

The Glowing Whistle By Rhona Baron

All that glows is not gold. On the morning of June 9, property owner Jordan McDevitt sat in council chambers, poised to take the final step with the City of Leavenworth to green light the initial phase of Alpenglow Village, a 70-lot subdivision off Ski Hill Drive. The development will continue to transform the wide green field that lies immediately north of the Pinegrass development. In the future, Mr. McDevitt, hailing from a family whose roots run deep in our valley, plans to develop three additional parcels that will pack as many as 102 additional dwellings (single family homes, duplexes and townhomes) onto the hillside for a total of 172 new residences. If an ADU is built in addition to any of those dwellings, and the City estimates 25%, we could be looking at well over 200 new homes.

Here's the quick math using the city's calculation of 2.2 persons per single family residence. Four hundred forty people may be housed at Alpenglow. Add that to the additional 600 projected to take up residence on Chumstick Hwy at Leavenworth Meadows and the math is even simpler. Over 1,000 more people will live here, or almost equally likely, own second homes. Mr. McDevitt stressed his sensitivity to the community, declaring that he "wants to do it well."

We always appreciate when developers care about our natural spaces and wetlands, consider aesthetics, respect our infrastructure issues and of course, address affordable housing. Two of these criteria may have been given a nod by McDevitt. It remains to be seen as the development takes shape. But affordability was ignored. Infrastructure was...sidestepped.

To understand what went down, let's explore the hearing process. According to the City's website, Leavenworth adopted the use of a Hearing Examiner system to "free the city council and planning commission to focus on policymaking. It also reduces the city's liability exposure..." Putting a proposed development in front of the Hearing Examiner, an attorney, is the last step before development begins. Typically, ten days after the public hearing the Examiner makes his determination. Typically, development is approved with simple modifications.

Not this time. Comments made regarding Alpenglow were compelling enough to temporarily stop the standard 10 day turn around. Shout out to Paula Stroyzk, Whistle team member, and Kirvil Skinnarland, Whistle team advisor and president of the land use watchdog group RC3. Their comments questioned compliance with requirements of Leavenworth's Comprehensive Plan. At the heart of the matter was a required but incomplete traffic study. That study along with a water/sewer study will conclude this summer.

To be clear, these studies are not new to the light of day. If you caught the article about Alpenglow in the Wenatchee World on March 16, you learned that the city's "Determination of Non Significance" concerning traffic, wetlands and more came under

question months ago. At that time, RC3 lobbed six pages of comments at Leavenworth's Development Services. It should come as no surprise that, at the end of the June 9 Hearing, Examiner Andy Kottkamp expressed concern about the lack of traffic study. "I want to look at that traffic study issue a little closer because it's normally here, now, at the hearing. So that whatever the city believes (we get to hear), or the public can comment on it. If there needs to be conditions, there can be, instead of just pushing it down the road."

As a "party of interest" I received an email the next day from Maggie Boles, Senior Planner for the City of Leavenworth.

"On June 9, 2023, the City requested the Hearing Examiner reopen the record for MS 2022-045 Alpenglow Village 3, in response to questions related to the Traffic Impact Analysis. The request was granted, and the record has been reopened indefinitely. Additional materials will be submitted to the Hearing Examiner and parties of record will be provided with the opportunity to review and make comment on the materials prior to the rendering of a final decision."

I hear the whistle blowing as the train comes into the station after another lap around the same gung-ho development loop. At the grassroots meeting last month, not a hand was raised when the eighty citizens were asked if they felt listened to in the city's development process. Yet, here is another glowing example of tuning out citizens in favor of density and development - if lack of listening to the wisdom of citizens can ever be considered lustrous.

The good news is that the community will now have more opportunity to comment! As always, please feel free to visit us and leave a note at LWhistle.com. Don't forget to check out the new survey in the Echo. And note that I'm back in print every other week; plus we've updated our website. Keep on whistling. We hear you.