

Board largely backs county's growth plan

Rural-landowners group sees appeal dismissed by state

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A state land-use board on Thursday issued its long-awaited decision about appeals to Clark County's Comprehensive Growth Management Plan. Though it will take some time to analyze the complex ruling in depth, a rural-landowners group saw its challenges against the plan dismissed while environmental groups declared victory.

The county's comprehensive plan is a document required by the Growth Management Act and is meant to guide growth in the county for the next 20 years. After it was passed by the county council last summer, it quickly drew challenges from two different angles.

Local environmental group Friends of Clark County was joined by Seattle-based Futurewise in its appeal, alleging that the county plan contained 12 violations of state law, including improperly expanding urban growth areas, removing agricultural land, failing to properly fund a transpor-

tation plan and contributing to sprawl by shrinking minimum lot sizes for agricultural and forest land. The two groups also challenged a move by the county to establish an industrial land-use bank on the Lagler Dairy property along Northeast 117th Avenue in Brush Prairie.

Clark County Citizens United, a landowners group, appealed the plan from a different angle. The group alleged that the county essentially discriminated against rural landowners. Their appeal claimed that the county violated public participation processes that

excluded rural and resource landowners, low-balled its population projection and put unlawful limits on the acres of rural land available for development.

On Thursday, the Growth Management Hearings Board, a quasi-judicial panel that adjudicates charges that local jurisdictions aren't complying with the Growth Management Act, issued its long-awaited order on Clark County's comprehensive plan.

"The (board members) concluded Clark County did not err in its public par-

GROWTH, Page C3



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Clark County is rapidly growing in places such as the Interstate 5/Northeast 179th interchange. On Thursday, a battle over how the county will grow was settled, for now.

Growth

From Page C1

ticipation process, private property rights procedures, population projections, remainder parcels claims, transportation or capital facilities or environmental claims," reads the synopsis of its 101-page decision.

The decision appeared to dismiss virtually every challenge made by CCCU, describing the group's arguments over the alleged lack of public participation

as "torturous" and "difficult to follow."

CCCU did not respond to a request for comment after the appeal was released Thursday afternoon.

However, the decision appears to give FOCC and Futurewise a partial victory. It states that the county violated the Growth Management Act by allowing development outside of the current urban growth area and permitting La Center, Battle Ground and Ridgefield to expand their urban growth areas. The decision also found the county violated state law by reducing

the minimum lot size of agricultural lots from 20 acres to 10 acres, and of forest lots from 40 acres to 20 acres, and erred in creating the rural industrial land bank. The rural land bank would allow the dairy, which is located along a state highway but far from city limits, to be redeveloped for industrial uses.

"We are very pleased with the decision," Tim Trohimovich, Futurewise director of planning and law, wrote in an email. "It will help protect working farms, working forests, and taxpayers from overdevel-

opment."

The order sends the plan back to the county for revisions, which are due in the fall.

Clark County council Chair Marc Boldt told The Columbian that Deputy Prosecutor Christine Cook would evaluate the decision over the next few days.

The parties have the right to appeal the hearings board's decision in the courts.

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