

Oak Lodge Governance Project looks at annexing into Milwaukie

Oak Lodge Governance Project Steering Committee

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Steering committee members: Remaining unincorporated or becoming separate city are other options being studied

We're pleased to provide an update on the progress that has been made during the past two months in the exploration of governance options for Oak Lodge and to share a video recorded last month that explains the scope of the project.

In November, the Oak Lodge Governance Project (OLGP) was awarded a \$100,000 grant to fund Phase I of a research study on the economic realities and possibilities for various forms of self-governance for the communities of Oak Grove and Jennings Lodge, often referred to as Oak Lodge.

Since then, the scope of work has been finalized and a team of consultants are now working to create the study.

The economic portion of the research study will be conducted by ECONorthwest, a local firm very familiar with the economics and current financial realities of this area. They have provided research and analysis for Clackamas County and cities within the county for decades and have led hundred of projects across Oregon on issues ranging from fiscal and feasibility analysis, market analysis, housing analysis and economic development.

Tiberius Solutions, a Portland-based firm specializing in fiscal analysis for cities and counties, and MorganCPS, an Oregon firm specializing in organizational development and strategic planning within a governance context, will assist ECONorthwest on the governance portion of the study.

Steve Faust, community planning director at 3J Consulting, will serve as project manager. Steve is a land-use planner and community engagement specialist with 20 years of experience managing projects in the Portland metro area and throughout Oregon.

To determine the scope of work for the research study, members of the OLGP Steering Committee along with community leaders worked in concert with members of the consultant team to determine how best to focus the study given complex variables and constraints.

The goal in developing the scope of work was to narrow deliverables that will provide accurate information to serve as a basis for valid, community-driven decision-making.

The boundaries of the study are complex. Our unincorporated community encompasses two Community Planning Organizations (CPOs), the Oak Grove Community Council and the Jennings Lodge CPO, as well as bordering on two cities, Milwaukie and Gladstone.

Both cities have intergovernmental agreements regarding their Urban Growth Management Areas (UGMAs), but UGMA boundaries do not correspond with CPO boundaries. Moreover, there are multiple school districts, service districts, ZIP codes, watersheds and zoning policies. In addition, Clackamas County, the current governing body for this urban area, manages a range of services for the area including zoning, transportation, social services, code enforcement, library services, vector control and more. OLGP Steering Committee members have worked closely with the consultant team to ensure all of these overlapping boundaries are considered.

There were numerous discussions to weigh these various options, always with an eye on how to "get the most bang for our buck" and how to ensure stable criteria to accurately compare the ramifications of different options for governance and economic decision making.

OLGP Steering Committee members and the consultant team met Dec. 17. A video of that meeting explains the overall scope of the project, and provides details on how the OLGP Steering Committee worked with the consultant team to select criteria that will allow the greatest range of future extrapolations given the current time and budgetary constraints. You can watch that video at youtu.be/qKFQnAKA2o8?, or you can search for "Oak Lodge Governance Project" on YouTube to find our video (and any future videos)? and share it with anyone in the area who is interested in learning more.

The first half of the meeting provides an overview of what OLGP and this grant are about — using economic data to explore governance options for the unincorporated Oak Lodge community. The second half gets more detailed on topics such as exact boundaries of the study, constraints on the grant, and whether the study should consider potential service-district changes.

Results of past efforts toward self governance for the Oak Grove and Jennings Lodge communities made several things very clear. People want to know what a change in governance might cost, and what the pros and cons of such a possible change will be and the potential added economic value of that possible change.

OLGP was encouraged to seek funding for a research study precisely because of the need for reliable, fact-based information to answer basic questions on the economic implications of various local governance options. Phase I of this project, which culminates with the research study, will provide this data-driven information.

Past governance efforts also made it clear that different areas within Oak Lodge might want different things ?allowing for the possibility of annexation, incorporation and remaining unincorporated all within this broader area. That said, funding for Phase I of the research study only allows for the entire area to be considered as one entity. The three options currently being explored are annexing into Milwaukie, incorporation and remaining unincorporated. Research criteria was specifically selected to ensure that the results of this Phase I study would be able to provide accurate evaluations for future explorations on annexing or incorporating subareas within the study area boundaries?. While this research study will answer many current questions, it is sure to create new ones. It is essential to understand this research study as just the first phase of an ongoing, community-driven project to adequately explore the potential benefits and ramifications of a possible change in governance in order for area residents to make informed decisions for the future of this urban area with a rural form of government.

The results of this study will be used to inform community conversations, which will begin after the study is released in the summer of 2021. This project is run completely by volunteer community members with no elected officials, county or city involvement.

This project exists to explore the questions, not to promote or campaign for a given outcome. In time, with robust community participation and engagement, and with additional phases of research, the community will work together to determine the best path forward.

The 10 volunteer members of the OLGP Steering Committee are all active residents of Oak Lodge, involved in many local groups, and excited by the potential that our community holds. As advocates for the local economy, we want to increase convenience, resilience and vibrancy within Oak Lodge for all members of the community.

OLGP's goals are to sustain, enhance and preserve our natural resources for the benefit of generations to come. We are committed to the equitable involvement of all area residents, of all income levels, physical abilities and ages knowing that all must have a seat at the table for transformative discourse to occur.

If you are curious as to how to be kept informed or get directly involved, please contact us at oaklodgegovernance@gmail.com? or follow ?Oak Lodge Governance Project? on Facebook. A website is currently being developed where a variety of resources will be posted. OLGP looks forward to providing updates on a regular basis to ensure the community is kept informed on the progress of this exciting project.



COURTESY PHOTO - Clackamas County officials are eyeing the former Concord School in Oak Grove as a site for a new library and park.

Oak Lodge Governance Project Steering Committee members include Mitra Anoushiravani, Nathan Breitenfeldt, Valerie Chapman, Jane Civiletti, Tom Civiletti, Joseph Edge, Nathan Ember, Eleanore Hunter, Chips Janger and Cole Merkel.

See: <https://pamplinmedia.com/cr/28-opinion/494805-397014-oak-lodge-governance-project-looks-at-annexing-into-milwaukie>