

## **Progress Is Inevitable**

*By David Pangburn*

I was 12 years old in 2015 when we moved away from Lake Oswego. At that time, there was a lot of talk about sustainability but I wasn't interested in whatever that meant. I was at the age where I was concerned about my own creature comforts like video games and skateboarding with my friends. I really didn't pay much attention to the environment, the rivers and forest until we move to the arid desert Southwest.

We often returned to Lake Oswego to visit friends and relatives. The grownup conversations always seemed to turn to how *progress* was altering the landscape and environment, mostly in a negative way.

I started taking note of what they were referring to when they mentioned sustainability, especially in the context of preserving the environment.

I had many times heard the term, *Portland Creep*, but like most people my age I was more concerned about things that were important to me; school, cars, girls. Besides, we didn't live in Portland. It was their problem. But unfortunately, because it was such a desirable place to live, there was also something called *Oswego Creep*. I would one day learn what that meant for Lake Oswego.

In high school I learned about ecology and conservation. That's where the term sustainability started to come into focus for me. Recycling was a big part of it. I understood this because our family always recycled papers, plastic, and bottles. We had a mulch bin where my mom recycled food scraps. My father even recycled used lumber, although he called it re-purposing. He used to say, "Think of it like this: a tree that stood for a hundred years or more, was cut down and sawed into lumber that was used to frame a house or build a deck or fence that then served people for 10, 20, 30 or 50 or more years and then was torn down because it wasn't needed anymore. When you re-purpose that lumber it may last another 10, 20, 30 or 50 or more years—saving other living trees from being cut down."

Dad taught me to love trees and taught me how important they were, not just for aesthetics but for the climate as well. "Live trees breathe in carbon dioxide and exhale oxygen. Dead trees or no trees don't." he used to say.

It had been many years since I was last here but in 2050 I returned to Lake Oswego with my wife and children. I was shocked to see that the forest of my youth was gone. The Douglas firs, Spruce, Hemlocks, Cedars, and occasional Redwoods were gone, as were the many mature hardwood trees planted for landscaping.

Gone too were many of the homes that were nestled among the trees. In their place were high-rise apartment buildings and condominiums. I would learn that increasing demand for housing was so great over the past 35 years that it created a conflict. On one side were developers who were supported by the realtors and the construction industry. On the

other side were the city officials in charge of zoning. In the end, the developers won and the Lake Oswego I once knew was no more. All that remained of the Lake Oswego of my youth was a section of the First Edition that fortunately had gotten designated a historic district before the razing and building frenzy began.

Most of the larger homes on spacious lots and the lakeside homes were gone. The lots were divided into smaller residential lots. High-rise, high-density buildings were built in place the older homes. Many of the old trees were cut down to facilitate construction. The voices that protested were shouted down. "Don't fight it," they were told. "*Progress is inevitable.*"

It was the same along the Willamette River; fewer trees, more high-rises, and condominiums. Some people realized that the increased population density was detrimental to the ecology, to the air and water quality, but no one would listen to them. The forces for change, for *progress*, were too powerful.

My children couldn't understand my sadness and frustration. As we drove up what used to be A Street toward Country Club Lane, I noted too that even the name of that street had been changed, but I can't remember what the new name was. It was probably named after some influential builder. As we got closer to the site of where the golf course should be, I was surprised to see large trees on and around what was no longer the golf course. I stopped a man walking his dog along the roadway and asked what had happened to the golf course. He informed me that the city was somehow able to gain title to the golf course, the clubhouse, and all the facilities, and had it legally declared a public park, thus saving it from being developed. The old clubhouse is now a community activity center.

I was overjoyed at the news. The trees had been spared and the park was just as pristine as it had been for more than the hundred or more years that it was the private golf course called Oswego Lake Country Club. It is now called Egan Park, named after H. Chandler Egan who designed the golf course back in 1924. Not only is Egan Park a beautiful recreation area and riparian habitat, it also provides recreation space for the growing population of Lake Oswego that the old George Rogers Park could no longer provide. Sunset Magazine had even published a feature story about the park and the efforts to which Lake Oswego went to preserve the area as a park.

For me, Egan Park was the highlight of our trip to Lake Oswego. I'm glad that something was saved, something that not only is aesthetic but also contributes to the reduction of carbon dioxide and helps in the fight against global warming. Lake Oswego did this one thing right.

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