Solving Plan, known more commonly as “RPS.”\(^5\) RPS was coordinated by the Rogue Valley Council of Governments and participants included most cities in the Bear Creek Valley (the most populated area of Jackson County), from Ashland to Eagle Point. RPS developed the twin goals of preserving farmland and expanding urban growth areas efficiently.

After over a decade, RPS is now a locally approved regional plan but still awaits state approval. RPS has established some positive policies for agriculture, such as agricultural buffering between existing farmland and new urban areas. It also requires that an Agricultural Task Force be created in order to study the impacts of RPS to the county’s agricultural economy, and to create strategies to mitigate for those impacts. These positive effects that RPS could have on farming and farmland in our county, however, are overshadowed by the reality that the plan identifies approximately 8,500 acres of rural lands for future urbanization. Of those, around 7,000 acres are zoned for farm use, and of those acres, around 1,200 were identified as some of the best remaining farmland left in Jackson County.

While the RPS process was still underway, Jackson County residents also participated in a process called Envision Oregon, which was led by statewide land


Beyond RPS

The RPS plan (and its Our Region precursor) has laid significant groundwork for accomplishing the goals outlined in Envision Oregon. However, to truly accomplish these livability and sustainability goals, as a community we need to do more than what has been done through RPS alone. In actuality, the thrust of the RPS Plan was identifying which rural lands would be selected for future urbanization. It did not develop strategies for making our cities more walkable and bikable. It did not determine how we can expand a viable public transit service in our region. It did not create ways to ensure that the remaining farmland in our county will be permanently protected.

Proponents of the plan say that while yes, we will lose thousands of acres of farmland to urbanization, at least we can be certain that the farmland identified as growth areas will be all the farmland our region will lose. Is this really true though? How can we be certain that no more farmland will be lost? RPS offers no built-in protections for the remaining farmland in the county. Also, while our efforts to convince the RPS leaders to reduce the amount of farmland (especially the best quality farmland) did not pay off in a significant way (only a few hundred acres were saved), does this mean that the farmland identified for future urbanization is written off entirely? Is there nothing that can be done to save any of this farmland if the RPS Plan becomes the approved law of the land? These are some of the lurking questions so far left unanswered.

Also left unanswered are the questions about what a growing population, especially one that will significantly expand the urban footprint as the RPS Plan envisions, will do to our existing towns and cities. As we expand the urban areas in our county, will we also expand the amount of time county residents spend in their cars getting around from place to place? Will we so alter the urban landscape that we lose the character of our communities and small-town charm? Will the diminishing rural landscape decrease the vitality of our local economy? Will our cities and towns suffer as they lose out on agritourism dollars they benefit from now?

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6 Information about the Envision Oregon process can be found at 1000 Friends of Oregon’s website at http://www.friends.org/issues/envision, where you can download a report from the first stage of town hall style discussions as well as the report that outlines policy recommendations stemming from those discussions.
Next steps: Envision the Rogue Valley

These are all important questions that still need to be answered if we really are to create a more livable, sustainable Rogue Valley. That’s why Rogue Advocates, which has been working since 2007 to implement more responsible land use policies in Jackson and Josephine counties, began a project called Envision the Rogue Valley. The Envision project picks up where RPS and its predecessors leave off. Since late 2010 we have been examining the holes in our land use policies and looking for innovative policies that other communities have implemented to preserve farmland, increase public transit, biking and walking and to make our cities more livable.

In January and February 2012 we held a two-part Envision the Rogue Valley series, in which we invited community members and local leaders to sit down at the table together and discuss these very questions, and how we may find some solutions that work for our community. We asked the same questions through a two-part survey that could be accessed online so we could reach a wider span of our community.7

We recognize that the feedback we received has not been fully comprehensive, as we were unable to poll each and every resident of Jackson County. However, the participants in this process represent a diverse makeup from our community, including farmers, concerned citizens, transportation advocates, transportation agency representatives, city and county planners, realtors and local elected decision-makers. The feedback has been thoughtful and informative, and we have synthesized it into trends about which land use policies and strategies our community would like to see implemented. This report captures these trends, and creates recommendations based on those trends.

Our next step is to share the recommendations in this report with local community members and decision-makers. Our hope is that local decision-makers will see how committed our community is to livability and sustainability in the region, and will use this report as a tool to actually implement these policies. Actually implementing these policies is key to accomplishing the highly interrelated goals of preserving farmland, decreasing our dependence on driving and making our communities safer, healthier and more livable.

7 Online survey results and community forum feedback is all available upon request.
Recommendations

Preserving farmland, reducing our dependence on the automobile and creating safer, healthier, more livable towns and cities: It’s all connected!

There are three policies that if made a part of Jackson County’s land use planning program, would have the effect of simultaneously accomplishing Jackson County residents’ shared goals of preserving farmland, reducing our dependence on the automobile and increasing the safety, health and livability of our towns and cities. These three policies are:

1. **Concentrate the majority of future urban growth within existing urban areas;**

2. **Ensure that as develop more efficiently, that we are doing it well;** and

3. **Develop strategies to make farming more economically viable.**

In our Recommendations section we next explore each of these policies individually, explaining how they accomplish these livability/sustainability goals that are so important to local residents. We also discuss the tools that we can use in our region to help carry out these policies.
1. Concentrate the majority of future urban growth within existing urban areas

Arguably, this is the most effective strategy for accomplishing community goals.

By far the most effective land use planning strategy in terms of meeting all three goals of preserving farmland, reducing our dependence on the automobile and creating safer, healthier, more livable communities is to concentrate the majority of future urban growth within our existing urban areas. By choosing to accommodate future growth mainly within our existing urban footprint, we stay off of our precious agricultural lands, leaving those lands available for farming.

That’s not the only benefit for our region, however. When we concentrate growth inside of our urban cores (especially along existing transit routes), we increase the viability of our public transportation system. Public transit relies on lots of riders, and the more riders you have, the more money you can use to boost transit routes and frequency of service. The number of routes and frequency of service in turn boosts ridership: It is a feedback loop that goes both ways. Also, the more demand there is for bike lanes, crosswalks and other safety measures for non-automobile transportation, the more likely it is that this infrastructure will be created in our community.

It also costs the city less to develop this way. By concentrating future growth in existing urban areas where there is already the infrastructure in place (e.g. roads,
sewer and water lines) cities save significant amounts of money they would otherwise spend on building new infrastructure outside the city limits. They save considerably on operation and maintenance of public areas and public services. For example, the less new roads and sewer and water lines that have to be built to service new areas, the less repaving of those roads and repairing of pipes that has to be done. Likewise, the less new neighborhoods that are built on the urban fringe, the less driving fire and police departments are going to have to do to get to those places in an emergency situation, and the less driving buses will have to do to transport kids back and forth to school.

Compact, centered cities also are safer, healthier and more livable for residents. Places are easier to get to because destinations are closer in proximity, and people tend to drive less and choose to walk or bike instead when things are closer together. People tend to exercise more and be healthier, and in turn are happier. More than any other strategy, this one effectively accomplishes all three goals.

**Strategies for concentrating growth**

So how exactly do we concentrate growth mainly within existing urban areas? This may seem like a hard question to answer, given that the RPS Plan has already identified approximately 8,500 acres of currently rural lands for future urbanization. BUT, the fact that these lands are identified as growth areas does not mean that we as a community will necessarily have to urbanize them. At a minimum, it does not mean that we have to urbanize them right away . . . There are plenty of strategies that can be used to at least slow the growth onto these important rural lands. We recommend adopting policies that focus on the following strategies:

- **Building more efficiently**
- **Making best quality rural lands off-limits to urbanization**
- **Making annexation of rural lands a community choice**

The green and red areas on this map are future growth areas the RPS Plan has identified.
#1: Building More Efficiently

A. Incentives

While the RPS Plan identifies specific areas for future growth, we can slow the pace of annexing these areas for growth by more efficiently developing our existing urban areas. How do we do this? The answer is by accommodating a higher number of people on our existing urban lands. In other words, it is growing more densely.

Community members support this concept, and on the whole feel that the best way to achieve this is through offering financial incentives for developers to develop in certain ways that will lead to higher densities in our communities. One idea that community members are particularly in support of is creating a tiered “System Development Charges” (SDC) system, in which developers would be rewarded with lower fees based on certain factors, as shown below:

- **Location:** In an effort to encourage development within existing urban areas instead of on rural lands, SDCs could be reduced where development projects occur within the city limits. Further reductions could occur where development is in certain locations that community members would like to see be re-developed, such as downtown cores of our communities. Furthermore, SDCs could be reduced even further where development occurs within a certain proximity to existing transit routes.

  **About System Development Charges:** State law allows local municipalities to charge developers fees to cover costs associated with new development. These costs are designed to cover city expenses such as road and sewer/water line construction, maintenance and repair, as well as services that will also need to be provided for residents living in the new development, such as schools and fire and police protection. To spur development, cities often waive SDCs or charge less than the actual cost of new development. The result is that these costs are shouldered by the city and are often passed on to the taxpayers. The result is that development rarely tends to pay its own way.

- **Number of units per acre:** SDCs could also be reduced for projects that boost the number of residential units per acre: The more units, the lesser the development fees associated with the project.

- **Type of parcel:** Lastly, where the developer chooses to redevelop urban parcels rather than build on fresh, undeveloped ground, SDCs could also be reduced.

A Note on Density: When we refer to density, we are not talking about densifying ALL neighborhoods. What we are talking about is a different mix, where traditional neighborhoods would continue to exist and may still be developed, but where new types of development with new options that don’t currently exist for people will be encouraged. While the word “density” may conjure up scary images of big city project housing with people packed in like sardines, this is not what you get when density is done well. All the demographic and market trends show that increasing density is going to be a necessary component of livable cities in the future, so it is important that we do density, and do it well!
**B. Disincentives**

In addition to creating incentives to stimulate the growth within existing urban areas, many community members were also interested in seeing some policies that discouraged or disincentivized development on rural lands. One idea was to add on a tax/fee that developers would have to pay when annexing rural lands for development. This fee could be added to a farmland conservation fund, which could be used to bolster agriculture in our region. To accomplish the goal of preserving farmland, this fee could be tiered as well, with development on farmland zoned parcels being a higher rate than non-farmland zoned property, and a higher rate again when it is high-quality farmland (e.g. Class 1 & 2 irrigated farmland).

**#2: Making Best Quality Rural Lands Off-Limits to Growth**

There was also a lot of discussion about preventing urban growth from happening on our best remaining farmland. As discussed, the RPS Plan has already identified thousands of acres of rural lands for future growth. However, if the plan does get passed, as mentioned, it is not inevitable that growth has to occur on these parcels, especially if we develop more efficiently and compactly, as discussed above. One way of ensuring that our urban areas grow more efficiently and compactly is to make less land available for annexation. This can be done through permanent protection of our best remaining farmland, which would effectively make these lands unavailable for urbanization. Here are the three tools available to permanently protect farmland that forum participants discussed:

- **Farmland Conservation Easements**

  One tool that many communities across the country use to preserve farmland is the conservation easement. A conservation easement is a legal tool aimed at protecting conservation values. It is an agreement that the landowner voluntarily enters into with an entity holding the land in trust (usually the local land conservancy), and the landowner typically receives a significant financial benefit, recognizing the great value of conserving the land for the community.

  More and more this tool is used to protect farmland, not just to protect wildlife habitat or forests or streams. Locally the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy has begun to work with farmers to put agricultural conservation easements on their land and they plan to do much more of this work, working strategically to protect the best remaining lands. Farmland protected by a conservation easement would be off-limits to urban development permanently.⁹

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⁹ To learn more about conservation easements and the work that Southern Oregon Land Conservancy has been doing, see their website at [http://www.landconserve.org/](http://www.landconserve.org/).
• **Rural Reserves**

Another way of permanently protecting (or at least more permanently protecting) farmland from urban development is to create a Rural Reserves program for Jackson County. Oregon law authorizes counties to identify rural parcels needed for future urbanization over the next 50 years (essentially this is the mechanism that Jackson County used to identify parcels for growth during the RPS process).

In a limited fashion, Oregon law also authorizes counties to identify rural parcels that the county wants to see remain resource lands over the next 50 years. It is limited because currently only Portland Metro region is authorized by law to go through this process. One of the big holes in the RPS plan is that the plan identifies future growth areas but fails to identify farmland that should simultaneously be protected into the long-term. If a Rural Reserves program was authorized for Jackson County, we could fix this major shortcoming with RPS, and seek out long-term protection for the best remaining farmland.\(^\text{10}\)

• **Farmland Conservation Zone**

Another concept that could more permanently protect farmland is something called the Farmland Conservation Zone. This concept was explored during the *Our Region* process, and was included as a recommendation for protecting farmland. The idea was that the best farmland in the county should be identified and protected, and the rest of the land would be available for urbanization – as long as it stayed off of the best farmland. The way that the best farmland would be protected would be to identify the best parcels as being part of this “zone” and then making it illegal to urbanize these parcels. This would be similar to a rural reserves program, although the mechanism would be slightly different.

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\(^{10}\) To learn more about Rural Reserves and the process that Portland Metro region went through to create their own Rural Reserves, see 1000 Friends of Oregon’s website: [http://www.friends.org/issues/reserves](http://www.friends.org/issues/reserves) or Portland Metro’s website on Urban and Rural Reserves: [http://www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=26257](http://www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=26257).
Making Annexation of Rural Lands a Community Choice:
A big part of the discussion about farmland protection was the idea that if as a community, we really want to see our farmland protected, we should have greater involvement and more of a say in whether it is protected. One idea was to follow the lead of Davis, California, which only allows farmland to be annexed if city residents vote for it. There seems to be support for this “voter-based annexation” here, although several forum participants were fearful that if we have a citizenry that is uninformed about the widespread benefits of protecting our farmland, that this may lead to being a mechanism for more not less farmland development.

Another tool that was discussed was giving the public an opportunity to financially support the protection of farmland. This could be done through a ballot measure, for example, where the public could vote whether or not to levy a tax for farmland protection. Each community could separately have its own tax, or this could be done countywide for all communities. Either way, the money would go to a fund to bolster agriculture in our county (see section below on ideas for bolstering agriculture).
2. Ensure that as we do higher density development, that we are doing it well.

Making our urban areas livable is vital
Concentrating the majority of our urban development within our existing urban areas is a vital strategy – and perhaps the most effective one by far – for maintaining the character and integrity of our region. But, if we choose to make this a local planning policy, we can’t just stop there. As we grow more efficiently, and do higher density development within our communities, it is also vital that we do higher density development well. As more and more people are concentrated in the same urban space, other problems can arise like increased traffic congestion, pollution and other environmental degradation, chaotic, unattractive development, and a feeling of being penned in and lacking access to nature. All of these problems have long been associated with urban living and contributed to the eventual exodus to the suburbs and more rural living. If only we could develop ways to avoid these problems, we could also avoid the itch for sprawl!

Strategies for urban livability
Fortunately, there are ways that we can avoid these problems, and largely the answers are through sound urban planning. As we concentrate more of our growth within our urban areas, we also need to make sure that we maintain cities and towns that are highly livable and sustainable. We recommend adopting planning policies that maintain the following set of “livability values” that community members voiced as being highly important to them:

- Transportation choices
- Housing choices
- Ecological design
- Character & beauty
- Strong sense of community
- Access to nature
**Transportation choices**

How we get around is a huge piece of the livability puzzle in urban areas. Livability in fact is often synonymous with transportation. What we confirmed through our forums was that community members want to see more transportation choices in our region: They are clamoring to get out of the car and go by foot or by pedal, but are discouraged from doing so due to safety and convenience concerns. Plus, they are not just clamoring for easier mobility, but easier access: Community members want to be able to access amenities, services, school and work a little easier, without having to go so many miles to get where they need to go. To improve both mobility and access in our region, then, we recommend adopting the following planning policies:

- **Concentrate growth along transit routes:** We discussed this tactic in the section above, but it is so important that we are mentioning it again here. As we concentrate growth within urban areas, we must also be strategic about *where within our urban areas* we are concentrating this growth. The more we can focus residential and commercial development along existing transit routes, the more functional our public transit system becomes. Developing this way won’t just happen, however. It is vital that we purposefully steer growth towards these areas, and the community is supportive of financial incentives and other means to positively reward this type of development.¹¹

- **Increase mixed use development:** Traditionally, zoning laws create different zones for different uses: people live in this zone over here and work and shop in those zones over there. While the original intention of zoning was good, times have changed and the laws need to change too. As our towns and cities grow in size, it becomes harder and harder to get from where we live to where we work, shop, play etc. This means more and longer car trips on a daily basis.

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¹¹ The RPS Plan certainly takes a step in the right direction by introducing some requirements for a certain percentage of this type of development in future growth areas. However, there is a lot more that could be done to encourage and facilitate developing this way.
While we can't change the fact that we will always have to go a long way to get some places, we can help alleviate some pressure on our roads and reduce some a lot of car trips by mixing up more of our uses. People tend to drive when the destination is over ¼ mile away. For daily needs like picking up a few items on the grocery list or getting a cup of coffee, if shops carrying these items were in close range to where people lived, many would choose to walk rather than get in the car.

We recommend that cities change their codes where needed to allow more of a mix of uses (e.g. authorize limited commercial development in residential zones – bring back the “corner store”, also authorize more residential use in commercial areas). In addition to simply authorizing a mix of uses, we should adopt ways to encourage and incentivize this type of development.

- **Expand non-car transportation infrastructure:** Some cities here in Jackson County are more bike and pedestrian friendly than others, but on the whole we can say that there is significant infrastructure for biking and walking (e.g., Bear Creek Greenway, some “sharrows,” crosswalks with flashing lights etc.). However, we still have a number of extremely unsafe areas for pedestrians and cyclists and these should be examined. It is clear that if we had more comprehensive non-car transportation infrastructure, people would walk and bike more. We recommend that the county work with alternative transportation advocates including the Jackson County Bicycling Committee, Siskiyou Velo and Southern Oregon Partnership for Active Transportation to identify gaps in bike/pedestrian safety and to develop a strategy to fill in those infrastructure gaps.\(^\text{12}\)

- **Design for transportation alternatives:** Typically, planning regulations require that new development, such as commercial buildings, also build adequate parking facilities, and oftentimes new or wider roads or turn lanes. This reflects the auto-centric nature of urban planning. What if instead, development regulations required that new development be designed to better accommodate people rather than cars? Imagine stores that can be easily accessed from sidewalks and bus stops, where you don’t have to navigate your way through a vast parking lot to enter the front door. Imagine more neighborhoods with garages accessible

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\(^\text{12}\) The idea of introducing a light rail or a commuter rail system is very appealing to many local residents, and was a topic of discussion at the Urban Forum. What may be much more likely to occur in our region, however, is a rapid transit bus service, similar to the one that runs in Eugene, Oregon. According to RVTD representatives, this concept is much more feasible for Jackson County than a rail system, and we should take steps to support efforts to make this happen.
from the alley behind the house, with the sidewalk and a front entrance more of a feature than the garage! We recommend developing policies that incentivize this type of non auto-centric design.\textsuperscript{13}

**Housing choices**

While having transportation choices in our local community is of widespread importance to the people we polled, having housing choices is also of great importance. When we talk about housing choices, what we are really getting to is the issue of \textit{affordability}. While the current economic climate has produced a glut of cheaper than normal houses in the Rogue Valley, the general trend is that single-family housing is not affordable for a lot of people.\textsuperscript{14}

It is also increasingly less desirable for more and more people: changing local demographics toward an older population, fewer married couples with kids and more younger people tending to live with roommates longer than before means that other types of housing are increasingly desirable. Locally, people want to see more options for living in apartments, condos, townhouses and also “co-housing” – particularly co-housing for seniors.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} The \textit{Commercial and Mixed-Use Development Code Handbook} is a great resource with examples of ways to make commercial areas more people-friendly and pedestrian-oriented. \textit{See} pg. 36, for example, which describes one feature this type of commercial area should have: “Building entrances oriented to streets, corner buildings should have corner entrances whenever possible. When it is not practical or reasonable to orient building entrances to an existing street, a new "shopping street" with sidewalks and pedestrian amenities (e.g. weather protection, seating, lights, etc.) should be created within the development.”

\textsuperscript{14} The Jackson County Comprehensive Plan includes a Housing Element: \textit{See} \url{http://www.co.jackson.or.us/Files/15%20-%20HOUSING.pdf}. However, this element was written in the late 1970s and does not appear to have been updated since. Even so, it acknowledges the county’s responsibility for assuring affordable housing exists, while at the same time concluding that there is a shortage of affordable housing in the county. The Regional Housing Element prepared during the RPS process found that this problem continues to exist today despite policies put in place decades ago.

\textsuperscript{15} The \textit{Cohousing Association of the United States} describes cohousing as follows: Cohousing is a type of collaborative housing in which residents actively participate in the design and operation of their own neighborhoods. Cohousing residents are
People want to be able to afford to live anywhere in the region, so that they can be close to where they work and go to school, not just be relegated to living in certain parts of the valley to live affordably. We recommend the following:

- **Renew commitment to affordable housing**: Revise the county’s comprehensive plan to include a policy to create affordable housing options all around the valley. Have cities commit to providing affordable housing so that people can live where they work (e.g. you shouldn’t have to travel from Ashland to Eagle Point every day just because you work in Ashland but can only afford to live in Eagle Point).

- **Developer incentives**: To carry out this commitment, cities should provide incentives for developers to include affordable housing options (i.e. a reduction in development fees if they build a handful of cheaper units in an upscale apartment complex).

- **“Mother-in-law dwellings”**: Cities that do not already authorize these should change their codes to allow “mother-in-law cottages” on residential properties. Not only does this help create higher-densities, which leads to more viable transportation options, but this also creates an availability of small, cheap housing options for singles or small families.

- **Work with HUD**: Cities should also work with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to make sure that their affordable housing projects are located along transit corridors. There has been a trend toward siting these developments in areas that are virtual islands, inaccessible to public transportation. This lack of access to transport makes “affordable housing” much less affordable, as families then have to spend more of their income on buying and maintaining a car.

**Ecological design**

Another important value that arose was that people want us to be living as harmoniously as possible with our natural environment. People would like to ensure that as we do grow in population, that the housing and commercial development we build to accommodate this population is done in an ecological fashion, with “low-impact development” standards. Water catchment systems and

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consciousely committed to living as a community. The physical design encourages both social contact and individual space. Private homes contain all the features of conventional homes, but residents also have access to extensive common facilities such as open space, courtyards, a playground and a common house. [http://www.cohousing.org/what_is_cohousing](http://www.cohousing.org/what_is_cohousing).

At our urban community forum, many participants expressed interest in seeing more co-housing opportunity for seniors in our region.
xeriscaping were mentioned as two options to live more sustainably in our urban environment. We recommend the following:

- **Design standards**: Have a set of standards for design of new buildings that must be followed that include a set of ecological principles. Work with groups such as Rogue Riverkeeper,\(^\text{16}\) which could assist in creating development standards that address water quality problems.

- **Tax/financial incentives**: Provide tax or other financial incentives to retrofit existing urban areas to be more ecological in design (i.e. rain catchment systems, xeriscaping, plant more trees etc.).

**Character & beauty**
Community feedback also revealed a desire to make sure that as we grow in population and as we develop more and more residential and commercial facilities, that we are doing it in aesthetically pleasing ways, with an attention to detail as well as a strong connection to the unique sense of “place” here in this mythical state of Jefferson. Community members want to make sure that we don’t lose the small-town feel of many of our towns, and that we retain a strong sense of our local history and culture as we grow.

- **Design standards**: Many forum and survey participants felt that implementing design standards on either a neighborhood or city-wide scale could help ensure that new development is thoughtfully done, and in keeping with the existing character of the urban environment.

- **Retain unique attributes**: The county create a list of cultural and historical attributes that make our region unique. New development could be required to choose a certain number of attributes in the project design.

**Strong sense of community:**
Jackson County residents also feel passionately about retaining a sense of community, which is created by knowing and interacting with the people that also live in this region. We need to be cognizant of this need as our population grows. The fear is that as we grow bigger we will lose our community feel. Many participants feel it is important that we ensure we design our cities and towns in ways that foster a sense of community like public gathering spots and kid and family friendly neighborhoods. We recommend the following:

\(^{16}\) See Rogue Riverkeeper’s website for more information: [http://rogueriverkeeper.org/](http://rogueriverkeeper.org/).
• **Public gathering spaces:** Create and facilitate more public gathering spaces in existing urban areas, such as parks, farmers markets and community gardens. Ensure that new development includes parks, plazas and other types of well-designed and inviting public spaces.

• **Traffic calming:** Add traffic calming devices in a variety of neighborhoods – especially family oriented neighborhoods to encourage kids to safely play outdoors in their neighborhoods.

• **Design standards:** Incorporate design standards for new development that encourages neighbor-to-neighbor interaction, such as smaller lot sizes, sidewalks, neighborhood parks and playground and street connectivity.

**Access to nature**

Participants like living in this region because of the close proximity to nature and the rural landscape, for all of the recreation, aesthetic and other associated values. They also really like that there is nature within our cities. We need to make sure that as our population increases, and our cities grow to accommodate more of us, that we don’t just build houses and shopping centers but also allow for more parks and community gardens, and plant more trees. We recommend the following:

• **Commit this policy to writing:** Revise comprehensive plan to make it a policy that Jackson County cities are committed to “greening” our cities. Cities should revise their development codes to include some basic requirements that a certain percentage of urban area will be committed to green spaces in the form of parks, trails, community gardens and other spaces that provide access to nature.

• **Green space incentives:** Cities should also revise their codes to include incentives to develop in ways that ensure this happens. One example would be to allow more flexibility so that that the developer can build more units than would ordinarily be allowed in exchange for leaving part of the parcel as a green area. This helps increase densities in the city while at the same time we keep our open spaces (a vital component of a livable but dense city!)

• **Don’t forget the trees:** Cities should also review their codes to achieve the goal of having more trees planted, either through incentives or regulations. One way to achieve this that may work well is to implement community design standards, which require that all new development plant a certain number of trees on the property.

• **Greening vacant lots:** Vacant urban lots that are somehow found to be unsuitable or undesirable for new development could be turned into community gardens, parks or other green spots.
3. Develop strategies to make farming more economically viable

The Farm Economy in Jackson County:
Agriculture is a significant part of the county’s economy. In 2008 farm sales in Jackson County totaled $77 million, and this does not include agricultural-related businesses like Harry & David or Amy’s Kitchen. Agriculture is a growing industry too: In 1990 the county saw only $71 million of farm sales. According to an OSU economic study, the local economic impact of agriculture in Jackson County is 759.2 million, with 2,135 jobs created. See RPS Record pg. 938-942.

Need countywide focus on the farmers
Urban planning can go a long way towards preserving and protecting farmland, and the success of agriculture in our region may depend on implementing the sound urban planning policies discussed in the sections above. However, we would be remiss to focus solely on farmland conservation efforts without also focusing on direct ways to keep the occupation of farming economically viable. While education, marketing and other activities that promote farming are not directly related to land use planning, these themes come up again and again in discussions about preserving agriculture in our region, and should be addressed in this process. This section explores these themes and recommends ways the county can more comprehensively address these farm viability issues.

Tackling farm viability through a task force
The local community is very interested in seeing direct support of farming, particularly through finding ways to make it easier to make money farming and doing farming-related activities. One way of tackling some of these issues is through some kind of county-led agricultural task force. Fortunately, the RPS Plan, if approved by the state, requires the county to create an Agricultural Task Force, which will examine how the RPS Plan will impact agriculture, and then develop methods to mitigate for any negative impacts. The county would be required to develop the Task Force prior to any UGB expansions. Community members were informed of this and suggested that the task force also work on the following issues:

- **Education**
- **Marketing**
- **Re-examine regulations on farm-related activities**
- **Agricultural support services**
- **Agricultural buffers**
- **Farming fund**
**Education**
A strong emerging theme was that while local agriculture continues to become increasingly important in our region, that still the majority of the population is not well-informed about its importance, which leads to a lack of widespread support for eating local and supporting our local farmers. The task force should work with schools and other venues in the community to educate all age levels, but particularly children, on the importance of local agriculture.

**Marketing**
Related to the need for more widespread education on the importance of agriculture is the need to develop more markets for local agricultural products. As our community becomes more educated about the importance of local agriculture, the demand for more local products will increase, but the county can also take proactive steps to increase local markets. The task force should explore and develop different markets such as getting more local produce into schools, government institutions and other venues.

**Re-examine regulations on farm-related activities**
There is widespread concern among farmers that local regulations actually hinder the economic viability of farmers. Most of these regulations are designed to protect farmland, but there is also a widely held perception that these regulations also prohibit or at least make cumbersome farm-related activities such as agritourism, value-added production and farmstands. Many farmers also expressed a concern that regularly comes up in discussions about challenges to farming in our area: The regulations limiting residential development on farmland. Many farmers would like to live where they farm but feel that the land use regulations make this difficult. We recommend that the task force examine these regulations with a view of protecting farmland while also ensuring that farmers are given more leeway for economic activities that support farming. A better balance may need to be struck between allowing additional farm-related activities and protecting farmland in our region.

**Agricultural support services**
Another concern amongst members of the farming community is the diminishing number of services that support farming in our county. We lack a local slaughterhouse, for example, and many of the packinghouses are disappearing, as are tractor sales and repair businesses.\(^{17}\) There is also a fear that as we urbanize our rural lands, that irrigation rights (an essential support service for farming) will also

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\(^{17}\) Jackson County Local Action Coalition’s “Project Rogue Valley” has begun efforts to bring a local meet processing facility to the region: [http://southernoregononline.com/home/2012/02/project-rogue-valley-wants-seeking-slaughterhouse/](http://southernoregononline.com/home/2012/02/project-rogue-valley-wants-seeking-slaughterhouse/).
disappear, leading to the eventual loss bankruptcy of irrigation districts. The task force should examine ways to bring back some of these support services.

**Agricultural buffers**
The RPS plan proposes the creation of buffers and setbacks as physical separations between urban and rural lands to reduce conflicts between rural and urban landholders. However, they would only be required on urban land in Urban Reserve Areas that adjoin farmland. Community members would like to see buffering extended to the entire county, and see this as an important way to bolster farming.

**Farming fund**
The community would also like to see the task force explore ways that we could create and maintain a source of funding that could be used to pay farmers for additional services they provide the community beyond the primary one: producing food. Other services farmers provide to the community include maintaining open space and wildlife habitat, clean air and water and other “ecosystem services” that is inherent in the preservation of rural lands. Being able to pay farmers for carrying out these other services could provide a supplementary income source for the farmer and help to keep the farmer on the land. Helping to fund conservation easements would be another way of helping to keep farmers on the land.

**Tackling farm viability through community collaboration**
Independent of whether the RPS plan is approved, the county should play a significant leading role in bringing together the community to tackle the issues outlined above. A number of local non-profit organizations are currently working toward the goal of making farming more viable in our region, but each with a particular focus. These groups include:

- **ACCESS:** Provides food, housing, heat and other essential services to low income and disabled residents in Jackson County. ACCESS is currently organizing the “Rogue Valley Community Food System Planning Process,” which is a “community-based effort to identify opportunities and needs in our food system and to develop a plan to address them.” Through its FEAST events, this process is bringing together the many groups involved in food...
and farming in our region with the hope of creating a more sustainable food system. [http://www.accesshelps.org/](http://www.accesshelps.org/).

- **Rogue Advocates**: A land use “watchdog” group (and the author of this report), Rogue Advocates works to preserve farmland and forestland in Jackson and Josephine counties, recognizing that we need these available resource lands to maintain a viable resource economy. [www.rogueadvocates.org](http://www.rogueadvocates.org).

- **Rogue Farm Corps**: Dedicated to training the next generation of farmers in an era of significant interest in farming but a shortage of farmers to do the training, Rogue Farm Corps facilitates on-farm educational opportunities in the Rogue Valley. RFC’s focus is currently on post-secondary education level training. [http://roguefarmcorps.org/](http://roguefarmcorps.org/).

- **Rogue Valley Farm to School**: Rogue Valley Farm to School’s mission is to educate children about our food system by both bringing kids to the farm and bringing farm-fresh food to schools. RVF2S focuses on elementary aged school children. [http://www.rvfarm2school.org/about-us/mission.html](http://www.rvfarm2school.org/about-us/mission.html).

- **THRIVE**: THRIVE works on the marketing angle of local agriculture, focusing on connecting local residents with local farm products for a more sustainable, “thriving” local economy. THRIVE publishes the “Rogue Flavor Local Food Guide” and runs an online farmers market, amongst many other local foods marketing programs. [http://www.buylocalrogue.org/](http://www.buylocalrogue.org/).

Many of these groups are involved in ACCESS’s Rogue Valley Community Food System Planning Process, which is making inroads to tackling farm viability issues. However, something that has long been talked about amongst many of these groups is the need for a single person to be in the role of facilitating and helping to carry out all of this important work on a long-term basis. Many feel strongly about creating a county paid coordinator position to lead this effort, and we recommend that the county consider this as the next necessary step in the local efforts to improve our local food and farming system. With so many groups working on different parts of the same puzzle, there is a strong need to coordinate all of these efforts to avoid overlap and stimulate more collaboration in our community.
Don’t forget about private forestland...  
The thrust of the community conversation about resource lands was about farmland, as this is most heavily impacted by urban development in Jackson County. However, community members also discussed the need to also support private foresters and forestland. Here are some of their suggestions:

- **Provide more financial benefits for forestland management:** Just as with farmland, forestland provides the community with a range of ecosystem services. Providing forestland owners with increased financial incentives to actively and sustainably manage their land would encourage keeping land in private forest production as opposed to trying to rezone land for urban development.

- **Prioritize protection of private forests adjacent to public lands:** One person commented that it is particularly important that we ensure that the private forests close to public forests are preserved and managed sustainably, due to their close proximity to wildlife habitat. As a county we should be encouraging landowners on these parcels to actively manage their land for wildlife habitat, perhaps with increased financial incentives.

- **Improve access to sustainable management training:** There certainly are ways to learn how to manage forests (e.g. extension agents) but there does not seem to be enough local training available, or at least it seems to be difficult to access. The county should work with the extension agents to make this type of training more accessible, which will result in better management of forestland and subsequently will result in more land being kept in forestland production.

- **Improve access to local markets:** As with farming, forest products are difficult to sell locally. The county should help private forestland owners find access to more local markets.

- **Improve access to sustainable management training:** Mentioned above, this also helps ensure that forestland owners can profit from forestry.
Conclusion

This report has identified three key policies and related strategies that if implemented, could serve to make Jackson County a more livable, sustainable county for all of its residents. The projection for a doubling of the county's population over the next 50 years makes this work vitally important.

The work we have done – holding community forums and gathering feedback from community members about creating a more livable, sustainable Jackson County – is not new: This Envision the Rogue Valley process is instead a continuation of the hard work that has spanned decades, which has had this very same goal. This report synthesizes community feedback about what strategies community members would like to see implemented to preserve farmland, reduce our dependence on the automobile and create safer, healthier, more livable communities in the post-RPS reality our county will likely face. The fact that the RPS plan intends to accommodate the growing population by significantly expanding urban boundaries in our region makes the need for more livable and sustainable communities that much greater.

What we hope this report shows is that despite the fact that if the RPS Plan is approved and authorizes the urbanization of an additional 8,500 acres of rural land, urban sprawl and its associated problems don’t have to be our community’s future. If we take steps to implement the policies and strategies recommended in this report, we can develop more thoughtfully and more efficiently, at a pace that makes sense for our region. We can limit unnecessary growth onto rural lands, preserving invaluable resource lands and at the same time improving mobility, access and livability of our towns and cities. We can create ways to make sure that as we grow more efficiently and compactly, and yes, more “densely,” that we do density right: It is vital that we retain a sense of community, beauty, history and other values as we accommodate more people in our urban areas. We can also keep intact the rural landscapes so dear to our community by investing in the financial success of our region’s farmers.

Preserving farmland, reducing our dependence on the automobile and creating safer, healthier, more livable communities are goals that are important to Jackson County residents. This report recommends practical policies and strategies to achieve these highly interconnected goals. As we share this report with local decision-makers and community members, we hope you can use this report to actually implement these recommendations. We believe that if our communities do, we will be a much stronger, more economically sound region in the long run.
Resources

American Farmland Trust, [http://www.farmland.org/](http://www.farmland.org/)

Better Not Bigger: How to Take Control of Urban Growth and Improve Your Community, Eben Fodor (1999)


Commercial and Mixed-Use Development Code Handbook, by the Oregon Transportation and Growth Management (TGM) Program (available electronically on the TGM website: [www.lcd.state.or.us/tgm](http://www.lcd.state.or.us/tgm) or by calling (503) 373-0050, ext. 230.

Cool Planning: A Handbook on Local Strategies to Slow Climate Change, by the Oregon Transportation and Growth Management (TGM) Program

Davis, California’s Agricultural Preservation Program: [http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/planning/farmland.aspx](http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/planning/farmland.aspx)

Envision the Rogue Valley – a 12min. film about creating a vision that accomplishes the goals outlined in this report, available at [www.rogueadvocates.org](http://www.rogueadvocates.org).