

The Action Whistle

By The Whistle Team (Rhona Baron, Editor)

The last Whistle blew long and strong for a more comprehensive, altruistic and diverse membership on the Leavenworth Planning Commission. This week, the Whistle is blowing to petition the Planning Commission and City Council take a step back to view the big picture and the impact of multiple changes they've made to Leavenworth's codes in the past three years. Like Old Faithful, we will keep blowing until good ideas and legitimate concerns get traction at City Hall.

To begin with, conflict of interest issues should be talked about. You know, out loud. Were you aware that pre-approved ADU plans are being promoted on the city's dime, and that sales and downstream opportunities line the pockets of past and current members of the Planning Commission? At the same time, ADU's (Accessory Dwelling Units) are rapidly evolving from affordable housing opportunities for locals into money-making, short term rentals (B&Bs). A current planning commissioner and a council member are in the process of converting their own ADU's into overnight rentals. And still, regulation of the number of B and B's has not made the PC docket for discussion? How convenient.

While we are on the topic of conflict of interest, we blow faithfully over the universally disliked multiplex-type place on Stafford. People, please! It was built by a former Planning Commissioner using "zero lot line" code he recommended, the same fellow who brought the community the Pine Grass Development.

Development like this is understandable. While you are busy navigating your day to day, people who have been given political power by the mayor and council are doing the same. They are in business and they are conducting business. I'm not sure we can blame them, but if the appointment process and Mayor favor those in the business of making profit from dense development, maybe it's time everyone took a breath to talk about what the Planning Commission can be instead of what it has become. In the city's own language, that group must strive for "diversity."

Let's be clear, we've reviewed the laws and strictly speaking, the City's Development Services Director, who sets the tone for conflict of interest, has not broken it. However, we'd like to point out that "letter of the law" is considered a minimum standard for behavior all across the United States. The lowest bar. Would it be possible to establish a higher bar, one that puts the public before private business when we're talking about representative government?

Here's an example of why the PC matters. Currently, the Planning Commission has alley improvement and maintenance at the top of their to-do list. You heard right, not roads, which are potholed ankle twisters, virtually impossible to navigate for people in wheel chairs and visual eyesores. Yes, you've told us you care about streets, but the PC is making recommendations on unimproved alleys being upgraded for primary access,

which would assist all those ADU's going up in back yards. You know, the ones that can transition to an unlimited number of B and B's.

According to the Public Works Director, it will cost about \$1.5 million to improve all the alleys to the extent the PC is considering and will take approximately \$100,000 per year once the alleys are improved to maintain them. This alley work will compete with current road funds. Meaning it will compete with the much needed improvements to current city streets!

We've been thinking about what can be done now. For starters, there is a single position on the Planning Commission that has remained empty for over half a year. Therefore, only six people are guiding the complex planning process that affects the entire village, whereas there should be seven. We suggest actively looking for and filling that open position with someone who has a more altruistic motivation for serving. Of course this person should be familiar with development, codes, and the community, but since the word DIVERSITY is a mandate for choosing PC membership, perhaps the mayor would consider actually following his own guideline and considering a candidate who favors affordable housing AND has a more comprehensive view of the big picture.

You can do something right now, too. Our community needs to comment NOW on the 2023 docket that is being established in the next month. We urge you to attend Planning Commission and City Council meetings right away. Let your preferences be heard. Or don't, and allow the current trajectory that favors a developer driven agenda to keep rolling.

You'll find meeting times on the city's website under "City Calendar and Events." Find us at LWhistle.com. And please take your current survey on the bottom of the front page of the online version of the Echo. Yours faithfully, The Whistle Team.

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