

Dear Mayor Batey, Council President Anderson, Councilors Massey, Stavenjord, and Khosroabadi; and City Manager Sagor

Community Comment, Agenda 5, June 17, 2025, Regular Session

**Re: Responding to Council President Anderson's Milwaukie Pilot column on Middle Housing.**

Much of what City, regional and state governments are now doing about housing is re-distributional in nature, rather than advancing overall housing affordability and general affordability.

President Anderson mentions the Short Stack Housing project being priced at \$245,000. But this price reflects a transfer of monies from one set of homeowners to another, seeing how this project receives government taxpayer monies, including monies collected from the City construction tax and, for energy subsidies, the public purpose fee charged on utility bills.

The government abuses the term affordability by labeling its subsidized housing programs, as "affordable housing." But the truth about the matter is that affordable housing - in government parlance - is a shell game of making one group less prosperous having been taxed. True housing affordability comes by lowering barriers to housing construction – for instance, allowing the Metro area to build outward and not just by infill – the latter having much more cost because of greater value of urban land and its physical constraints while farmland languishes relatively.

There is further reduction in the quality of life for existing Milwaukie residents from the likes of projects like Short Stack, which rely exclusively on on-street parking. Creating a bank of cars lining streets otherwise lightly parked on. The rating systems in the Transportation System Plan Update for pedestrians and bicyclists both worsen with streets becoming inundated with parked cars. Moreover, the System Development Charges are such that they contribute relatively little to building out a system of sidewalks – instead creating a system of disconnected sidewalks.

Low traffic volumes add greatly to the walkability and bicycle quality of life for Milwaukie's residents, currently. President Anderson alludes to wanting to raise the utility SAFE fee to build more sidewalk because of more middle housing and hence greater traffic volumes, but this also raises the cost of living for Milwaukie residents.

As for stores on street corners, this ignores the economics of large stores versus small stores. Large stores (Big Box Stores) have great economic advantage over smaller shops because of economies of scale (through greater sales volumes). I can count on my hand the number of times I have bought at a local convenience store versus my daily shopping at a big store like Safeway in the past four years. (Small stores are simply too expensive relative to the bigger

box store malls.) Small stores need to have ready parking to improve their chances of competing – but providing such either means more parked cars on the street or parking lots that take out land for housing.

As for downtown, here again there is a redistribution of General Fund monies paid by Milwaukie property taxpayers outside the downtown area to the downtown area. Many Milwaukie residents rarely visit downtown, let alone shop downtown. Most residents live northeast of Highway 224, essentially cutoff from downtown. What happens next is the residents outside of downtown are going to pay higher fees/taxes to subsidize the downtown area.

I know you mean well. But there seems to be a positive correlation between the degree to which the government intervenes in markets and the problem for which government intervenes. This is the case with the Government's spending on homeless services. A recent Oregonian news article headline reads: "Homelessness continues to rise even as services increase." People good at math and a healthy understanding of the self-interest aspect of human beings are not surprised by this Oregonian headline. I suspect the same can be said of government's current housing policies. I heard a recent Wall Street investment firm representative say that his firm is telling its investor cliental to stay away from West Coast state real estate, because of local and state government housing policies.

Sincerely,  
Elvis Clark  
resident of the City of Milwaukie