

April 1, 2022

To: LaConner Hearing Examiner, Mr. Lowell

Hello Mr. Lowell,

Thank you, for taking the time to listen to all the details and concerns brought forth at yesterdays hearing on the 306 Center Street project. I've written a couple of letters previously, my husband and I own the lovely home directly across from 306 Center. I really appreciate the questions you had for developer and neighbors.

I'm writing to ensure that something was made very clear to you as you read all our letters, looked into a couple of items, reviewed the careful and astute decision made by the planning commission, heard the testimony of the planner and developer.

From the very beginning, with the developers first proposal, which was accepted by the planner last fall, the information on application was inadequate. My husband and I met with the planner to review it with us in person. It was described as a pre-application and that more information would be forthcoming at an unknown time. Yet the public comment period would close at the end of the month. I asked about the exit/entrance to the first floor short term rentals (motel rooms) being on the Center Street side, not placed on the inner parking lot side. We had a map right there between us as he assured me I was wrong. The map proved me right. I asked what would stop those motel guests from using public right of way parking. There was no plan for that. I asked about the height of building and fire protection and he described the process of sharing info with and getting approval from county fire Marshall. That approval has not come through according to the latest information I could find.

We asked about no SEPA provided and described to the planner the history of the property and what we had witnessed in our 30 years living across the street, the gas station, the oil truck garage, the oil storage tanks. In one of my letters I described some of these. It appears to me that the SEPA and other work was performed only after myself and other concerned neighbors alerted the planner about this history, that what

should have been begun by planner in the first place, was done only after public comments.

After our initial letters were written, and you can see there were several, the developer replied to the town planner, in an itemized addendum to the pre-application, addressing some of our items of concern. Again, it appears to me that we neighbors did the planners and developers work for them.

When the small, dilapidated garage on site came down on a Sunday morning, a neighbor went out to check on what was going on. That should be a welcome act. As she was attempting to get information she was brushed off by the worker, who quickly tried to finish the job as she was alerting our town public works director. He came out and soon some requirements were met and the building came down; the orange soil barriers, the closure of sewer drains, the taping off of areas where children/pets could wander in. We later learned from developer that all the requirements stated on the permit were not read. This is not reassuring is it? How can he be trusted going forward?

We learned at the planning commission hearing after developer was asked that his descriptions of “flats” “units” were actually condos to be sold and not apartments for rent. This severely changed our view of what we thought might be affordable housing. Why did the developer obfuscate?

You might know by now that many citizens of LaConner are old hands at reading documents, checking out what’s going on in town, and right now still a bit shell-shocked at the way the Ball Park on Maple street was handled by town government, including the planner, administrator and mayor. This, in my opinion, is due to their inability to understand that money and growth are not first priorities here, despite ongoing desires and plans of developers. We agree that more folks will be moving here and planning is important. Neighborhoods and scale are just as important. We know we need to build up and that ADUs are helpful.

But consider Snapdragon Hill and Landed Gentry on Maple Street at present time. You can easily drive by and take a look. The LaConner Retirement Inn on Center and First street has a very interesting story on how citizens/architects showed the planning commission in 1988 how the planned building would impact that area and

forced the developer to lower, add landscape, and create open space and parking on their property abutting First Street.

The building on First Street now known as the Museum of Northwest Art has a very colorful history as well. As it was being built as store fronts, office space and parking around 1990 one of the town planning commissioners walked by and noticed that it was not being built as approved. Work was stopped and the developer had to receive approval for changes she thought she could “just make”.

Most my neighbors have at least one story of a visitor, family member, new business owner making a comment like “you folks don’t know the gold mine you have here” over the years. We have had cold calls about selling our homes.

Despite what our planner describes as his duty as town planner, that his hands are tied by lack of additional housing zoning descriptions as he alluded, that there is nothing in our code to direct him to make a thorough list of requirements including reduced scale, landscaping, and parking, he should be ensuring, as we all go forward with growth of this nature, that the town has the capacity to support this size and density, parking and infrastructure, and *before* they get to the county permit stage. I don’t see him doing his job. He speaks developer-speak, if you know what that means.

I will conclude with this:

As I note here, at several stages in the process the town planner and developer have not been clear, have not seemed to know the necessary steps to take, and possibly simply omitted important information.

Throughout the process my neighbors and I have not felt the developer or planner was acting in good faith, that there has been bungling, as with the Maple Street Ball Field Incident, and we don’t trust them. I don’t know if trust is on your checklist for a decision like this, but it should be.

Again, thank you for your work.

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