

Hector Macpherson (1918-2015)

By Sy Adler

Hector Macpherson Jr. received the Distinguished Leadership Award for a Citizen Planner from the American Planning Association in 1999, the same year the association designated Senate Bill 100 a National Planning Landmark. Macpherson, a Linn County Republican senator, had co-sponsored the bill during the 1973 legislative session. During that same session, he had also co-sponsored Senate Bill 101, which articulated state planning policies for agricultural lands. The two bills set Oregon on a land-use planning path that was unique in the United States.

Macpherson was a farmer-intellectual who helped shape policy and its implementation in Linn County beginning in the 1960s. Following in his father's legislative footsteps (Hector Macpherson Sr. had been state senator for the county in 1928-1932 and 1940-1942), Macpherson was a state senator from 1971 to 1974, an advisory board member of the watchdog group 1000 Friends of Oregon from 1975 through the 1980s, and an Oregon Land Conservation and Development Commissioner during the 1990s.

Born in Corvallis, he was the third of three children, all of whom started to work on the family dairy farm when very young. Macpherson studied farming at the Oregon State College School of Agriculture, where his father had taught agricultural economics. He earned a bachelor's degree in 1940 and took over the farm after returning from World War II, where he served in the Army Air Corps. As he educated himself about land-use issues, Macpherson integrated theories, case studies, and a deep knowledge about farmers and farming practices into his policy recommendations. Throughout his career, he welcomed debate and was open to learning from his own and others' experience.

SB 100 and SB 101 emerged from study groups that Macpherson organized after the 1971 legislative session. Both incorporated principles that were especially important to him: land ought to be treated as a precious resource in which the public had an interest; and the health of key Oregon economic sectors—farming and forestry—and the prevention of sprawl from undermining those sectors had to be authoritatively inserted from the state level into local planning processes.

SB 100 established a new state agency, the Land Conservation and Development Commission, which was authorized to review local government plans and zoning ordinances for compliance with statewide planning goals. Macpherson anticipated that restricting land uses in farm zones would generate landowner concern, and he believed that it was necessary and appropriate to compensate for the restrictions. SB 101 expanded property and inheritance tax benefits and initiated other policies to help maintain commercially viable agricultural production in those zones.

Macpherson lost his re-election bid in 1974, in part because his conservative constituents disagreed with his legislative agenda and in part because of a general increase in support for Democrats during the Watergate era. As a 1000 Friends of Oregon advisory board member and an LCDC member, he worked for twenty-five years to enhance the effectiveness of implementing the Agricultural Lands goal in light of changing political and economic circumstances and to keep the statewide planning program moving forward along the path he had helped carve. One of his five children, Greg Macpherson, followed his father's path into state legislative service and onto the Land Conservation and Development Commission, where he currently serves as chair. Hector Macpherson died in March 2015, at the age of ninety-six.

Sources

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