

May 16, 2019

Re: Oak Ridge Meadows Sub-Division

I write once again to voice my extreme objection to parts of the Oak Ridge Meadows plan.

To learn that the 11 acres of wetlands in this project is going to be destroyed in exchange for 11 acres being added to wetlands in Rickreall is completely and utterly insane. It is tantamount to playing God with Nature. The wetland that is there serves a purpose that no amount of engineering and drainage is going to replace in the same way, not to mention all the habitat and animals that have no clue their homes just got moved over 20 miles south. We've lived in Compton Crest the last 15 years and the last couple of years I've seen the wetlands fill with more water than it had in the previous 13 years and that's with the requirements placed on the drainage for the new filbert farm farther west on Baker Creek. The planning and requirements for that were not enough to keep the water run-off from flooding the wetlands, what arrogance makes you think the requirements you're placing on Premier now is going to a) make up for that and b) not cause things to get worse? There are certain things that shouldn't be played with, this is one of them. We will get up in arms about bulldozers in rain forests in South American and habitats being lost there for endangered animals but we let habitat destruction happen in our own back yard. Why? There is something really wrong with that.

I worked for a timber investment management firm in Portland years ago, when investing in timber was new. One of the things that came from this new investment industry was something called the SFI (Sustainable Forestry Initiative). It called for riparian zones along rivers, the creation of habitat for spawning fish, along with other things even though it meant some timber would be taken out of "production" and not available to cut down and make money on. The long-term cost far exceeded the short-term profit. They knew they couldn't just take from the land, that they had to be good stewards of it too. This didn't mean that they would cut down all the timber up to the stream in one area while leaving double the amount of a required riparian zone in another. There was no swapping here for there. The whole stream, start to finish, had an equal riparian zone on either side. This is how we should treat the wetland. It was there first, it serves an important purpose and we shouldn't mess with it. We leave it alone to thrive and do the job it's meant to. To this day, SFI understands that destroying habitat along a river, stream or wetland, is so much more costly than the little money they'd make on that much timber that it is just isn't worth it. Baker Creek itself, from its beginning in the hills west of McMinnville to its wetland in the city, needs to be protected. The principles of SFI aren't just for forestry. They are for the oceans, the streams, and for City planning departments everywhere. We have to learn from mistakes and be willing to stand up to those wanting to profit on the destruction of nature.

Some are against the development in its entirety, others understand and new home building is not going to stop. Those who believe the latter just want it done in a more respectful and thoughtful way I believe. One of the ways is to change the way construction vehicles and future residents develop and access this new neighborhood. Safety and protection of existing residents of neighborhoods should not be sacrificed. I would personally like to see Premier and Stafford understand this and work together to cause the least amount of disruption to both Compton Crest and Oak Ridge as possible. Using Merlot and Oak Ridge as the main entries into this new development does not do that. In just Compton Crest alone, the increased noise from construction and eventual residential traffic will impact 38% of our neighborhood, more if the extension of Merlot allowed, every single day. This is not an immaterial nor acceptable amount. In Oak Ridge, it's 34% - 45% of the neighborhood that would be affected, depending on which way traffic goes. This does not make these neighborhoods more livable or "Great Neighborhoods". "Great Neighborhoods" are walkable, quiet, and safe for kids/families. With the increase in traffic affecting so much of both neighborhoods this will not be the case. I see it now, cars not living in our neighborhood of Compton Crest still use Merlot and come in fast on their way to Oak Ridge. 1200 more trips/cars PER DAY on Merlot and Pinot Noir is not going to make that stop or even get better, it will only get worse. It will make our neighborhood less safe.

Everything we do has an effect; it might not be immediate or obvious but it will have one. All it appears that is being thought about is the effect of adding houses in these 11 acres that you HOPE are affordable. That is a short sided, and only POSSIBLE short-term effect. If the destruction of the wetlands is allowed, if the access to the new neighborhood isn't changed, the long-term effects are homes in wetlands that will likely flood (and often) and that will require flood insurance, which doesn't come cheap (this won't help affordability); increased insurance rates even for those who don't have flood insurance because face it – the cost gets passed along to EVERYONE because the insurance company has to cover those losses somehow and continue to increase revenues to continue to employ people, offer benefits, raises, etc.; more pressure on schools for the increased student load which means kids and teachers suffer to learn and teach in larger classes which in turn causes government to have to ask us for even MORE tax dollars to hire teachers, build classrooms, and schools – all while we haven't paid off the last set of school bond measures that were meant to do the same things. It will mean decreased safety and a loss of “quiet enjoyment” for those living along Merlot, Pinot Noir, Oak Ridge, Riesling Way, and possibly Pinehurst. It's a horrible, vicious cycle and it starts with planning. Planning must change to look at the whole picture, not just a few pixels of it.

Just because the rules and laws say that this CAN be done, doesn't mean it should be. There are lots of things that CAN be done but shouldn't be in this world and this is one of them. Allowing destruction of this wetland destroys what helps make McMinnville, McMinnville.

Please don't let this happen. Don't destroy the wetland. Don't degrade our neighborhoods for the sake of profit. We must be good stewards of the land and taking away land that provides natural safety for flooding and that provides habitat for animals is the opposite of being good stewards. Animals, wetlands, and the ecosystem the wetlands provides all work together to serve a purpose for the City – when you take that away all you will do is cause more problems for the City and residents that allowing building on the 11 acres would solve.

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