

Planning Commission  
City of Forest Grove

Dear Commissioners-

With regard to the Westside Planning Project, we believe it would behoove the City to explore a more flexible and expansive approach to planning for and funding infrastructure development in the David Hill area. We have concerns relating to the development of Green Grove Cohousing Community, which was approved by Planning Commission on May 3, 2015, as well as concerns about the high-stakes financial and environmental impact of the plan, as proposed by the City. Steep grades and geological and waterway challenges beg the question of whether the proposed costs are commensurate with the benefits, and how the costs will impact the affordable housing question. Conversion of Plum Hill Lane into a through road with a greater than 12% grade in some portions as well as challenges with sewer elevations and water connections at higher than 400' need to be evaluated with a sustainability lens, and an openness to newer and forward-looking approaches. Housing trends suggest millennials and boomers are looking for smaller and more affordable homes and a greater sense of community. High infrastructure costs which drive high construction costs could be counterproductive in meeting market trends.

As pertains to cohousing development:

The City Development Code does not recognize cohousing as a form of dwelling. Green Grove Cohousing Community represents a development approach that features sustainability at its core, with a condominium legal structure featuring small home sizes (900-1400 sq. ft.), an emphasis on energy-efficient construction and alternative energy sources (solar and geothermal), and a focus on pedestrian and alternative transportation sources (including ride-share, vehicle-share and cycling, so that there are no garages in the development and all automobile parking is on the periphery of the property in a shared carport. Also, the use of rainwater catchment, green roof on the carport structure, narrow and partially permeable footpaths and roadways, a pond and cistern all contribute to best practices for on-site storm water processing and storage.

In reference to the TDT rates, we believe that cohousing in general, and this project specifically, should be calculated at the townhouse/condominium rate as it more truly reflects the transportation impact of cohousing on transportation infrastructure.

As pertains to the Westside Planning Area and Forest Grove development in general:

As the City has adopted a commitment to sustainability, we believe the Development Code should reflect this by specifically acknowledging the full range of housing alternatives. Cohousing should be defined and incorporated into the Development Code. Additionally, tiny houses are a potential remedy that could meet a local need for affordable housing, but not if SDC's are prohibitive and Code prohibit them.

Additionally, we believe the Development Code should incentivize a pocket neighborhood approach to development in the Westside Planning Area to promote a more community-oriented vs. automobile-oriented approach. Pocket neighborhoods

facilitate more sharing of resources and encourage neighbors to support each other in ways that potentially reduce transportation, and public safety costs, through informal opportunities promoted by the pocket neighborhood physical layout. This can be likened to the more formal effort to engender community found in cohousing development.

In regard to sewer infrastructure development, the Westside Planning Project proposes an 800' fill, raising Thatcher Rd. in order to have a gravity sewer line, 15' above the lowest existing ground elevation. It states that alternatives to the fill would be a pumping station or a syphon. We propose that using a STEG (Septic Tank Effluent Gravity) and/or STEP (Septic Tank Effluent Pump) sewer system for the David Hill area would eliminate the need for the fill and the entire system would be much less costly. Innoflow defines STEP & STEG as follows:

“In an effluent sewer system each individual site has a small, underground tank (interceptor tank) which receives all the waste from the dwelling. ... The liquid effluent remains in the tank for only a day or two, it is then pumped (**STEP**) or gravity fed (**STEG**) to the next treatment point.”

Because the effluent is liquid, it can flow to the public sewer treatment facility via a 4” pipe that can go up and down hill, bend at 90 degrees, only be 4 feet underground, and not require manholes. As the result of 30 years of use in civic applications, research indicates that municipalities utilizing STEP/STEG systems can provide right-sized and effective maintenance for a municipal system with a single full-time employee for 1000 households, so both the initial outlay, which can be incremental, lack of infiltration compared with gravity-flow systems, and on-going management, produce considerable savings, and far less impact on the environment. Orenco Systems touts the value for incremental development purposes as : “Effluent Sewer technology benefits communities that want to accommodate current needs and future growth. The modular nature of the system allows capacity to be built only as it is needed. Communities and their taxpayers can avoid the risk of large up-front outlay of capital for capacity that might not be used for years.”

They also reduce the need for expansion of capacity at the sewer treatment plant, as flows are more even throughout the 24hr. cycle. An exploration of the cost benefits and environmental benefits of all available systems should be foundational to decisions regarding the future financing of the Westside Planning Project.

Thanks for your consideration,

Brad & Linda Taylor

Green Grove Cohousing Community