

DupliCity

The City has morphed a neighborhood initiative to improve pedestrian and traffic safety on south Willamette Street into an intrusive rezone of neighborhoods in that area. They call it an “up-zone.” From the perspective of many who live there, it is more appropriately called a “down-grade” - of property values, the environment, and their quality of life.

According to City projections, they need to accommodate 15,100 housing units (HU) over 20 years. They assume enough room in the city for 13,500 HU. They plan to rezone 122 acres of an established neighborhood to locate a portion of the remaining 1600 HU's. That tiny area, comprising a mere 0.43% of the city's total square acreage, is slated to receive at least 16% of those HU's. It's the “South Willamette-Special Area Zone.”

The City is making liberal use of rhetoric like “affordability” and “density,” to rationalize this action even though “affordable” is undefined and not mandated in the SW-SAZ code. And, there is no substantiation that rezoning this neighborhood of existing, affordable, and relatively dense housing will result in more affordable housing. There is plenty of evidence from other cities that demolishing homes and displacing residents results in pricier housing.

Increasing density is the City's other excuse for this game-changing action. Densifying within the Urban Growth Boundary is a laudable goal intended to: reduce sprawling onto farm and forest land, conserve spending on new infrastructure, and accommodate changing population demographics. In reality, achieving those goals demands a comprehensive approach to all facets of development and redevelopment and would require city-wide regulation including: mandatory design standards, containing commercial sprawl like big box stores, strip malls, and surface parking, and converting residential property to commercial uses. But the City has no stomach for regulating the development industry, especially commercial development.

City policy is to densify along “Major Transit Corridors”; tearing up existing, already dense neighborhoods is not adopted policy. Lane Transit District has invested about \$200 million to build two “major transit corridors,” Franklin/11th and the newer EMX out 6th. That is where higher density is supposed to go - not Willamette St. which is narrow and has limited capacity for widening. It is a waste of taxpayer's money to build the “Transit Corridors” and then undermine that investment by failing to implement the necessary density which makes them useful. If the City were serious about densifying within the UGB, they would be focusing additional density along the EMX corridors.

The City is already planning to expand the UGB over 900 acres. And there are myriad alternatives for densifying within the UGB that would not negatively impact existing neighborhoods, like minimum density requirements on undeveloped land.

So, why would the City aggressively pursue more density in this small established neighborhood, while permitting new sprawling neighborhoods and exempting established expensive sprawling neighborhoods?

What is gained and who will benefit, by destabilizing this neighborhood?

To understand why, you only have to look as far as the fact that the City plans to extend the vastly unpopular Multiple Unit Property Tax Exemption (MUPTEx) to the SW-SAZ. This area has already

achieved the goals of diverse housing, affordability, and close-in services. It is one of densest areas in the city. Property values are stable, but not expensive. It is a desirable place to live, work, and play - making it a ripe target for gentrification. Speculators and developers can make lots of money by consolidating lots, demolishing homes, building high-density/high-rent projects - while at the same time, displacing residents, denuding the area of trees and gardens, blocking solar access, wasting resources, and polluting the air. Tax breaks are just more gravy for the cronies on this gravy train.

It is a violation of fiduciary responsibility for the City to continue giving tax breaks, like MUPTE, to build housing when they are planning to increase housing stock by 15,100 units. With such robust demand over 20 years, housing does not need subsidies unless it is low, or very low-income.

The City has employed the rhetoric of “sustainable,” “green,” and “affordable” housing, but they have not employed the practices. To add insult to injury, the City, and their surrogates, are pushing back on opponents by trying to “enviro-shame” them with propaganda labels like “nimby” and “no-growthers.” Our condescending Mayor and Council majority would prefer to believe that all they need to make SW-SAZ acceptable is better, and more, “communication.”

For many folks, their homes are a stabilizing factor in life, and their most significant investment. When they move to, or invest in, a home, they do so believing the zoning will protect them. Rezoning will create serious havoc in their lives. It already has. The City is very responsive to the Chamber of Commerce’s and Developers’ demands for “certainty” in government actions or regulations that impact their bottom line. Residents and homeowners deserve the same “certainty” the City affords the business community. They can begin by protecting our neighborhoods instead of exploiting them.

-Bonny Bettman McCornack