

Mark Davis
652 SE Washington Street
McMinnville, OR 97128

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McMinnville City Council
230 NE Second Street
McMinnville, OR 97128

Dear Mayor Hill and Members of the Council:

The Council's decision at the July 21st work session to move forward with a new annexation process was disappointing on several levels. Most obviously, you made that decision in a closed session that did not allow anyone from the public to comment. Not that the public could have commented about the documents under discussion anyway, since they were provided to the Council the day before work session but not made available to the public until the day after you met.

I realize you can hold that legal fig leaf in front of yourselves and righteously say you haven't made a legally binding decision so you don't have to invite the public to address you. But from a psychological perspective you have committed to very specific results from this process and such prior commitments are very hard to change even if compelling information is later provided at the required public hearing.

Despite Goal One declarations about the importance of public participation, it is hard for individual citizens who lack professional standing to be taken seriously during the formal land use hearing process. The proposal you agreed to on Wednesday evening removes even that citizen's right to be heard by turning annexation requests from land use hearings into administrative matters settled in private by staff and rubber-stamped by the Council.

The State Legislature removed our right to vote on annexations. The City Council is now proposing to take away our right to even testify about specific elements of annexation proposals and appeal misapplications of the law to the Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA). Yes, that does happen. In 1996 I appealed approval of a city annexation to LUBA based on inadequate public infrastructure, a decision that was ultimately remanded to the city.

At the heart of the discussion about how to handle annexations is a basic philosophy of how government makes important decisions that impact the entire community. One method is to allow appointed bureaucrats with professional expertise to make those decisions subject to approval of the governing body; at the other end of the political spectrum is permitting the public to vote on those decisions.

Given our 20-year experiment with voting on annexations, I think it is instructive to look at what happened in the community before and after the implementation of voting on

annexations in the mid-90s. The early 90s was a period of rapid growth that overwhelmed our aging public infrastructure. Long-time residents complained bitterly about the increase in traffic, and the main sewer line from the west side of town was broken and leaking directly into Cozine Creek near Linfield, a situation exacerbated whenever it rained and stormwater leaked into the sewer system overwhelming its capacity.

Citizens including myself repeatedly asked the Council and Planning staff to slow the annexation process down to allow for infrastructure improvements to handle future growth. The response varied between claiming there was nothing they could do (land use law forced them to keep annexing more property) and claiming all this growth was really good for the community.

This response led directly to the voter approval of the charter amendment to require a vote on annexations. To my recollection the only annexation ever defeated at the ballot box was the proposed 172-acre Shadden Claim annexation. All other annexation votes for smaller additions to the UGB were approved, including later attempts by other developers to bring smaller chunks of the Shadden Claim property into the city limits.

Voters clearly had a vision of slow, steady growth of the community in line with our capacity to support that growth. Supporters of the defeated Shadden Claim proposal lamented the loss of the huge planned subdivision, but the developer insisted on developing it out within 5 years which would have had a dramatic impact on population which was already surging.

All this was taking place during the initial planning for a new UGB expansion that used a population projection growth rate of 3 percent. Had this vision of Shadden Claim and continued rapid population growth been realized we would have had a population of 45,000 in 2020 and be heading for 85,000 residents in 2040. Voting on annexations slowed things down so we could get the sewer infrastructure updated and new roads constructed. I personally believe that the community benefited greatly from the gentle braking that annexation votes put on what was becoming runaway growth.

That is not to say the proposal you considered on Wednesday night was without merit. I like the idea of annexations not being the automatic process that they have been. Property owners entering the city limits are being granted access to city infrastructure and services worth millions of dollars. They should be asked set aside land for parks and affordable housing. The current system puts them in the city with a few minor fees and reduced system development charges and then the expectation is that the existing taxpayers will pay the difference.

I think we currently have a good, dedicated Planning Director. I also think we have conscientious, public-spirited City Council. Having watched people come and go over the past few decades, I don't believe public policy should be based on assuming both of those things are always going to be true. However you decide to proceed with annexations, I think you should provide some ability for the public to inspect the details

of the process and maintain the right of public to appeal to LUBA those decisions lacking in legality.

I would also request that when the Council is going to look at draft planning documents and make decisions about whether they are acceptable or not that you provide them for the public to look at and allow the public the opportunity to comment on them. Work sessions are being used to avoid your Goal One responsibilities.

Thank you for considering my viewpoint on these matters.

Sincerely,

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Mark Davis