

The Whistle #1
By Rhona Baron



“The Whistle,” is blowing onto the pages of the Leavenworth Echo on the winds of change. Driven by COVID, new peaks in tourism, shifting demographics, skyrocketing real estate values and the City’s choices as it looks to the future, our community is being reshaped before our eyes.

Change can be good. But change always comes at a price. This column is about that price. It’s a price we are beginning to feel in real time as new codes and strategies are implemented by Leavenworth’s paid administrators, elected officials and appointed planning commissioners.

Having listed these folks, most of whom I voted for and/or have been friends with for decades, does not make me happy. However, I’ve also been blown to these pages to provide a place for the voices of the community to be heard and respected. There are many issues to explore but let’s begin here.

For the past nine months or so, I’ve been engaging on an issue that is crucial to most of us, namely our neighborhoods and the changes occurring under the City’s Housing Action Plan which is part of the City’s Comprehensive Plan for growth.

What I’ve encountered and observed has convinced me that common sense and caring citizens of our town are coming in last while developers, planning commissioners and (unsupported) lofty ideals are sucking the oxygen from true community collaboration. It’s taken my breath away to witness good citizens with deeply reasoned and reasonable thoughts discounted by City administrators and elected officials. Or maybe worse, dealt pat phrases like “thank you for caring” after being ignored on key issues for many months.

Seeking to add respect and a little balance to the conversation about the future of our neighborhoods, I’m working with a group of knowledgeable folks who will provide content in the upcoming weeks as we dig into housing topics like density, water availability, infrastructure, aesthetics, out of town ownership, and affordability. Today, join me in simply stepping back to look at three properties currently under development. In our opinion, these properties exemplify the City’s approach to planning for growth.

Each property takes advantage of codes, some ratified in the past year, to compress development in neighborhoods- despite complaints from neighbors. All of these properties are built on what is called a “Zero Lot Line” meaning any portion of one or more of the building’s walls or foundation rests directly on a lot line. Some use what’s called “Administrative Deviations.” Find a simple map and additional info for 243 Prospect, 117/121 Stafford and 728/730 Cedar properties on our website: LWhistle.com. Drive, walk or bike by to view.

Every week we’ll also have surveys for your response. We’re committed to making surveys as clear as possible to transparently share community opinions and ideas. Survey results will be published in upcoming weeks. Find it all here in the Echo (much thanks to Publisher Carol Forhan) and at LWhistle.com. Or just whistle. We’ll hear you!