

Support for Oregon Initiative Building

Jeffery Smith, Portland, reports that he and Kris Nelson, Salem, Oregon, are very busy building support for "green tax" (land value tax) legislation.

Much impetus for the Oregon initiative was gained at the July 30 - August 2, 1998 annual conference sponsored by the Council of Georgist Organizations. Local hosts in Portland were Smith (who is chairman of the Pac.NW (Ore/Wash.) CGUSA chapter and also president of the Geonomy Society) and Kris Nelson (who is V.P. of the Geonomy Society). Funding for speakers was assisted by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation and Common Ground-USA. Other funding came from Oregon-based Share-It-Now Foundation and the Southern California Bernstein Foundation.

Among local dignitaries on the conference program were: former Ore. State Senator Pete Sorenson; Oregon Legislature Fiscal Analyst Jim Scherzinger; Oregon Legislator and Willamette University Acting Pres. Bryan Johnston; Tax Shift author Alan T. Durning of Northwest Environment Watch; Oregon Natural Step Network Coordinator Christopher Juniper; Oregon Environmental Council Exec. Director Jeff Allen; Oregon Green Energy Director Nancy Newell; Alternatives to Growth co-founder Betty McArdle; Sierra Club's Exec. Com. Chairman Charlie Ringo; Portland State University Urban Studies and Planning Professor Dr. Gerry Mildner; Clark County Land Value Study author Dr. Tom Gihring; Lake Oswego Councilor (now Metro Councilor) Bill Atherton; architect Virginia Hodgdon; Dr. John Wish of Lewis and Clark College; Dr. Russ Beaton of Willamette University Economics Dept.; Cascade Policy Institute Environmental Policy Director John Charles; land use disputes attorney/mediator Richard Forrester; and Alternative Fuels consultant Kris Nelson.

Major Portland-area press coverage included Pacific Radio Station KBOO, The Oregonian, the Statesman Journal, Channel 8 TV, newspapers in Corvallis and Roseburg, and local newsletters.

Continuing to build the support

needed to get legislation passed, Smith presented slide shows to Reed College environmental students in February and also in San Francisco to an academic activist group, covered by the Christian Science Monitor.

To explain geonomics and recruit supports, Smith and Nelson have met with numerous opinion leaders and dozens of elected and bureaucratic officials, including State Representatives, and officials in the Oregon Dept. of Land Conservation and Development, EPA Oregon Director, Metro's Director's executive assistant and Metro's Park Planner. Additionally, community groups include the Sierra Club Exec. Committee, Coalitions for Livable Future, Salem City Watch, Association of Oregon Community Development Organizations, and a number of professors at Portland State University, Reed College, Lewis & Clark College, and Willamette University.

Smith's and Nelson's group meet each month's second Monday. The Geonomy Society attracts to its lunches representatives from Cascade Policy Institute, the City Club, 1000 Friends of Oregon, Alternatives to Growth in Oregon, Salem City Council, Salem's Citizens for Responsible Growth, the past Salem mayor, and others.

While in Portland to make a presentation April 15 at Reed College, Dr. Nicolaus Tideman accompanied Smith and Nelson to meet with the House Revenue Committee Chairman. (As GroundSwell readers know, Dr. Tideman is an Economics Professor at Virginia Polytechnic and also President of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation.) Nelson subsequently reported support from the Legislative Revenue Office director and also the House Speaker's tax advisor, as well as some Republicans (who hold the majority of votes in the House.)

A week later Nelson reported a proposed amendment to a couple of existing bills relating to a property taxation study: "The Legislative Revenue Office and its assigns are hereby directed to conduct a study of the economic effects of enabling local governments to lower tax rates on improvements and compensate for the reduced revenue by raising tax rates on sites,

hereinafter called incentive taxation. The results of the study shall be compiled in a report to the next legislature and made available to the public by the 2000 general election. The study shall examine the economic efficiencies such incentive taxation may engender..."

On April 26, as reported by Nelson, the House Revenue Committee passed the Environmental Tax Study out unanimously. The bill contains an amendment that directs the Legislative Revenue office to support the Study Commission, where the director and a staff would be interested in researching site value tax economic efficiencies, rather than the Dept. of Revenue. The director, a former state economist, encouraged Nelson to work with the Environmental Tax Study Committee to ensure that the economic effects we want addressed are included in the agenda. Nelson and Smith will make an effort to get appointed to the committee. The bill now goes to the Joint Ways and Means Committee regarding its \$200,000 price tag.

GroundSwell has just received a copy of a report from Smith in which he addressed credentialed Georgists asking for their signature to letters of support to the Oregon House and Senate Appropriate Committees for House Bill 2473. Signers to date that GroundSwell readers will recognize include: Dr. Nicolaus Tideman, Dr. Mason Gaffney, Dr. William Batt, Dr. Tom Gihring, Dr. Fred Foldvary, Dr. Drew Harris, Tom Sherrard, and Godfrey Dunkley.

Nelson reports work is wrapping up on a property tax buildings-to-locations shift study on Salem, OR sites to see who'll pay more and who'll pay less. Announcement of the study drew coverage from Salem's and Portland's main papers.

A state-of-the-art slide show of the property tax shift aspect of geonomics has been begun. Object is to show it to university classes, activist groups, charities -- enough presentations to grow a groundswell leading to a public hearing co-hosted by Metro.

Smith can be reached by phone at 503-236-1968 or e-mail at geonomist@juno.com; and Nelson can be reached at altfuels@open.org.