

The Pothole Whistle

By Rhona Baron

I've been a Leavenworth resident for over three decades and I enjoy the simple benefits of small town living where, day or night, I can step out the front door for a refreshing stroll. One evening, fifteen years ago, I was taking a brisk walk with a friend in deep twilight and twisted my ankle on a chunk of road surface dislodged from one of the many potholes that pepper our residential streets. My ankle never healed properly, but I figured it was part of the price we pay to live in a mountain village. It's rural, and not everything is perfect, right?

Unless it is. We make the tourism experience and road surfaces downtown a priority. The Chamber encourages that, which is, after all, their job. Let them do it well. In the meantime, shouldn't we expect the city to do the same on behalf of residents? We are back this week to bring the April 5 Public Hearing and meeting of the Planning Commission to your attention.

According to the agenda, this Public Hearing at 7pm at City Hall is your opportunity to comment on proposed code changes including accepting alleys as main access in all residential areas. Yes, main access, meaning you can mosey up to a front door of a residence on an alley. I know this sounds strange, but please recall that the Planning Commission (PC), Mayor and Council have been pushing for construction of accessory dwelling units (ADU's) in all neighborhoods. Their stated goal is to increase density to provide for more affordable workforce housing.

The problem is that while the PC and Council coo over their altruistic mission, both Jason Lundgren from the council and Alison Miller from the PC have constructed ADU's on their alleys and are in the process of converting them to B and B's, a lucrative small business opportunity...for themselves! In fact, at a recent council meeting when limiting alley access for B and Bs was discussed, Mr. Lundgren burst out that if he couldn't have an approved alley access for his B and B, he would "build a parking lot in his front yard, then." What's not to love about that degree of community spirit?

We credit the City for attempting to address our neighborhood streets. A recently completed study shared at the last Council meeting determined our streets would require \$9,600,000 of repairs and replacements over multiple years to bring those potholed, ankle twisters up to speed. That's real money and we want to know where it's going to come from and what the plan is for implementation, before the Council begins to think about needing approximately \$1,000,000 to improve the alleys and \$100,000 annually to provide alley maintenance!

The April 5 Public Hearing at 7pm at City Hall also includes discussion of code changes for driveway access and setbacks that intend to squeeze more homes onto smaller lots with shared driveways (vegetation and permeable ground be damned) among other code changes that will have significant impact on our neighborhoods.

After the formal Public Hearing, regulating the number of Leavenworth's B and B's is on the agenda. Stick around to discover why the entire PC and half of the Council, to date, see zero need to regulate the amount of B and B's being licensed in Leavenworth's residential neighborhoods, much less the more granular decision about how many three bedroom B and B's could exist on any given block. At this time, following current code, every home on every block could offer 3 bedroom B and B short term rental units. Correct us if we're wrong, but we don't believe most citizens would be in favor. Kudos given to Sharon Waters, Zeke Reister and Clint Stand for recently speaking out about the need to regulate B and B's, even as the Council and PC promote construction of ADU's. Again, every ADU turned into a B&B to house a visiting tourist is one less dwelling that could be an affordable home for our local workforce.

This is a meeting you need to attend! This a a time to make your preferences known. If you can't attend, write an email or letter to City Hall and join the Whistle team in expressing true concern about alleys taking precedence over fixing the residential streets we walk and drive on every day.

We have background material on everything we've mentioned in the column today, including the street study. We'll post it on our website under the tab "Columns" Search for www.LWhistle.com. Find Columns and click into the drop down. We also have a new Leavenworth Echo survey question up on the paper's online site. Keep Whistling. We hear you!