

Jerrie Fife Echo, Oregon ~~Aug~~ 14, 2025

To the Members of the Echo City Council,

I am writing to express my concerns about the clarity of information being provided regarding Open Space zoning within the City of Echo. I understand that Carla, the planner hired by the City, has been responsible for presenting zoning information. However, it seems some of the explanations have been unclear.

To ensure I had an accurate, unbiased understanding, I consulted an independent source — ChatGPT — for an objective explanation of Oregon's Open Space zoning rules as they apply to private property.

The question I asked was: "Is Open Space zoning only for publicly owned spaces in Oregon?"

The full response I received was: No — in Oregon, Open Space zoning is not limited to publicly owned land. A city or county can apply an Open Space (OS) designation to either public or private property if it aligns with the local comprehensive plan and Oregon's Statewide Planning Goals — especially:

- Goal 5: Natural Resources, Scenic and Historic Areas, and Open Spaces - Goal 7: Areas Subject to Natural Hazards

Legal safeguards for private owners: If OS zoning on private property significantly reduces development potential, the landowner may: - Challenge it through the Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA) - Seek relief or compensation under Measure 49 if the zoning removes all or most economic use - Apply for a zone change or a variance

Common examples of OS zoning on private property: Many cities in Oregon (e.g., Bend, Eugene, Salem) have private parcels zoned OS along: - Creeks and rivers - Irrigation ditches - Steep slopes or unstable soils - Habitat corridors

These designations are often applied regardless of ownership, so long as the restriction supports public health, safety, or environmental protection.

It is also important to note that Measure 49 does not apply to properties that have been in Open Space zoning for many years. It is intended to address situations where zoning is being changed to a more restrictive designation, not to provide compensation or relief for long-standing zoning.

My goal in sharing this is not to undermine City staff, but to ensure that property owners and residents receive clear, accurate, and transparent information regarding land use and zoning that may affect their rights.

On a personal note, I have been told there is now a sudden concern about fire hazards between the ditches. In the last 60-some years, there have only been two fires that I am aware of, and in both cases the great Echo Fire Department handled them quickly before any harm was done to personal residences — quite the opposite of what happened when the ditch broke.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I believe that clear communication is essential for maintaining trust and making informed decisions that reflect the best interests of our community.

Sincerely, Jerrie Fife