

Chapter Seven The Woodburn Community Resource Unit

Section One: Baseline Social and Economic Information

A. Community Description

Geographic Features

The Woodburn CRU extends from north of Woodburn and takes in the farmland south to Keizer. On the west, the Willamette River is the dividing line, and the eastern line roughly corresponds to the Pudding River, dividing the area from Mount Angel and Silverton. Gervais is part of the Woodburn unit and for the last generation has served as a suburb to Woodburn. Figure 19 shows a map of the area.

"Woodburn relates mainly to Salem. A lot of people know others there and they do their shopping there."

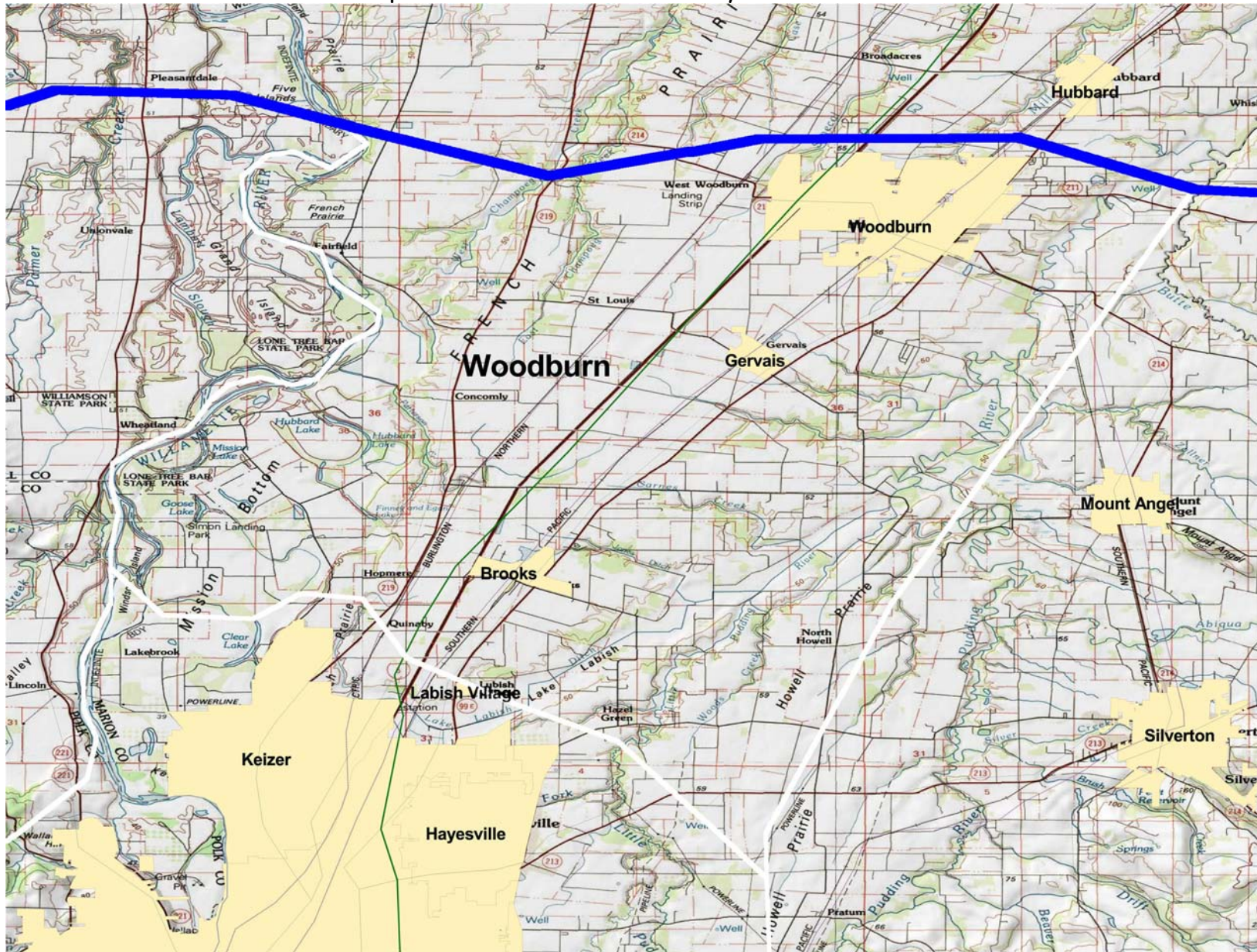
"There are significant ties between Woodburn and North Salem. The redistricting of the congressional districts combined these areas."

"People are starting to feel like we are part of the Portland metro area, rather than a neighbor of Salem. Ten years ago, we related more to Salem. Now it's probably split."

Settlement Patterns

Woodburn was settled in 1889 by Jesse Settlemier, whose house is an historic museum and by the coming of the railroads. It is about 35 miles south of Portland. In 1990, Woodburn had a population of 14,110 and had grown to 20,100 by 2000, an increase of 30% (Census Data, Table Two).

Figure 19
Map of the Woodburn Community Resource Unit



The history of Woodburn is agricultural. The rich soils of the French Prairie west of Woodburn have supported white population, and more recently, Hispanic populations, for many generations (Figure 20).

Figure 20
The Agricultural Legacy of Woodburn



A number of observers in Woodburn believe it to be on the verge of major growth, primarily because of the livability of the area and its proximity to Portland and Salem. Growth has been rapid the last few years. The Hispanic population continues to grow, although it has slowed due to job saturation in their labor niches. The primary settlement presently is from urban professionals moving to the new developments on the outskirts of town and commuting to either Portland or Salem for work.

"It's been exploding with growth, if you look at building records last year. The housing here is 25% less expensive."

"The area is changing from an agricultural community to a bedroom community."

Overall, neighborhoods are incredibly diverse. Russians, Hispanics, and Anglos live in mixed neighborhoods. The ethnic barriers are still enormous. One Anglo father talked of Russian children visiting his own and being unable to communicate with the Russian parents when problems developed, so that the relationships of the children ended. A number of parents said that because many parents of the current generation are not bilingual, that kids have more power than they should and cause problems in the community.

"They learn at an early age how to manipulate the system to get what they want. They use language to deceive and thwart their parents' will. As a result, later in life they stay with the pattern of manipulation in the form of petty crime and drug dealing."

Woodburn is highly transitory.

"Woodburn is an interesting place because so many people come and go. Many Mexicans come and stay with relatives that are well-established, then they leave after they get some money together. This tradition has made many people open to strangers, unlike many other towns. There is a sympathy for newcomers."

Gervais is over 50% Hispanic and the schools are the "backbone" of the community. The major employer is Fiber-Fab. Begun in 1957, this locally owned business manufactures fiberglass products, primarily showers and bathtubs. The Gervais Community Learning Center was begun on a 21st Century Learning Grant in 2000. It serves adults and over 200 children.

Publics

Woodburn promotes itself as the "City of Unity" because of its ethnic diversity. Three generations of Hispanics have been coming to Woodburn since the 1960s. Woodburn is now the largest city in Oregon with over 50% of the population being Hispanic. Despite the "settling out" of this population from migrant routines, they are not yet very visible at the formal levels of the community—Chamber of Commerce, city government and so on. Only one Hispanic person is on City Council, for example. Hispanics reportedly make up 75% of the school population.

Although Anglos, and especially older whites, have dominated city politics for many years, many people expect that to change very soon. A prominent Hispanic businessman owns several bakeries in the area, and there are other signs of emergent Hispanic leadership. It's also true that the Anglo and Hispanic population have taken significant steps to accommodate mutual interests and to create a workable community. Residents took very evident pride in reporting these efforts.

The area also has a sizeable Russian population, although they are reportedly declining in numbers. They have a reputation for being very private and religious. Woodburn also has a fair number of Indians from southern Asia that reside in the community. Ethnic groups are located in particular geographic areas.

Senior citizens are quite plentiful in the community and are said to be quite active. Many people talked about Senior Estates, a housing subdivision for retired people that started in the 1960s but now has over 1500 units. It is on a golf course with many amenities and has created a definite retirement presence in Woodburn.

Networks

See Section Two.

Work Routines

The retail base of Woodburn has been growing. Residents mentioned new enterprises such as WalMart, Safeway, an expanding outlet mall, and a new assisted-living facility. The outlet mall, built in 1996, is the largest in the state. While some residents liked it, many complained about it, too.

"Did you notice all the empty spaces in this mall? It's half empty. The outlet has forced several local businesses out. They also have a practice of hiring part-time minimum wage help."

"The outlet mall is a fantastic addition to the community. It put Woodburn on the map."

Residents talked about the loss of the frozen food plant. They felt that the combination of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Act) opening up trade to foreign competitors plus farmers forming a cooperative and raising fruit prices, pushed the plant over the edge. Apparently, the plant was purchased by another frozen storage operation, Food Service of America based in Portland, which employs mainly truck drivers. Of the 400 employees, only a few are from Woodburn, a fact noted by local workers who hope that with turnover they may find jobs. In contrast to the seasonal cycle of the earlier plant, the new plant operates on a year-round basis. The loss of a mushroom plant near Salem affected local workers as well and exacerbated an already tight job market.

The impact on the community from the loss of the plants has been enormous. The Hispanic workers that predominantly had worked at the plant were at a disadvantage in finding other work. Many have low English skills. They compete for local nursery jobs, but there is not enough employment in the area to accommodate all the workers. The local food bank experienced a sharp spike in the number of people that are using the food bank services in the last year.

"The frozen food plant closed its door for good last year. It employed nearly 800 people."

"Two years ago, we served 150 families a month. This year, it was 400." [Food bank director]

Nurseries are common throughout this area. Not only is the valley land rich for growing but the area's proximity to urban centers make the businesses particularly successful.

Job and Career Centers serve dislocated workers in finding new jobs and in securing job training. The Chamber of Commerce is active and well-respected, offering business support and business attraction services.

The work force of Woodburn is relatively small because it has a large senior and young population. The city listed its major employers in 2000, with number of employees listed, as:

Agricpac, frozen fruits and vegetables	1430
Walmart, warehouse distribution	700
Fleetwood Homes, manufactured	675
Silvercres, manufactured home	395
Conroy Packing, frozen berries	250

Source: Community Profiles, Oregon Economic and Community Development Department, 2000.

Support Services

A new community center is being planned. The City of Woodburn has an active Parks and Recreation Department. It also operates the Woodburn Memorial Aquatic Center that includes a pool, slide, rope swing and wading pool.

The World's Berry Center Museum is located on Front Street, and displays vintage photos and artifacts from Woodburn's past. Silent movies are shown in the restored Bungalow Theater.

Woodburn has the first urban renewal reform program to be approved in the state. It allows the tax base of the business and industrial areas of town to be reinvested into these areas. This program has been controversial (See Citizen Issues).

Woodburn Together is a community-based program that focuses on drug and alcohol abuse prevention.

Woodburn has just upgraded its wastewater treatment plan. The challenges for Woodburn are the planning for growth, the congestion at the freeway, and the overcrowding that is coming to characterize the schools. What the schools have done, apparently successfully, is to accommodate the Hispanic student body.

"The school system is wonderful. The new ESL [English as a Second Language] program is becoming a model for the nation."

The Woodburn Tulip Festival is held in spring each year, with over 150 varieties of tulips and daffodils over 40 acres. Last year, 100,000 people attended.

Hispanic celebrations that include Anglos and are regional in scope include La Fiesta Mexicana, which attracted 30,000 attendees last year, and Latin American Club and Folklorico de Woodburn.

Recreational Activities

See Section Three.

B. Trends and Citizen Issues Related to Community Life

Trends

A very real social experiment in tolerance and accommodation is occurring among Anglo, Hispanic, Russian, Asian Indian, Mennonite and retirement people.

Woodburn is broadening its base. What was once agricultural is now also including retirement, residential, retail, and some tourism.

Citizen Issues Related to Community Life

Some residents talked about the urban renewal plan approved for downtown and the controversy it caused in the community. Hispanics use downtown as a gathering place and patronize available stores on Sundays. They tend to like downtown the way it is and consider it "healthy." They worry about all the tax money being devoted to the area. Anglos drive through downtown and see people just hanging out and fear drug or delinquent activity. They want modernized storefronts, which do not appear important for the Hispanic community.

"The urban renewal plan does not have a lot of community support. Anglos and Hispanics look at downtown very differently."

Section Two: Communication Strategies

A. Informal Networks and Communication

Gathering Places

Legion Park in summertime for farmworkers

Downtown on Sunday

The library

The restaurant at Senior Estates

Woodburn Saturday Market

Denny's Restaurant

Pudding River swimming holes

Both the library and the Woodburn feed and supply store have bulletin boards.

B. Formal Groups and Communication

Figure 21
Organizations With Interest in Public Lands in Woodburn

Organization	Contact Information	Mission
Woodburn Parks and Recreation Department	Randy Westrick; Brian Sjothun, summer camp director (503) 982-5264	Promoting active citizenry, especially children and youth
Educational School District (ESD)	Jose Romero Summer school director (503) 981-9555	Ties to both Hispanic and Anglo communities
Woodburn Livability Task Force		Parks Clean-up Clean up events on Earth Day
Woodburn Chamber of Commerce	Jerry Wheeler 2233 Country Club Road (503) 982-8221	Jobs and business promotion
Woodburn Downtown Association	Bruce Heath Nancy Kirksey	Downtown revitalization Urban renewal

Section Three: The Public Lands Perspective

A. Uses of and Orientation to Public Lands

Woodburn has been an agricultural community from the beginning. Its orientation has been the French Prairie and farming, and it adapted many ways to work the land, including choice of crops, that has accommodated changing market conditions. Generally, its residents have not been mountain oriented, nor oriented to public lands, but that is likely to change. Interest in public lands will increase as the population urbanizes, and introduces outdoor and environmental perspectives to the community.

People from Woodburn like to go to the Jefferson Wilderness area. Mt. Hood is less than an hour drive for snow skiers, as are the coast range and the Cascades. Public lands are used on a regular basis for hunting, fishing, and hiking.

Silver Falls and Oregon Gardens are major local attractions.

B. Trends and Citizen Issues Related to Natural Resource Management

Trends

Increased use, and more organized use, of public lands over time. Low levels at the present time.

As urbanization increases, environmental values about natural resource management will be expressed politically.

Citizen Issues

Both the Community Learning Center in Gervais, and Woodland middle school teachers are interested in outdoor education.

Some observers did not feel like Hispanics use public land use when recreation fees are involved.

"Hispanics will not participate in our programs if there are any fees attached." [Parks and Recreation staff]

C. Management Opportunities

Available evidence suggests that Hispanics will not pay fees to participate to city sports and recreation activities. It may be that their uses of public lands will not be high if fees are involved.

Outdoor education is an expressed wish.

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