



## The Heads Up Whistle

By Rhona Baron

Spring brings change and the chance to assess winter's impacts around town. It was a rough winter that flattened shrubs and even structures. We won't soon forget the layers of snow and the difficulty of keeping our travel ways clear. The Whistle team was pleased to see that the city has purchased a new CAT loader and loader mounted snow blower to help when winter rolls around again. But circling

back to our topic from the last column, our alleys were highly impacted by weather conditions too.

That's why, at the April 5 Planning Commission hearing, we were surprised to hear a staunch defense of the use of alleys for primary residential access, particularly regarding ADU's. The justification was that using alleys will cut down on street traffic and create more motivation for people to "sit out on their front porches." After some investigation however, we found the on-the-record reason for encouraging alley access, along with changes in driveway and parking locations: "The proposed amendments... are intended to increase options for infill and residential lot development." Infill involves construction on lots already zoned for neighborhood development to their maximum potential, further packing structures and driveways into our neighborhoods.

A 2021, "Residential Alley Study" concluded that around \$1.6 million was required to bring the alleys up to a minimum gravel standard with an investment of \$100,00 a year for maintenance after that. Despite the study's conclusions, we've learned that there is nothing budgeted for alleys. Whistle blown and heads up! Although the PC and Council encourage alley use, citizens who choose alleys for primary access to residences are now required to sign an indemnity waiver, releasing the City from related liability for damages.

In our March 29 Whistle we encouraged citizens to attend the April 5th Planning Commission Public Hearing and Meeting where alleys and B&B density were being discussed. Attend you did, with one of the highest attendance numbers in the past year. Your attendance showed Lilith Vespier of City Development Services and our Planning Commissioners that this community DOES CARE about decisions and recommendations to the Council.

There was good news on the B and B front. Previously, most Commissioners had expressed indifference or opposition to regulating B&B growth. With the threat of a Council generated moratorium, we believe the PC is now looking a little more seriously limiting B&Bs. In fact, at the April 5 meeting, the Commissioners agreed to remove expanding primary B&B access from alleys at this time. The PC has begun to discuss ways B&B density can be controlled, including by neighborhood numbers or by a total percentage of housing. Keep whistling Leavenworth!

Our only regret is that with so many in attendance, an opportunity was missed to encourage comments. It would have been nice for the PC Chairperson to go the extra block instead of formally stating the comment process then waiting the obligatory time before cutting off after several remarks from “regulars” trickled in. It was by the book, but I had this fantasy. Cue magical music as the PC welcomes, then encourages participation with words like “We know this may be your first time attending. We are thrilled you are here. Please know that every voice matters and we really listen responsively to any thoughts you have tonight. No idea is too small.” That sort of thing. Thank you to those who attended and don’t be discouraged. Try again!

Here’s the biggest heads up of all. The Whistle team observes that due to COVID, policies and politics in general over the past several years, our community is slipping into polarization, perhaps even becoming more dismissive of alternate points of view, or even the majority point of view. We’ve been frustrated with the way the City keeps conversations tightly controlled through “comments” and “engagement nights,” where isolated individual “booths” limit wider community involvement within the conversation. We’ve even had to fight for blank note cards that would allow for general public comments.

This model is not necessarily normal. We know that past administrations were not shy in holding open public forums. Other area cities hold them consistently. Jim Fletcher, the Mayor of Cashmere, has held many large community conversation meetings to learn from residents and businesses, and to build a common community vision. He seems to relish the dialogue and he values the diverse public-involved discussions.

In the absence of a public discussion aimed to form a broader comprehension of the community’s values and future vision, The Whistle is announcing a grassroots public forum on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023 at 6:30pm at the CCFD3 Fire Hall. Hosted by The Whistle Team and other concerned community members, several people will provide brief updates on a City initiatives. Then the meeting will open up for public discussion on Leavenworth’s future, including possible new candidates for local leadership positions. What does the community want Leavenworth to look like in 20 years? How is it going at this point?

Let’s get creative together! To be clear, this meeting will not be a bashing session of individuals, but rather an opportunity for our residents and businesses to hear each other, and to understand one another’s’ ideas and concerns. The City claims that public comment is the same as public dialogue. We respectfully disagree. Dialogue allows for free-flowing discourse that builds clarity and decreases discord.

“...Of the people, by the people, for the people.” That’s democracy. We hope to see you at the Fire Hall on May 8. Everyone welcome, and in the meantime, take the new survey in the Echo and keep whistling. We’ll hear you! [www.lwhistle.com](http://www.lwhistle.com).