

## **MEMO**

TO: Boulder Planning Commission, Interested Parties

FROM: Lee Nellis, FAICP

DATE: May 4 , 2023

### **RE: Focus**

It seems to me that the recent story of planning in Boulder has been one of distractions. Those distractions have included the ADU mandate and the other changes in state law that required your action, the need to resolve questions about road access to subdivisions that were not clearly answered in the ordinances, and fire hydrants. Now comes another, even more complicated state mandate. There has also been turnover on the PC and in the position of Zoning Administrator.

The first purpose of this memo is to remind us all that what has not changed is the general plan and the goals it directs the PC to pursue. It is an excellent set of goals that I think was reaffirmed by the Housing Forum (there have been accomplishments, including the forum, despite the distractions) and I think it is being reaffirmed again in the work PC members have done with the public over the past few months.

### **5-2 General Community Goals**

The following list expresses the primary goals of the citizens of Boulder:

1. To preserve Boulder's rural agricultural atmosphere and cultural resources.
2. To promote farming, ranching and the conservation of open lands to support agricultural endeavors.
3. To preserve the natural beauty, open space, clean air and water and quiet atmosphere.
4. To keep agricultural fields open, watered, and productive.
  
10. To maintain diverse community structure by creating housing opportunities for seasonal workers and low to moderate income individuals.

I suggest that the PC try to set distractions aside and focus on how to implement these goals through a new set of subdivision standards. There must eventually be a new subdivision procedure, both because of deficiencies in the existing one and the new state law. The Town has several months to comply and the larger jurisdictions will surely come up with something that can be adapted to Boulder. I suggest also setting aside the draft bylaws, to which changes will now be necessary, continuing to use them as guidelines for PC business for the time being.

There are two things beside the subdivision standards that need immediate attention.

I suggest that you send the minimal ordinance changes needed to facilitate housing at BES to a hearing, then to the Town Council. Those proposed changes were distributed to you last week. It may be argued that they are premature because there is not yet a

specific plan for the BES housing. True. But wouldn't it help those working on that project to know what will be necessary when they are ready? And incidentally to have a tangible expression of the Town's support? Its up to you.

It has also become necessary to clarify the ZA's role in the review of CUPs (and, implicitly other applications). John Veranth's recent memo to everyone goes far beyond that, but cites the ordinance language that says the ZA is responsible for the equitable administration of the ordinance. While that could be more specific, it is meaningless if it doesn't include having the ZA make recommendations (as every ZA I have ever worked with over the past 49 years routinely does). The question, as I see it, is: How can the PC help April be comfortable with making the necessary recommendations.

While I agree with much of John's memo and appreciate his effort, I know that he also sees the work on subdivisions as critical. I would like, therefore, to add most discussion of the commercial development standards to the list of distractions, for now. You can and should begin using the new application form (which is independent of the adopted checklists, which would still be completed as a summary of your decision). It would be possible to make some procedural amendments along the lines John's memo suggests if the PC thinks that's urgent.

I, however, am going to speak for focus. The future character of Boulder does not really depend on how you regulate commercial development. They're important, but they will never have the impact that the regulation of residential subdivisions will. I suggest that the PC focus on the subdivision standards until it has made measurable progress toward implementing the goals of the general plan.

### **Density Questions**

The starting point for the subdivision standards must be tentative answers to the questions posed in my April presentation. Those questions boil down to this:

How much, and in what ways, is the town willing to change the permitted density of residential development to achieve the goals of the general plan?

I don't think you are quite ready to answer though. John Veranth has not completed his work with the landowners group and I am not sure the other working groups are finished either. I suggest a break from these questions in May based on an agreement to wrap up the working groups and get started on the density question in June.

