

To the Planning Commission:

I write this note because I am unable to attend this meeting, as Jennifer and I will be floating down the Green (I know, I know, you feel bad for us).

I want to advocate, as strongly as possible, that you pass “option (c)” of the Ordinance Regulating Fire Protection in Subdivisions, which would waive the hydrant requirement for a single-lot subdivision. It is also important to note that choosing option (c) does not leave the town vulnerable for large-scale subdivisions avoiding the installation of adequate infrastructure, including fire hydrants. Option (c) identifies a specific exception to the general rules regulating fire hydrants in subdivisions: if, and only if, the subdivision is a single lot, the hydrant requirement is waived.

There are also rumors/reports that some on the PC want to select two of the three options to forward to the Town Council and have them make the final call. This is a bad idea. You on the Planning Commission have done the work, not the TC. You have been dealing with this issue in various forms for months, not the TC. You have more knowledge on this topic than the TC. This is your responsibility, not the TC’s.

The PC has discussed various strategies for addressing the lack of affordable land/housing in Boulder, with the upcoming Housing Forum as an example. And yet, options (a) and (b) of the proposed ordinance are steps *away* from an ordinance that promotes more affordable land options. Tessa, in her letter to the PC last month, pointed out “the ways that young people are getting land is either by buying it together and splitting it...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...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 under market price so that another resident or family can afford to live here.”

It is important to recognize that the lots Tessa mentioned and are the focus of option (c), that is eliminating the hydrant mandate for single-lot subdivisions, are not what many of us think of when we hear the term “subdivision.” For me, the term provokes images of large-scale projects with developers selling multiple lots for a profit, lots of construction, and the need for any infrastructure throughout the project. But the lots we are talking about here are radically different. The term subdivision is used only because a piece of property is being divided, hence “subdivided.” The lots affected by option (c) are single lots being sold at an under-market price, with no developer; no large-scale, multi-unit construction, and little or no need for any infrastructure. Every person identified by Tessa and benefitting from the goodness of their neighbors is already a full-time Boulder resident.

Not only are the folks Tessa mentioned permanent residents, but they also epitomize the objectives in the vision statement of Boulder’s General Plan: “...to preserve the ranching, small-scale agricultural...lifestyle...to promote self-reliance and resiliency...supporting an economically viable future by encouraging a local land-based economy centered on food security, cottage industry, local entrepreneurship, full-time residency, and affordable

opportunities for future generations.” It is a spot-on description of people like Andy and Andria, Elena, Nick, Zoey, and others.

So, these people are getting their own land? Problem solved, right? No, no, not so fast. Either option (a) or (b) regulating fire hydrants in subdivisions will close this one avenue currently available for especially young folks (Elena’s and Nick’s cases) or young families (Andy and Andria’s case) to be able to afford land in Boulder. If you require a single lot cleaved from an existing parcel to be within 600 feet (?), or maybe 400 (?) feet of a fire hydrant, I don’t know Andy’s and Andria’s situation, but you might literally be pricing Nick and Elena out of Boulder. Elena’s bill could easily exceed tens of thousands of dollars, a price that she is unable to meet.

These are folks with limited resources whose neighbors have gone out of their way to make land more affordable (I’m not sure, but I think Jacqui is offering Andria and Andy a parcel at a below-market price; Donna Jean sold Zoey her lot at a reduced price; Anson and Alex are offering Nick a lot at a reduced price; Elena’s and Dylan’s two neighbors gave them enough land to put them over the 10 acres necessary to subdivide (not sold, but GAVE them land because they wanted these young women to be able to live permanently as their neighbors). Some local landowners see that skyrocketing land costs are pricing young people out of owning land in Boulder, and recognize that without these young folks, Boulder moves toward a community of retirees and largely empty second homes, owned by people who are here for a dozen weekends a year.

I don’t mean to be repetitive, but this needs to be said more than once. Option (c), waiving the hydrant requirement for single-lot subdivisions, is aimed directly at folks identified by the PC on many occasions, and explicitly identified in the General Plan, to be the sort people we WANT in Boulder. The local landowners who are making these lots available clearly recognize the value of what they are doing because these are largely private offerings, not lots that are on the open market. The landowners are targeting specific people they want to help and support.

So, I urge the PC to be proactive. PC members talk a lot about the General Plan, about finding ways to help young families and individuals make homes for themselves in this community. Well, here is a chance for you to DO something tangible to help young families and individuals make homes for themselves in Boulder and also help meet Boulder’s goals in the General Plan. Support and reinforce the generosity of community members who are willing to cleave off a part of their land at under-market prices or even donate land. They do this out of genuine care for those they are helping, and they do it for the future of Boulder. Their efforts are done individually and informally, whereas you can help collectively (as our representatives) and formally, by voting for option (c), waiving the hydrant mandate for single-lot subdivisions.

Thank you for your attention.

Dan Pence