

## THE RECOMMENDED WHISTLE

By Rhona Baron

Disclosure: I'm odd. I don't take sides unless absolutely necessary and I have never strongly affiliated with political parties, even in today's a politically polarized fun house. I have faith in great ideas from diverse sources, innovation, and most of all collaboration. Odder still, I am fiercely passionate about moderation and balance; still naive enough to believe that well researched, thoughtful journalism can support an informed citizenry that's equal to the task of partnering with local government. Just giving you a glimpse of The Whistle Team's philosophical undies before we reveal our recommendations for Leavenworth's once and future neighborhoods.

First, some happy news. The Whistle considers the Community Engagement Night on Nov. 1 to be a significant improvement on the crumbling "Residential Advisory Committee." Thanks to council person Sharon Waters for her initiative. The event gave folks an opportunity to learn and engage in a comfortable setting — that included pizza. We appreciate getting results from the city's Urban Growth Area (UGA) survey which showed how deeply residents and visitors care about our future. Since the city has confirmed it will offer this event quarterly, The Whistle officially requests an additional table/station at each event for housing topics. Front and center, we'd like to see a transparent progress report on the Planning Commission's annual docket as the commission is tasked with recommending changes to city code and initiatives for the future of our neighborhoods.

Speaking of the Planning Commission, it's time to refresh and balance the membership and the process by which the members are selected. The current process is unusually biased, and the mayor's appointments could be considered non-compliant with the PC's own membership requirements. In our researched opinion, the PC seems stacked to advantage the people who serve. We don't have space to scan the anatomy of the PC today, but will be back next week with a Whistle Stop.

For now, let's head back to the UGA survey where we made a public record request to review the community's written comments. Respondents expressed much enthusiasm for our beautiful mountain valley and we hope the city takes note! The Whistle Team is concerned about a lack of strategy to enhance, preserve and protect natural features in the city and in the UGA. We note that the 2021 Comprehensive Plan "encourages" but doesn't require regulating the preservation of open space, vegetation and corridors for trails that help link neighborhoods. Our Team thinks the city can do better. Why not ensure that open spaces for people and wildlife are identified and protected as housing density and subdivisions increase?

The Whistle strongly recommends developing a Green Infrastructure Master Plan along the lines of other Washington cities. The Green IMP will guide future developments in retaining vegetation and reducing non-point pollution from storm water runoff from sites. The city's Stormwater Study from 2016 provides important data to contribute to such a plan. Think about it. Green Infrastructure is both a physical "thing" and a planning and

design philosophy. The infrastructure, such as open space, trail systems, and other green spaces represents an approach to “urban” planning that will improve the social, economic and environmental impacts that accompany new development.

Again, It’s all about balance, in this case with nature. As residential areas expand, what other kinds of balance should we seek? What about balancing the use of Accessory Dwelling Units for conversion to B and B’s? Currently, there is NO LIMIT to the number of B and B’s that can be established in Leavenworth. Likewise, there is no code limiting their density on a given block! What about balancing the look of new housing with the historic and small town feel of the older neighborhoods? A clear majority of people surveyed favored single family homes and historic character. Are we listening and changing code accordingly? Not yet. New code allows houses up to 35 feet tall to dwarf and compromise existing homes. New code also allows for various administrative deviations and zero lot line development. Again, this is a boon for builders but not for neighborhoods. And please, please stop saying the zero lot line option will make a place affordable. We simply have no example of this being true in Leavenworth.

Here’s hoping you find some moderation and balance in our sometimes crazy world. Thanks for taking The Whistle’s community surveys found at the bottom of The Echo’s home page online. Visit us at [LWhistle.com](http://LWhistle.com) to comment, pro or con. Or just whistle. We’ll hear you!

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