



## Commissioner Jeff Cogen, District 2

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### MULTNOMAH COUNTY OREGON

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: PDC Urban Renewal Advisory Group

FROM: Jeff Cogen

DATE: 10/23/2007

RE: A New Conversation on Urban Renewal

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I'd like to begin by thanking you for inviting me to represent Multnomah County's perspective in our ongoing conversation about urban renewal in general and the specific issues before us as they relate to the River District, South Park Blocks and Downtown Waterfront Urban Renewal Areas. I'm sorry I'm not able to participate in the meeting today, but I want to share a few thoughts with you that I hope will encourage a broader conversation about how best to balance human needs and infrastructure development in our community.

Current urban renewal efforts have done a good job of spurring investments in bricks and mortar, but with a tradeoff that is often left unmentioned and unexamined. Urban renewal is designed to fight "blight", but by diverting tax dollars from investments in people and public safety it can serve to foster inequity and, yes, even blight. The hit taken by Multnomah County's General Fund is particularly troubling.

The County is overwhelmingly dependent on property tax revenue to fund its programs and services yet urban renewal is diverting an ever increasing amount of property tax revenue out of the County's General Fund. Twenty-six cents of every urban renewal dollar would otherwise flow directly into Multnomah County's coffers. This equates to almost \$16

million each year. Over the last seven years, Multnomah County's general fund has weathered over \$80 million dollars in budget cuts. That has led to deep reductions in badly needed public safety and human service programs throughout the community. While we've all watched the River District blossom from infrastructure investments, what isn't readily acknowledged is the invisible parallel decline in human services available to the people living there and throughout the community.

That's why I was excited and pleased when this body agreed to include an analysis of the impact to other jurisdictions in its criteria for establishing and expanding urban renewal areas. But while significant, that action is just a first step. We need to seriously consider the proposal to allow the South Park Block and Downtown Waterfront URAs to end and return those areas to the tax rolls. We need to look at creative investments that can help other jurisdictions offset the loss of tax revenues caused by urban renewal. And we need to reform the current process for decision making around urban renewal because Multnomah County and the citizens who depend on our services deserve a real say in future decisions about urban renewal that will affect our ability to provide services to our community.

We've seen the great success that's possible when investments are made in bricks and mortar. Let's take that success a step further and make investments that consider a blighted community as an ecosystem. Let's harness the creativity, imagination and vision we have in this community to make strategic investments in our people. Let's make sure that future urban renewal projects don't inadvertently de-fund services that might help struggling members of our community. And let's do it by building on the partnership that has begun at these meetings, by giving a meaningful voice to our entire community in these important decisions.

In short, our community needs a new approach to urban renewal that treats the root human causes of urban decay not just the symptoms. I look forward to working in coming months toward specific steps to implement these ideas.

Thank you.