

Asheville City Council July 26, 2022 Email Comments

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Text

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From: Steve Rasmussen <stevenrasmussen@gmail.com>

Date: Mon, Jul 25, 2022 at 1:47 PM

Subject: Please oppose Open Space Amendment

To: Asheville City Council <AshevilleNCCouncil@ashevillenc.gov>

This proposal is based on the empirically disproven fallacy being pushed by the development industry that incentivizing "density" will solve our affordable-housing and climate-resiliency crises. After many years of Asheville's prioritizing this policy chimera, we clearly see that it does exactly the opposite: Our pursuit of density is actually increasing gentrification largely because of the "highest and best use" principle that more development = higher property values, and is increasing deforestation and habitat destruction largely because our developer-dominated General Assembly has prevented municipal tree-protection and other environmental regulations from applying to infill subdivisions.

It's significant that no factual studies or projections have been done to justify this proposal. It's solely based on unexamined assumptions and what could be called "density dogma".

We don't have a housing-supply problem in Asheville -- we have a housing-DEMAND problem, and it's in the interest of the real-estate/building/development industry to continue fueling that demand such that supply can never outrace it to the point that housing prices fall by purely market forces. Rather than blindly deregulating, we need to look at STRICTER government regulation of housing markets, such as inclusionary zoning and the kinds of rent control successfully practiced in much of Europe (where laissez-faire market speculation is not the sacred cow it's become in America these days).

I'm sorry I can't attend and speak in person on Tuesday owing to a family emergency, but I fully support the more detailed objections being voiced by CAN, the Urban Forestry Commission, SACEE, and presenters Perrin de Jong and Sharon Sumrall.

-- Steve Rasmussen

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I highly encourage you to vote to approve the new open space amendments. We have long been frustrated by how much open space is required and how inflexible the existing ordinance is. Recently, we worked on a project that would allow for 19 units as per the UDO's density standards. Once the open space and parking requirements were incorporated into the plan we only had room for 12 units. A new developer took the project over and reduced the number of units to 6 so that he didn't have to provide ANY open space. Instead of 19 relatively affordable unit he's building 6 very very expensive units.

The existing ordinance greatly hinders density, infill development and increasing the housing stock. We need more housing and one way to do that is to approve the new open space regulations.

The new amendment is not the environmental catastrophe that those who oppose it state. The tree preservation ordinance and the landscaping standards in the UDO provide plenty of tree canopy and plantings. The amendment will also improve our storm water system as it incentivizes storm water mitigation.

The existing ordinance increases sprawl, traffic and air pollution and does nothing for the storm water system.

Please approve this amendment.

Thank you

Jeff Dalton, Principal

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7/25/2022 11:17:00 PM

Dear Asheville City Council and City Staff,

I am appreciative that City Council and Staff are considering the adoption of zoning text amendments to the UDO to update open space requirements for residential and commercial development.

Our landscape architecture/land planning firm has been engaged on projects or had to inform prospective clients that the open space requirements are burdensome and in direct conflict with the client/developer's best intentions and the City's stated goals to try to maximize the number of affordable residential units in infill developments.

As an example, we initially submitted in August 2018 for city approval of a 12-unit affordable housing project with the Westwood Place Apartments at 31 Westwood Place. Upon realizing the restrictive nature of this open space standard, we realized that despite the intentions of the city to incentivize developers to maximize affordable housing units, once parking and the extent of the apartment building was defined within the 0.544 acre lot, an approval or fee-in-lieu of alternative was not possible within the current UDO. After 3 years of patiently waiting for the UDO to be modified to allow for this infill project to proceed, the Client/Developer decided to leave town and find another city where their investment in affordable housing and transit-oriented infill development would be met with less resistance.

It is my professional opinion that this amendment will reverse this trend of denying positive infill development within the City of Asheville while not sacrificing the importance of protecting tree canopy areas, incorporating enhanced stormwater features, and promoting higher quality open spaces in the city.

My sincerest thanks to City Council and City Staff for their consideration in this matter.

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