

THE OPINION OF THE OREGONIAN EDITORIAL BOARD

Racing to stay ahead of the pack

After more than three decades of showing the world how to think and live green, Portland has a unique opportunity to brand itself as sustainability's global leader

Portland does one thing better than any other city in the world. It thinks green. The seed was planted 35 years ago when Gov. Tom McCall drove a dagger through the heart of the jobs vs. environment argument. Oregon can, he insisted, have both. The state then proceeded, through three decades, to showcase how making short-term sacrifices to secure environmental goals could indeed spawn long-term rewards.

In the process, Portland emerged as a global leader on four fronts:

- In the planning for, and designing of, sustainable cities.
- In rigorous husbanding of marine and stream environments.
- In artful fostering of sustainable forestry and agriculture.
- In innovative harnessing of renewable energy.

Time now to relax, right?

Not exactly.

We are reminded daily just how global, competitive and interconnected the modern economy has become. The consequence is clear: In this new world economic order, only the nimble will thrive.

This fresh market reality places cities — not generally known for being light on their feet — in extreme peril. Those that have a clear sense of purpose and direction will flourish. Those lacking this trait will wilt.

Few understand this better than Mark Edlen, the Portland real estate developer whose towers are hailed as the world's greenest. Which likely explains why people from all over are beating a path to his Pearl District door. They arrive with a simple question: How's it done?

It's done, Edlen makes clear, by setting some pretty high standards. His blueprint calls for buildings that generate more energy than they consume, and consume more waste than they generate. He wants that model to work for spiffy condos in The Pearl, techno hospitals in South Waterfront and affordable housing downtown. Edlen is con-



vinced that Portland's nexus of expertise in the sustainable design, engineering and construction trades leads the world.

He's also convinced the world has noticed, and is hellbent on catching up.

All this means Portland now faces a very brief opportunity to brand itself as sustainability's global leader, and then race to remain ahead of the pack. The sole realistic shot Portland has at achieving that goal involves quickly engaging the city's higher education community. All of it.

Portland's first priority must be creating a major research institute. Imagine a National Center on Sustainability that would anchor the emerging "innovation quadrant" of degree programs offered in the city by Portland State University, Oregon Health & Science University, the University of Oregon and Oregon State University. Imagine, too, a systemwide commitment to infuse sustainability into *all* college-level programs. And, yes, to reach down into public schools. Some of this will require new financial resources.

That's a task for the 2009 Legislature. In the meantime, much can be accomplished by refocusing current resources.

None of this can wait. The world today is watching Portland. China and India are developing vibrant — and vast — economies. Current consumption patterns cannot endure. We all will have to use fewer resources, use them more wisely, reuse them, then recycle them. That is the core of sustainability. That is the manner of living Portland must role-model for the world.