

January 28, 2020

City of McMinnville Planning Department
Attn: Charles Darnell
213 NE Fifth Street
McMinnville, Oregon 97128

RE: January 28 City Council Hearing on Stafford North Development; Letter of Concern

Dear Mr. Darnell,

Please pass this letter of concern to City Council members.

My name is Markus Pfahler and I live in West Wind subdivision near the new traffic circle at Baker Creek Rd and Hill Rd. I have a long time affiliation with McMinnville having moved here in 1975 with my parents and siblings. After college and a 30 year career in the U.S. Marine Corps, my wife and I elected to move back to Oregon in 2013, ultimately settling on McMinnville as our destination. We wanted to be in proximity to family and in our search for a place to live, rediscovered the small town charm that originally attracted my family to McMinnville 45 years ago.

I fear, however, that recent decisions by the Planning Commission and City Council are putting us on an irreversible path that will forever change the character of this rural and historic town. These six applications represent a pivotal point in our City's history. Will we retain our unique small town character ... or become another Beaverton?

I sat through the entire Planning Commission hearing on December 5, 2019 – to include the closed executive session, and came away with a host of concerns. Chief among them that the Commission members didn't have adequate time to review the 377 pages of documentation, didn't ask probing questions and, most likely, were somewhat overwhelmed.

As the Council considers these six land use applications (which I now note have grown in size to nearly 1,000 pages) for the proposed development of Baker Creek North, I, respectfully request Council members consider my concerns – which are many. For brevity, I will focus on four concerns: 1) "Vision" for McMinnville, 2) inadequate transportation infrastructure, 3) dwelling design standards, and 4) rate of dwelling construction. I will attempt to associate the concern to decision criteria contained in the McMinnville Municipal Code (MMC).

I have reviewed most of the City's key capstone documents, including; Mac-Town 2032 Strategic Plan, McMinnville 2010 Transportation System Plan, City of McMinnville 2019 Housing Needs Analysis, 2019, City of McMinnville, 2019 Housing Strategy, and Portland State's "Coordinated Population Forecast for Yamhill County.

Concern #1: Vision for McMinnville.

This concern is associated with McMinnville Municipal code (MMC): “Resulting development will not be inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan objectives of the area.”

These six land use applications put the City of McMinnville at the proverbial “fork in the road.” Down one road is more high density, high height housing that will lead to traffic overload (if not mitigated), and a town that will lose its unique rural heritage. Down the other road is a town that continues to guard, through **stewardship**, its place in history, growing in a slower more balanced manner that ensures other necessary elements of growth (e.g., transportation, services) are properly phased to support growth.

One of the charms of Oregon is having unique towns like Sisters, Cannon Beach and, yes, McMinnville. I do not want to see our town take the road that make us yet one more cookie cutter, traffic congested city like Beaverton.

In 2019, the City published a first time Strategic Plan (good move) that articulates a unifying Vision for McMinnville: “A collaborative and caring city inspiring an **exceptional quality of life.**” What impact would approval of these land use applications have on our Vision of an “exceptional quality of life?” In my opinion: detrimental. Local citizens will be spending more time sitting in their vehicles trying to get from point A to point B because of constrained and limited east-west road network – as outlined in the 2010 McMinnville Transportation Systems Plan. More on this issue later in this letter.

Earlier, I mentioned that recent decisions by the City Council are putting us on an irreversible path that will forever change the character of this rural and historic town. I refer here to the decision and current construction of high density and high height apartments and houses adjacent to the new Baker Creek Rd – Hill Rd traffic circle. Their box like appearance ranges from unappealing to displeasing. The transition between urban and rural should be balanced and proportional with the surrounding environment. Here it is not!

The decision to approve that development seemingly disregards key physical constraints. As the 2010 McMinnville Transportation System Plan makes clear, the city has very limited east-west roads connecting the western suburbs to downtown. The primary options are Baker Creek Road, 2nd Street, and to a smaller degree, Wallace Road. These roads were never conceived or constructed to carry the traffic load that is coming. **High density housing of this nature must be sited in proximity to road infrastructure that has the capacity to process increased traffic volume.**

I have lived in many cities during my military career. In Fairfax County, VA, the type of apartments being constructed near the new traffic circle would be found alongside major roadways (typically two lanes each direction). During our recent one year residency in Wilsonville, OR (a town that has great city planners), we lived near the high school in a mixed housing area of single family homes and **two** story apartments. Two story apartment heights, in combination with effective landscaping, result in an acceptable appearance. Wilsonville planners sited larger three story apartments near primary roads.

Concern #2. Inadequate transportation infrastructure.

Discussion. This concern is associated with the following MMC decision criteria: *“The streets are adequate to support the anticipated traffic, and the development will not overload the streets outside the planned area.”*

My limited research indicates construction of this development, coupled with other developments already approved or under construction in proximity to Baker Creek Road, will lead to problematic traffic volumes. (More details below.) I believe due diligence requires a formal traffic study of the entire Baker Creek Road area and into the downtown area **before** any approval of these land use applications by the City Council.

Land use applications proposing new home developments such as Stafford’s Baker Creek North development include some form of traffic impact assessment, either by the developer or a consultant hired by the developer. These traffic assessments, generally, only consider roadways in and in close proximity to the subdivision. **The traffic assessments I have reviewed do not consider downstream impacts upon major roads, major road intersections, downtown core, etc.**

To my knowledge, the most current traffic analysis for McMinnville was completed in 2006 with results contained in a 2010 dated document titled: “City of McMinnville Transportation System Plan.” The document includes a “Transportation Systems Analysis” at appendix C. The date of that data collect was 2006 – 13 years ago. The analysis includes major road intersections. **The analysis determined the peak PM delay at the intersection of Baker Creek Rd and Pacific Hwy at 13.3 seconds. The analysis estimated the delay at this intersection in 2023 would be 19.6 seconds.** Here we are in 2020 and the average delay is already well beyond 19 seconds. Presently, it often takes a second green light cycle to execute a left turn onto Pacific Hwy.

Wondering what the traffic impact might be from Stafford’s 280 home development, I used traffic data from the recently approved 108 home Oak Ridge Meadows development that will be located on the north side of Baker Creek Rd and adjoining the eastern side of Stafford’s proposed Baker Creek North development.

- DKS Associates, a Portland based transportation planning and consulting service, conducted a Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) for Oak Ridge Meadows. Among its findings for the 108 single family home development: “The development is expected to generate 80 (20 in, 60 out) AM peak hour trips, 107 (67 in, 40 out) PM peak hour trips, and **1,020 daily trips**. 1,020 daily trips divided by 108 homes = 9.44 trips per home.
- Using the 9.44 trips per home as our benchmark, how many additional trips will be generated by dwellings currently under construction, already approved by the city and in the planning approval process – that will use Baker Creek Rd as their primary route:
 - Baker Creek West and East: 208 homes x 9.44 trips/home = 1,964 daily trips
 - Baker Creek West: 70 apartments x 9.44 trips/home = 661 daily trips
 - Baker Creek North: 280 homes x 9.44 trips/home = 2,643 daily trips
 - Baker Creek North: 120 apartments x 9.44 trips/home = 1,133 daily trips
- These 786 new homes and apartments will generate about 7,420 daily trips
- Assuming 85% of trips are taken during a 12 hour period (6 am – 6pm) results in 6,307 trips over 12 hours, 8.7 trips per minute, and **1 trip every 7 seconds**.

- **To help visualize what that might look like, image standing today at the traffic light intersection of Baker Creek Rd and N Baker St and watching vehicles go by. Then, factor in an additional vehicle driving by every 7 seconds.**
- Also factor in the additional 1,133 trips per day of traffic volume coming from the new 120 unit apartments off Evans St.
- This higher volume of traffic will make it challenging to enter the new Baker-Hill traffic circle, at certain times of the day, and to make left turns onto Baker Creek Rd from side streets.
- Much of the additional volume will be acutely felt at the intersection of Baker Creek Rd and Pacific Hwy – particularly at the left turn lane. Already, today, the delays at this light are beyond what the 2010 traffic study estimated, taking more than one light cycle to get through, and sometimes backing up cars in the turn lane beyond the Evans St. entrance.
- Another major intersection at 2nd St and Pacific Hwy – recently reconstructed – is already backing up two red light cycles during various times of day.
- As City planner continue to plan the buildout on the west side of town, they must take into account certain constraints caused by geography and decisions by city leaders in prior decades. One is the lack of major east-west roads. We have Baker Creek Rd, 2nd Street and, to a degree, Wallace. I say “to a degree” because driver using Wallace to get downtown will often end up on 2nd street. While the new Hill Rd provides some efficiencies, it’s N-S orientation does little to alleviate the load on Baker Creek Rd or 2nd St. In fact, this new road may be leading more drivers who reside in the west hills to opt for Baker Creek Rd to head towards Portland in order to avoid going down 2nd street and through city core and it’s multiple traffic lights.
- The new Mac 2032 Strategic Plan contains seven high level priorities. One of them states: “Guide growth and development strategically, responsively, and **responsibly** to enhance our unique character.” “Responsible,” in my opinion and given the above traffic volume estimates, says the right thing to do is obtain a formal traffic analysis before approving further large scale developments.
- There are a few relatively low cost actions that can be done today at the intersection of Baker Creek Rd and Pacific Hwy without having a formal traffic analysis completed:
 - Provide a dedicated left turn signal for drivers on Baker Creek Rd heading northbound on Pacific Hwy. This is long overdue!
 - Another measure is removing the first 10-15 ft of concrete lane divider on Pacific Hwy so cars turning left have a more natural 90 degree turning arc, moving the vehicle “stop line” back 10-15 ft for vehicles using the left turn lane of southbound Pacific Hwy (heading towards the high school) back an equal distance, and restriping the new arc.
- This is a dangerous intersection for pedestrians today and safety enhancements should be a high priority. Longer term, the high school side of Evans St needs to be widened to allow left turn, center/straight, and right turn lanes.

Recommendation:

- In coordination with ODOT, implement the recommendations outlined above to improve the intersection of Baker Creek Rd. and Pacific Hwy.
- Contract for an updated traffic study for McMinnville that specifically assesses impact of current and planned growth on not only Baker Creek Road and 2nd St., but side streets and downtown impacts as well.

- Approval of Stafford's development application should be contingent upon completion of a traffic study by a properly credential traffic consultant.

Concern #3. Dwelling design standards.

The McMinnville Comprehensive Plan contains a number of sub-policies that, I believe, touch upon dwelling exterior features/finishes. My sense is there is broad disappointment within the nearby community over the appearance of homes being constructed by LGI near the new traffic circle at Baker – Hill Roads – and a fear that the same outcome may occur with Stafford's Baker Creek North development. To avoid a repeat scenario requires stricter up front design standards, and more effective City oversight during construction to ensure design standards are met.

During the December 5, 2019 Planning Commission meeting (which I attended), some verbal disagreements occurred between Stafford LLC representatives and City Planning staff regarding dwelling design changes the planning staff placed into their conditions of approval. For example, planning staff directed a change to front porch size which Stafford objected to because it would cost them to redesign. The City must put mechanisms in place to ensure agreed upon dwelling designs are carried through during construction.

To my knowledge, approval of home designs within the City of McMinnville is done by the City Planning Dept. They are a hard working staff, however, they don't have the keen eyes of an architect who possesses a better understanding of building/structure scale, proportion, function, harmony with surrounding environment, and a host of other considerations that City planners lack. If an architect on contract to the City had been involved in the design review and approval process for the homes and apartments going up near the Baker Creek Rd traffic circle, I'm pretty sure their appearance today would be quite a bit more eye pleasing.

Recommendation:

- The City should give serious consideration to hiring an architect or contacting for services on an "as needed basis." This will lead to better outcomes to include freeing up City planning staff to focus on other essential business.
- Develop a comprehensive legal contact between the City and Stafford LLC that specifies dwelling design standards, as well as all other aspects of the project – in a manner that mitigates litigation risk to the City.

Concern #4. Rate of dwelling construction appears excessive.

In researching historical and forecast dwelling construction and comparing it to current dwelling construction, it appears the current rate of construction is well above historical.

Historical. The Portland State population forecast shows an average of **265 dwellings** constructed per year during the period from 2000-2010, with an average household size of 2.7 persons. The 2019 McMinnville Housing Needs Analysis shows an average of **191 new dwellings** per year during the period from 2000-2017, with an average household size of 2.2.

Future forecast (2017-2035). Portland State projects McMinnville population growing by 9,829 persons – or 546 persons per year. Dividing 546 by household size of 2.7 results in an average of **202 new dwellings** per year. Looking at these numbers, 200 new dwellings per year is a pretty good benchmark.

A question worth asking is: How does McMinnville's current dwelling construction rate compare with the 200 home per year benchmark? Here's a snapshot:

Current construction or completed in recent months:

- Evans St: 120 apartments
- Baker Creek West and East: 208 homes
- Baker Creek West: 70 apartments
- **Total: 398**
- (Note: There are additional dwellings under construction that are not captured here.)

Approved but not yet under construction:

- Oak Ridge Meadows: 108 dwellings

In the hopper for decision:

- Baker Creek North: 280 homes
- Baker Creek North: 120 apartments

With nearly 400 dwellings under construction when the benchmark objective is about 200 new dwellings per year, seems to indicate building "ahead of need."

It's important that the right types of dwellings are being constructed locally. The McMinnville Housing Needs Analysis provides some targets.

- For the period 2020-2021 it recommends:
 - o 84 – single family detached dwellings per year
 - o 18 – single family attached dwellings per year
 - o 50 – multi-family dwellings per year
- It recommends the following housing mix for 2021-2041:
 - o 55% - single family detached
 - o 12% - single family attached
 - o 33% - multi-family
 - o Density of 5.3 dwellings units per gross acre

The City Council, in the process of making land use decisions involving new dwellings, **must** be provided with a summary (or snap shot in time) of where the City stands in terms of required types dwellings, as articulated in the Housing Need Analysis, compared to types and numbers of dwellings currently under construction or previously approved. Barring this information, how do you know whether the demand signal is being met?

This concludes my major concerns. I have many others that I will address in separate correspondence which concern policies and procedures for City staff and executive decision bodies – an area I see needing improvement after reviewing this application.

In closing, I ask that you consider my concerns as well as those of fellow citizens. I have found in my short time back in McMinnville, that I have neighbors with valuable knowledge and experiences that – if listened to – can help set our community on a good path. And finally, thank you for your service and dedication to this beautiful, unique town. Let's keep it that way.

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