

To the members of the Boulder Planning Commission, Matt Cochran, Colleen Thomspson, Tina Karlsson, Elena Hughes, John Veranth, and Shelley Price-Gipson

Also to: the members of the Boulder Town Council, Judy Drain, Elizabeth Julian, Gladys LeFevre, Steve Johnson, and Jim Catmull

Fire safety is of the utmost importance, but I want us as a town to consider methods to promote fire safety while also taking serious account of the issue of affordable land.

In particular, I wish to voice my support for passing "option C" of the Ordinance Regulating Fire Protection in Subdivisions, which would waive the hydrant requirement for a single-lot subdivision.

I first want to ask you as a Planning Commission and Town Council to look closely at the way affordable land is actually working in town, *right now*. The Planning Commission is planning a Housing Forum with the commendable intention of listening to the community and providing ideas about how affordable land and housing can work in Boulder. However the town's residents are already not only speaking but also acting in ways that demonstrate how land is going to be sold affordably here- and the way this is currently happening does not have to do with cluster housing or forming land trusts, though I do think these are options we should continue to consider.

The ways that young people are getting land is either by buying it together and splitting it, in the case of Elena and Dylan, or, more commonly, buying it from another resident who has enough land to either sell an existing lot or break off a lot in a single-lot subdivision. As the price of raw land here has skyrocketed, a number of residents with enough land to share have responded in the best way possible, showing enough care for the future of this community to split off land at an undermarket price so that another resident or family can afford to live here.

Let's consider how often this scenario has happened in the last year. Zoey and Dusty (and Everlee and Westley) were able to buy land from Donna Jean in this way. Jace and I are under contract to buy land from Geneen. Nick Vincent has been offered land by Anson and Alex, and Andria and Andy (and Shirley and Carmen) have been offered land by Jacqui. Dylan and Elena bought land together, with the intention of splitting it. That is 13 of us all together, THIRTEEN of us, including the children, or 6 individuals/family units, who now either have land or have the potential to have land of our own soon, mostly due to someone selling us a piece of their land. Residents of this place are literally showing the town ways that affordable housing can work.

Again, I appreciate the Planning Commission's ambition to consider affordable housing at the forum. But I do feel that the good intentions of that forum would be entirely undermined by passing an ordinance that would mandate a hydrant for a single-lot subdivision, thereby blocking the attempts of landowners to break off a piece at an affordable price. In fact, mandating hydrants for single-lot subdivisions could potentially block members of our community from their nearly-achieved goal of having land of their own: Nick, Andria, Andy, Shirley, Carmen and Elena. This affects all of us. This affects the future of our town, and who will be able to stay.

To get back to fire safety, I am entirely in support of requiring hydrants for subdivision applications larger than a single lot. When it comes to a single-lot subdivision, however, I believe that the need for affordable land outweighs the potential difference that a new hydrant would make, particularly when, as has already been stated in meetings, an owner of ten acres could build two houses on their lot without putting in a hydrant (under the ADU ordinance) but splitting that same area into two lots and

having the same two houses would require a hydrant. Same land, same number of houses, same fire risk, but in one situation a hydrant is required and in the other it is not.

If members of the Planning Commission believe that “option c” provides too much of a risk in terms of fire safety, then I would advocate for considering additional conditions or standards.

The Planning Commission has already been talking about the use of deed restrictions within the affordable housing conversation. While I personally have some misgivings about the deed restrictions stipulations, I would rather see them make it into the ordinances than see hydrants be required for all single-lot subdivisions.

1. If the Planning Commission is willing to allow single-lot subdivisions only when they are intended to provide affordable land, standards could be created to support this intent. Could standards consider whether the buyer is a full-time resident, or compare the sale price to market value to determine whether it is considered affordable?
2. If the increased fire risk due to density is a concern, the town could take into consideration a deed restriction that would prohibit the buyer from building an external ADU.
3. If the parcel being broken off was greater than 10 acres (and therefore technically able to apply for a subsequent subdivision), the town could take into consideration a deed restriction that would prohibit the buyer and seller from making a subsequent subdivision without first putting in a hydrant.

I encourage the Planning Commission to brainstorm other conditions and ask for suggestions from residents before turning down “option c” in its entirety.

Let’s also consider the importance of fire prevention. The Wildfire Council has been providing education on fire safety, and there have been initiatives to mow different parts of town. The town and Fire Council are already working on creating a “pod” system to help communication during emergencies. Could these pods work to promote fire prevention within an area as well? Could a network and chain of command be established to share information about who has a mower and when that mower is available in an area to be used? This information could then be reported up the line, and fire prevention measures occurring throughout town could be tracked. We have other resources in our town too. The compost tea made by High Desert Soil Works (Eric Feiler) could potentially be used with seeding for restoring tumbleweed fields to less flammable native grasses. Could we utilize this compost tea on a greater scale?

These sorts of systems, which focus on prevention of a fire even occurring, would help eliminate the chance of an emergency. The best way to subdue our fear around fire is to be proactive, to work as a community to prevent it; not to exclude people who cannot afford to put in an expensive hydrant.

I’ll say it one more time. Housing forums are great but paying attention to the housing solution that is literally happening is better. There are many ways to reduce fire risk, but there is no way that someone who is already struggling to afford land here will be able to afford the additional price of a hydrant, when someone with extra land and a desire to help offers them a piece of land of their own.

Thank you for your consideration.

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