

CAC Draft Review Comments Synopsis

At our initial meeting it was agreed that the most important topic was “housing, housing, housing” and as recently as the week of June 9 Mayor Peter Donovan stated “Skagit County cities recognize what the need is – especially around housing and zoning changes that need to happen”.....”Cities themselves don’t build housing, but we can pave the way for housing through better zoning” he further stated.

Conversely, he had previously stated “we can get in our own way of seeing successful development, those (regulations) are unnecessary things that we’re going to change”.

At the end of the last (2016) Comp Plan update the Berk report stated that “current conditions in Mount Vernon will need to change for this vision to be realized” and provided a list of suggested changes for the CMV to achieve its’ goals. Basically, none of the suggestions were adopted.

So here we are 8 years later and in the same place. Time and countless hours have been wasted dancing around the core issue....changes have to be made.

Here is a synopsis of my review comments:

GENERAL DISTRIBUTION, LOCATION AND COORDINATION OF LAND USES.

The CMV is surrounded by other interest groups, specifically, agricultural land uses, forestry land uses, open space/critical area land uses, and Skagit County land uses. Noe of these groups have been willing to part with even a single inch of “their” land, proclaiming that the world will end if they lose even a single inch “their” land.

We must learn to make better use of the land since we aren’t going to get any more and we must look at planning through a more empathetic lens. Planner must learn to plan for the greater good, builders/developers must learn how to develop and build better, farmers must learn how to make better use of their land,, elected officials must make decisions based upon that greater good. How do we get things done rather than creating road blocks that prevent us from meeting adopted goals.

QUALITY OF LIFE.

We must plan for the 2040’s and beyond, not live in the 1970’s. Those days are gone.

PROCESS IMPROVEMENT IMPROVEMENTS.

Refer to the 2017 BERK report to the CMV. The biggest improvements must be that builders/developers are customers, not the enemy. They are actually the only group that has hands-on experience and realize the full impacts of the “blind alleys and booby traps” so often adopted. The State Legislature adopted bills that require cities to expedite development applications....get the message, embrace the message and lead the way rather than looking for ways around it. You don't need to review something to death.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

Old saying ...”a camel is a horse designed by committee.” Creating an administrative bureaucracy is not the goal, results are the goal. Embrace the professional, private sector who understands what it takes to get something done and can provide specific, actionable solutions.

EQUITABLE HOUSING, HEALTH AN COMMUNITY STABILY.

Council's solution via the Affordable Housing Ordinance, while well intended was bling-sided by the “blind alleys and booby traps” reference previously. In today's world affordable housing is an oxymoron because of regulations that prevent it from happening, specifically, concurrency requirements and design standards.

CULTURAL RESOURCES AND HISTORIC SITES.

No Comments.

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING.

Again, refer to comments contained in attached Pratschner memo and the 2017 BERK Report. A guiding principal should be that “a community can accommodate a variety of housing products as long as common design elements and scale exist”.

Alley loaded lots/homes are a viable option with very few development sites, certainly in Mount Vernon. And yet, of the 24 photos shown in Single Family Design Standards 18 (80%) of those are alley loaded. My company has developed over 300 alley loaded homes and can address the challenges in detail. This represents another blind alley and booby trap.

NON-RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AND JOBS.....no comments

CRITICAL AREAS.....no comments beyond this is another area that dictates we all operate smarter.

CLIMATE.... No comments

ANNEXATIONS.

CMV needs to establish a true buildable land inventory..... existing inventories have included large areas that are not developable. **We need an inventory of land that is developable not a buildable land inventory that only satisfies a regulatory requirement.** This will require a coordination of land uses between jurisdictions and industries for the greater good.

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES MEMO

DATE: 06/04/2025

TO: Planning Commission and Citizen Advisory Committee

FROM: Stacie Pratschner, Director

SUBJECT: Review Draft #1: Land Use Element Goals and Policies

BACKGROUND: The attached document contains draft Goals and Policies for the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan. As noted in RCW [36.70A.070\(1\)](#), the land use element goals and policies should, at minimum, focus on the distribution, location and extent of uses of land; building intensities; establish protections for critical areas and address flooding and stormwater runoff; address environmental justice and greenhouse gas emissions; and include efforts to promote physical activity and reduce vehicles miles traveled¹.

The attached draft Goals and Policies are exclusive to the Land Use Element; and there are other Elements that will also be updated in 2025 and 2026. For example, the Housing Element will expand upon and will include additional housing related Goals and Policies. Similarly, the Transportation Element will expand upon and will include additional Goals and Policies regarding trails, vehicular traffic, multi-modal facilities, et cetera.

REQUEST: Review of, and comments on, the attached draft Goals and Policies for the Land Use Element. When reviewing and commenting on this document please keep the following questions in mind:

1. Do the Goals and Policies reflect the values and needs of our community?
2. What stands out to you as particularly strong or important?
3. Are there any concerns or unintended consequences you see?
4. Is anything missing or unclear? Who might be left out?

The above suggestions are made in an attempt to avoid line-item editorial comments (i.e. grammar, sentence structure, and the like) because with the first several drafts of this document we need to focus on overall land use concepts and longer-term possibilities versus focusing on less important grammatical details. Once the overall content is roughly right, a final draft will be reviewed to ensure its grammar, voice, and related editorial issues are addressed.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Following is the Vision Statement for the Land Use Element adopted under the 2016 – 2036 Comprehensive Plan update that will also need to be updated with the Goals and Policies contained in the attached materials:

LAND USE ELEMENT VISION: *Mount Vernon is committed to being proactive, rather than reactive, in managing growth within the City. The City will adopt and emphasize strategies that promote the City's rich history, natural and man-made beauty, along with its environmental and cultural resources. Emphasis will be placed on creating and promoting land uses that will help to balance land uses where people live, work, and recreate.*

The accompanying Goals and Policies are organized under the following headings:

- GENERAL DISTRIBUTION, LOCATION & COORDINATION OF LAND USES
- QUALITY OF LIFE
- PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS
- PUBLIC PARTICIPATION & REGIONAL COORDINATION
- EQUITABLE HOUSING, HEALTH & COMMUNITY STABILITY
- CULTURAL RESOURCES & HISTORIC SITES
- RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT & HOUSING
- NON-RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT & JOBS
- CRITICAL AREAS
- CLIMATE
- ANNEXATIONS

ATTACHED:

- Draft #1 Updated Goals and Policies of the Land Use Element

¹ Please note the last two items will be provided in a separate package of goals and policies that respond to climate and environmental justice planning requirements.

CITY OF MOUNT VERNON (CMV), CITIZEN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC) REVIEW COMMENTS

Goals: None of the Goals shown meet the definition of goals, "they must be attainable, specific, measurable and in writing", followed by an action plan(s) to meet those goals. CMV needs to commit to numbers against which we can be measured, right now we have general action steps attempting to steer us with no specific goals in place. City needs to be held accountable, which will require entire new mind set for most Council members.

GENERAL DISTRIBUTION, LOCATION AND COORDINATION OF LAND USES.

The CMV is surrounded by other interest groups, specifically, agricultural land uses, forestry land uses, open space/critical area land uses, and Skagit County land uses. None of these groups have been willing to part with even a single inch of "their" land, proclaiming that the world will end if they lose any land.

We must all learn to make better use of the land since we aren't going to get any more and we must look at planning through a more empathetic lens. Builders/developers must learn how to develop and build better, farmers must learn how to make better use of their land. Elected officials must make decisions based upon a greater good.... How do we get things done rather than creating road blocks that prevent us from meeting adopted goals.

One of the underlying goals of GMA remains curtailing sprawl and when looking for opportunities to expand focus on areas where property is adjacent to existing city limits, where urban densities have already been put in place and where infrastructure exists or close by..... areas of infill, if you will.

My identified areas are: 1) east of Moore's Garden Road, 2) east of Sunset Drive, 3) east of Burlingame Road, 4) north of Skyridge Drive, 5) the general West Mount Vernon area, 6) Swan Road area, 7) under utilized land owned by Mount Vernon School District, i.e., entire city bloc where existing administration building is house (4th and Lawrence), half a city block of Lincoln Elementary is sited, several acres adjacent on north of Madison Elementary....enrollment is shrinking and growth is moving away from these locations, 8) south of the post office provides massive opportunity for creative master plan community.

Another observation: we won't meet any goals by trying to develop ten 20 lot subdivisions every year, there simply isn't enough land....we can't go out, we have to go up, density is part of our future. Think of a European model community.

QUALITY OF LIFE.

We can't all live in a 2,000 s.f. house built on a 10,000 s.f. lot. We must plan for the 2040's and beyond, not live in the 1970's. Those days are gone. The CMV has a large role in this by leading the way in making changes and not becoming a hurdle that must be overcome. See attached comments prepared for first meeting with Stacie Pratschner in 2023...too few issues have changed.

PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS.

Again, refer to attached comments for Stacie Pratschner AND refer to the attached 2017 Berk Report to the City. The biggest improvements must be that builders/developers are customers, not the enemy. There's a reason so many builders won't touch CMV. We can provide you with many examples of needed process improvements. My favorite term is "blind alleys and booby traps" whereby a well intentioned ordinance is adopted only to be neutered by staff or advisory body with an agenda. I am currently assisting a local development that is approaching 7 years since it first started the entitlement process with the CMV and will likely be 9 years before actual housing is built. CMV needs to follow the new State legislation mandating expediting of applications. We have a crisis NOW, not 3-4 years from now.....take up the challenge. Again, reference Pratschner comments.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND REGIONAL COORDINATION.

Old saying....."a camel is a horse designed by committee". While participation is necessary, too much credence is given to screaming special interest groups offering only a view from 30,000 feet, while ignoring the professional, private sector who understands what it takes to get something done and can provide specific, actionable solutions. Administration is not the goal, results are the goal. Direction might be provided from 30,000 ft. but solutions are created at ground level, it's micro v.s. macro.

EQUITABLE HOUSING, HEALTH AND COMMUNITY STABILITY.

Council's solution via the Affordable Housing Ordinance, while well intended was blind-sided by the "blind alleys and booby traps" referenced above. In today's world affordable housing is an oxymoron because of regulations that prevent it from happening.

CULTURAL RESOURCES AND HISTORIC SITES.

No comments

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING.

Again, refer to comments contained in attached Pratschner memo. Also, attached is examples of my companies guiding planning principal for the last 3 decades. “A community can accommodate a variety of housing products as long as common design elements and scale exist”. This principle has been applied in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Colorado and Northern California. Another attachment shows how the City of Olympia requires multiple housing product types within a community..... it requires a minimum number of housing product types depending on the size of the project. This particular project was on 72 infill acres and included 501 lots/units in 5 different housing product types plus a neighborhood commercial tract. Adjacent D.R. Horton followed our lead on 8 acres and created an 800 lot/unit design. The City was very cautious but had put in place ordinances/standards which could make it happen. Final note on this, when our last public hearing was held the adjacent 80 upper price home neighborhood actually went on record supporting our plan.

Another note, of the 24 photos shown in Single Family Design Standards 18 of those (80%) are alley loaded. This space won't allow a full examination of why that's not workable. My company has developed over 300 alley loaded homes and can address this in detail. Another blind alley and booby trap.

Refer to second attachment shared with CMV officials about state of housing crisis.

NON-RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AND JOBS.

NO COMMENTS.

CRITICAL AREAS.

NO COMMENTS beyond this is another area that dictates we all operated smarter.

CLIMATE.

NO COMMENTS.

ANNEXATIONS.

We need to establish a true buildable land inventory.....existing inventories have included large areas that are not developable. **We need an inventory of land that is developable not a buildable land inventory** to grasp CMV's true situation.

Coming into play here will be school district boundary lines, specifically Sedro Woolley. Within Highpoint East you can stand in Crested Butte Blvd. which is both the City Limits and the SW School District boundary and in full view of Harriett Rowley Elementary 2 blocks away. And yet children in the SW District would have to travel 3-4 miles for elementary and 12-15 miles for middle and high school. The CMV UGA contains large swaths of land that lies within the SW District.

Other comments are contained in General Distribution, Location and Coordination of Land Uses section.

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 18, 2017
TO: Rebecca Bradley-Lowell, Senior Planner, City of Mount Vernon
FROM: Erika Rhett, Senior Associate, BERK
RE: Approaches to Housing Affordability

INTRODUCTION

Mount Vernon's Comprehensive Plan expresses a vision in its Housing Element as "... a home-town atmosphere, with a diverse housing options available to a full spectrum of its residents throughout their lives..." The housing analysis that follows shows that some of the current conditions in Mount Vernon will need to change for this vision to be realized. As housing becomes more expensive and thus harder to secure families are paying larger portions of their incomes on their rents and mortgages. Thirty six percent (36%) of all households in Mount Vernon spend more than 30% of their income on housing and 18.4% spend more than 50%. Overall, renters are more cost burdened than homeowners. Mount Vernon has the highest rate of overcrowding in Skagit County.

The Housing Element includes several strategies for achieving the housing vision. These strategies include: income and job creation, preservation of existing housing and new infill development, and creating diversity in home types.

Communities across the state and across the country face growing housing demand and challenges to housing affordability. Approaches include increasing the supply and variety of housing types and the development of affordable housing programs.

APPROACH

Implementation of the new Goals, Objectives, and Policies adopted within the 2016 Housing Element will be a major undertaking for the City. To tackle this work the City organized and prioritized their code amendment work as follows:

- 2017: code amendments to assist in locating a permanent supported housing facility in the city. City staff confirmed that this has been completed.
- 2017/2018: code amendments to incentivize and encourage the production of affordable multi-family housing for those at 80% area median income (AMI) and below and small scale in-fill development in single-and-multi-family residential districts. In addition, mechanisms to ensure housing is income restricted and remains affordable over the required 50 year timeframe, and regulations to create or maintain graceful transitions between higher and lower density areas. These are the amendments that BERK has been retained to facilitate.
- 2018 – 2020: code amendments to encourage the production of affordable market rate housing (targeted at those above 80% AMI), additional infill and mixed use developments.

DIVERSITY OF HOUSING TYPES

Goal 1 of the Housing Element is to: “Enhance Mount Vernon’s cultural and economic vitality by encouraging the development of housing solutions of all types that provide for varied densities, sizes, costs and locations that are safe, decent, accessible, attractive, appealing, and affordable to a diversity of ages, incomes, and cultural backgrounds.” This is reflected in several housing policies:

- *HO-1.1.2: In recognition of community needs, the City shall maintain a variety of future land use classifications and implement zoning to accommodate a range of housing types with varying densities and sizes.*
- *HO-1.1.4: Continue to promote plans and policies that encourage in-fill residential projects in close proximity to neighborhood centers, shopping and retail facilities, parks, transit routes and other service uses.*
- *HO-1.1.5: Continue to promote plans and regulations that allow incentives such as bonus densities and flexible design standards that support and promote the construction of new innovative or affordable housing styles, compatible with the planned uses of surrounding sites. Ground related housing types such as cottages, townhouses, zero lot line developments and other types are examples of housing choices that promote individuality and ownership opportunities. Consider adopting new development regulations that would offer new ways to encourage these types of housing choices.*

Vacant lands and lower density single-family areas, especially those closer to the center of town, present an opportunity for increasing the supply of housing, adding new housing types, and revitalizing neighborhoods. Costs related to the construction of utilities or roads can be reduced, providing a natural incentive for development if there are no other barriers to discourage innovation or significantly increase development costs. However, the strict application of development standards written without consideration to the challenges of infill housing or without consideration of varied housing types can be an obstacle. With appropriate development standards in place, communities can encourage a diversity of housing types as compatible infill in existing residential areas.

A greater diversity of housing types can make housing generally more affordable by supplying housing units that meet different community needs. Mount Vernon’s housing stock is predominantly single-family housing, with multi-family housing comprising only about a third of all housing units in the city. Small lot single-family development, townhomes, accessory dwelling units, small-scale multi-family housing types, and attached single-family developments could provide housing units that are compatible with existing single-family neighborhoods and meet many different needs.

Allowing a wide variety of housing types by right in the zoning code is the first step. However, additional flexibility is needed in development regulations such as lot size, setbacks, height, and coverage to meet the needs of different housing types and make infill development feasible (see also Flexible Development Standards, below). Simple design regulations help to ensure the compatibility of uses.

Examples

Bellingham's Infill Housing Toolkit (BMC 20.28) is a set of regulatory changes that allows nine new housing types to encourage infill housing in city neighborhoods, urban villages, and the urban growth area. The types are not applied in the lowest density single-family neighborhoods. Types include smaller house, small house, cottage, carriage house, detached accessory dwelling unit (ADU), duplex/triplex, shared court housing, garden court housing, and townhouses. Each housing type has its own simplified set of site, bulk, parking, and design standards that override the standards in the underlying zone. This allows for needed flexibility and also helps to manage neighborhood compatibility. In some allowed zones, infill types get a higher density allowance than the underlying zone. Portland, Oregon takes a similar approach.

Auburn has infill residential standards (ACC 18.25) that allow alternate standards for properties creating one new lot or dwelling unit in single-family residential zones or for properties under an acre in size in medium intensity residential zones. Modified standards allow changes of approximately 10-20% for lot standards, setbacks, parking requirements, height, and density. Simple design standards address potential compatibility issues.

Kirkland's Code (Chapter 113) allows for cottages, carriage houses, and two or three unit homes in single-family zones to promote a diversity of housing types. Each housing type has a full set of alternate development standards that include site standards, unit size, height, parking, and open space. Density is allowed at two times the number of detached dwelling units allowed in the underlying zone. Design standards require common open space, shared parking/garage, and low impact development storm water control in addition to addressing potential compatibility issues.

Recommendations

Mount Vernon's policies within the Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan support infill housing and a diversity of housing types. ADUs, townhomes, and zero lot line development may be appropriate to encourage in different zones. The City should consider the following in developing and implementing code amendments: (Not under occupied)

- Encourage a variety of housing types with the following changes:
 - Allow ADUs in all residential zones including zoning districts R-2, R-3, and R-4.
 - Allow ADUs that are attached to a single-family structure, to a garage structure, or are detached.
 - Allow over the counter land use permitting for ADUs that conform to a standard template.
 - Eliminate notice requirements for ADUs.
 - Allow zero lot line housing¹ types (in addition to townhomes) in the R-2, R-3, and R-4 zones. (underlying density)

¹ Zero lot line housing has at least one wall placed on the boundary of the property. It can include attached housing such as row houses or townhomes, or detached housing and can be single story or multi-story. Zero lot line housing

- Allow ADUs to have separate utility service and meters.
- Require zero lot line development to have separate utility service and meters.
- Amend the impact fee structure to reflect that smaller unit housing types are closer in impact to multi-family types than single-family.

 Consider allowing modifications to development standards for height, setbacks, lot size and coverage, density, and parking that make it easy to create new housing but still maintain neighborhood character (see also Flexible Development Regulations, below):

-  Develop alternate dimensional standards for infill housing types such as ADUs and zero lot line development that do not require a variance.
-  Allow further modifications to development standards through an administrative deviation process.

- Implement design, open space, or parking requirements that enhance compatibility and attractiveness without adding overly burdensome regulatory complications.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAMS

Mount Vernon's Housing Element Goal 4 states: "Encourage safe, decent, accessible, attractive and affordable housing development that meets community needs and is integrated into, and throughout, the community including areas of higher land cost where greater subsidies may be needed." This is supported by Objective HO-4.1 and related policies which promote the development of a voluntary or required affordable housing program consistent with federal rules and state law.

- *Objective HO-4.1 Encourage the creation of ownership and rental housing that is affordable for all households within the City, with a particular emphasis on low, very-low, and extremely low income households as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).*
- *Policy HO-4.1.1 Evaluate the adoption of zoning regulations targeted at otherwise market-rate developments that require or incentivize a minimum percentage of new dwelling units and/or lots that are created (whether multi-family or single-family) be income restricted.*
- *Policy HO-4.1.2 Evaluate the adoption of zoning regulations that would allow multi-family residential developments that are income-restricted to those at or below 60 percent of the area median income for at least fifty years to be located in zoning districts other than multi-family residential.*
- *Policy HO-4.1.3 Evaluate the adoption of zoning regulations that provide bonuses in density for developments that create income restricted units aimed at those earning less than 80% of the area median income (AMI) with greater bonuses provided to housing reserved for those earning 60% of the AMI and below.*

allows for ownership of the land associated with the housing unit, even though the land associated with the unit can be very small. This distinguishes it from other types of multifamily housing in which units share a common parcel of land that is either owned by a single owner or by several owners through condominium ownership.

STACIE PRATSCHNER TOPICS: (from 2023, prior to Peter Donovan, Steve Sexton)

1. PLANNING DEPT. Operates with the worst possible communication skills/practices. Adversarial attitude. Builders/developers aren't customers, they are the enemy. What takes 12 months in Burlington, Sedro Woolley, Anacortes takes 24-36 months in MV. Reviews are stretched to absolute deadlines and beyond. **These are some of the items that led to builders/developers "boycotting" City.**
2. No SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS FOR OVER 12 YEARS. There are zero new homes for sale in MV and only 1 development will be building in the next 2 years and based upon the history of the last 5 years that is not likely to happen. **City couldn't have planned to destroy housing market any better. Numbers don't lie and the lies don't add up. See attached spreadsheet produced by a City leader and confirming what the private sector had been saying for several years.**
3. ORDINANCE ISSUES.
 - a. Tree Ordinance. (2018/2019) **An over-reaction to one builders problem in market crash**
 - b. Garage specs. (Design Standards). **"No minimum lot size"-affects all sfr zones. No minimum lot size is a complete misnomer/lie. Smallest lot size would be 58' for 2 car garage. R,1-5 and R,1-7 can't be built.**
 - c. Model Homes (\$75,000 bond) **For something that costs maximum \$25,000 to remove**
 - d. Concurrency issue with Affordable Ordinance. **City has it backwards...affordable apt.s will drag down value of adjacent detached market rate homes while detached market rate homes will increase value of the apts.**
 - e. PUD (requirement for 25% of lots to be 8,500 s,f, larger in R,1-4) **plus requires additional review process.**
 - f. Zero lot line sfr (**front door placement**) **combined with 40%**
 - g. Rezone requires Affordable Housing. **Why?**
4. BERK REPORT... it was buried at multiple levels because it told an ugly truth. Remember, this is an outside consultant. **See attached....it was "spot on".**
5. Pre-design development meeting. **Local example, Highpoint Community**
 - a. We want to **create a collaborative working relationship** for success.
 - b. We want to **discuss our vision** for Highpoint East, Highpoint West and Highpoint Village and how they're compatible with the goals of the City and **not to simply show up and hear about all the things we can't do, which is the current climate.**

STACIE PRATSCHNER TOPICS: (from 2023, prior to Peter Donovan, Steve Sexton, new role for Rebecca Lowell)

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From: David Prutzman <samishbay@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 16, 2023 12:46 PM
To: Kristen Cavanaugh <kristen@belcherswanson.com>; Gord Cheema <gordcheema@yahoo.ca>; Bar Hayre <barhayre@gmail.com>; Arjan Cheema <arjancheema@abegroup.info>
Cc: Katy James <Katy@BelcherSwanson.com>
Subject: FW: Meeting Followup

Kristen,

Take a look at these proposed solutions. These are solutions that I have experienced in both MV and other jurisdictions. We need solutions to these issues in order to achieve desired product mix and density. Let me know.

Stacie,

Thank you for meeting with Gord and myself last week and your quick response. This reply will be more than a series of questions, it will also contain identifying ordinances that have proven problematic to builders/developers along with proposed solutions.

Political Capital. One of your points of emphasis is political capital. While everyone has acknowledged that the lack of housing in Mount Vernon has reached a crisis point and some things must be done, the political will to do so has been lacking. Politicians love to talk in generalities while planners deal in specific details. I've been encouraged by positions expressed by future elected officials and discussions with incumbent council members about changes needing to be made and acknowledged as identified in the 2017 Berk Report.

Problematic Ordinances.

1. **Naming of Streets. MVMC 14.05, 12.24 and Title 16.** On March 1, 2022 we submitted applications for street names in Highpoint Estates. Our reply came via email from Rebecca Lowell (3/2/2022) citing the reasons our applications would not be accepted. MVMC 16.12.030 states that only after a technically complete application for final plat is received will staff move forward with NG911 and determine street names and addresses. One of the requirements of a technically complete application, MVMC 16.12.030 is street names and

addresses. The problem becomes obvious. Our request for a waiver or administrative relief was ignored. Street addresses finally came through in October 2023. **City should assign street names/addresses upon request any time after issuance of fill/grade permit.**

2. **Model Home Permits, MVMC 16.10.010.030.** Eligibility for a model home permit treats road improvements and installed frontage improvements in separate paragraphs 16.10.030(d) requires access to a model from an existing public right of way which, in the case of a new development, could only occur after final plat recording. This access shall be from an existing public right of way approved for "alignment and subgrade". It does not require full asphalt installation which is covered by final plat requirements. Currently the City's requirement has been for full asphalt installation. 16.10.030€ requires "installed frontage improvements". Once curb, gutter and sidewalk has been installed along a soon to be public right of way that has been approved for alignment and subgrade a builder should be able to secure a model home permit(s). We had requested administrative relief on this interpretation but were denied. We opted to forego the model home permits which require a bond in the amount of \$75,000 per permit. This has cost us the ability to have (9) homes completed and ready for sale at time of final plat recording. As it is this will cost us 10-11 months before we can have product to sell. The carrying costs are prohibitive. **Model home permits should be issued any time after issuance of fill/grade permit and acceptance of curb and sidewalk by City inspector.**
3. **Land Clearing, MVMC 15.18.** Exemptions to this ordinance include 15.18.050.A.1. "removal of less than 5,000 bf of timber and 15.18.050.B "land clearing of less than 2 acres". Here's the resulting scenario. Highpoint East has 49 lots, each with less than 5,000 bf of timber and if the day after we record our final plat we presented timber cruises showing the bf of timber on each lot (which we have in our possession) OR if any individual lot is less than two acres, we can clear every lot collectively at one time as they are all exempted. Final plat requires installation of roads, frontage improvements, utilities, landscaping, etc. which, in turn, are dedicated to the City. Here's what 15.18 has created... we install full frontage improvements, we dedicate those improvements to the City, then 30-45 days later we begin clearing individual lots (all exempt from 15.18) which requires heavy logging equipment (excavators, dozers, grinders, logging trucks, etc.) which will bust up the newly installed and dedicated improvements. That is not a development activity, it is a logging activity, and brings with it additional safety issues and it allows danger trees to remain in place all too often. That is insane and it is a situation that has been the subject of an ad hoc committee in 2019 with progress stalled for the last 4 years. This is prohibitively expensive. We have sought some form of administrative relief but have been denied. Highpoint East is the second time I have gone through this, previously the East Village short plat was subjected to the same insanity. **Land Clearing permit should be issued after issuance of fill/grade permit. Developer shall stabilize the lots after tree removal. Developer shall provide a bond in the amount of \$15,000 per lot (amount adequate to remove model home if final plat not completed and to stabilize the lot after such**

removal of model home). **Eliminate requirement for arborist tree reports associated with permit.**

4. **Design Standards, SF-G: Garage Facades, page 22, #3.** “Garage doors facing access ways shall not exceed .40 percent of the length of the building façade”. Using the City’s minimum size parking space of 9’ and doubling that to 18’ for a minimum garage door. A minimum’ garage door @ .40% equals a 45’ wide house plus 15’ side yard setbacks equals a 60’ wide lot. In reality, a minimum garage will be 20’ wide which equals a 50’ wide house and a 65’ wide lot. In reversing the calculations, a 45’ wide lot minus 15’ side yard setbacks equals a 30’ wide house @ .40% equals 12’ for a garage. Additionally, the requirement for 2 cars parking inside and 2 cars parking outside (driveway), the only way that works is with tandem single car garages and paved 10’ side yard setbacks which pushes maximum impervious surface thresholds. That means a tandem garage, which may be buildable but have proven not very livable and not at all acceptable in the marketplace. This single design standard totally trumps density calculations and “no minimum lot size” in the Affordable Housing Ordinance along with neutering the density calculations and “allowable” housing types in Planned Unit Developments. The City’s Design Standards are biased towards neo-traditional, alley loaded homes. In the DS brochure, 19 of 24 homes illustrated are alley loaded product. **Garage façade should be no less than 18’ and shall provide parking for 2 cars inside and 2 cars on driveway. Eliminate the .40% requirement.**
5. **Affordable Housing Ordinance. MVMC 17.73.060.** The only development moving forward under the Affordable Housing Ordinance (that I’m aware) is the Glenmoor project on East Division on the City’s old library site. The single family component offers 62’ wide lots (see Design Standards above for the reasoning of that). Have City leaders asked why this Affordable Housing program has not received a warmer reception.....here are some reasons:
 - a) **No minimum lot size.** Because of Garage Façade Design Standards this cannot be achieved and is false advertising. **Eliminate the .40% Garage Façade Design Standard requirement which adversely effects all sfr detached zones.**
 - b) **Concurrency.** Prevents owner of mfr portion of project from selling to sfr builder. No sfr builder is going to commit to a sfr project that is controlled by a mfr owner....banks won’t allow it either. **Allow the sfr component to be built separate from the mfr component.**
 - c) **Rezone.** Any rezone requires Affordable Housing. This stops a developer that wants to rezone for an upscale project. **Eliminate the Affordable Housing requirement for all rezones.**
 - d) Questions: Can Affordable Housing hold market rate housing hostage on pricing? Can Affordable Housing project/units be age restricted? **Allow Affordable Housing units to be age restricted for both mfr/sfr.**
6. **Planned Unit Development. MVMC17.69.080.**
 - a) PUD’s are a zoning overlay and, as such, do not require a rezone...please confirm. **Allow the zoning overlay to not require a rezone.**
 - b) Density is based upon dupa and not minimum lot sizes and yet reduced sfr lot sizes are not attainable because of the Garage Design Standards and need for “may be allowed” design elements. **Eliminate the .40% Garage Façade requirement.**

c) 25% of lots in R-1.4 must be at least 8,400 s.f. This 25% requirement wipes out any possibility of attaining density. **Eliminate the .25% larger lot requirement.**

d) The following “may be allowed”, clustered, zero lot line, and mixed residential – MVMC 17.69.080. How is “may be allowed” determined”? **Allow zero lot line, cluster and mixed residential as part of PUD. Allow side entry location for front entries.**

Conclusion: Developers will approach PUD anticipating both flexibility and density, however, in Mount Vernon there is only flexibility not density and even that flexibility is very limited. There is no consideration for placement of entry doors, zero lot lines, etc. In order to make PUD’s work you need both flexibility and density.

There more questions we have pertaining specifically to future phases of Highpoint, however, before bringing those forward we need to gain feedback on the above questions. We look forward to discussing these issues with you and working collaboratively to find solutions.

Respectfully,

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★ Shared with Peter Donovan

Relationship

The relationship between the City and the development community should be obvious and yet it doesn't seem to be recognized. We need each other. We're in the same boat and should be rowing to reach the same goals.

The City invests untold time and money to establish and fulfill housing goals, i.e., Comp Plans, consulting reports (Berk, etc.), zoning codes, 2022-2024 Housing Element Work Plan, etc., etc. It has been stated many times recently that the City doesn't develop land, which is correct, however, the City controls the availability of developable land and how it is, or isn't, developed. Ultimately the City relies on the development community to develop and build the homes and apartments. We are co-dependent, we need each other.

It's like a marriage...the relationship needs to be open, honest and trusting. When one partner ceases to be open and stops being honest the trust disappears and the relationship fails. When one partner espouses maintaining an open and collaborative relationship and yet operates in a secretive, controlling, divisive and dismissive manner problems exist and crisis arise.

There is no crisis that can't be solved if we (the City and development community) work together, but on the flip side nothing can be accomplished if the trust is lacking.

Neither the Council or the development community is the enemy. Why does it feel like everything has to be done in secret when just the opposite should be the case.

To quote the 2017 Berk Report, first paragraph, "The housing analysis that follows shows that some of the current conditions in Mount Vernon will need to change for this (2016 Comp Plan) vision to be realized".

This is one of two over-arching problems and the element I would feel most comfortable discussing in person, at least initially.

Housing Crisis

In 2016 I had noted that there was a complete lack of new subdivision applications. This trend seemed to have started in 2010. Part of the reason could have been effects of "the Great Recession" of 2008-2009. But after 2014 that was no longer valid. From City records I could only identify 3 applications for new subdivisions (Hillcrest Village, East Village and Walter Street cottages, all 7 lot short plats which, coincidentally, I had developed the first two). Subsequent to that time 2 additional subdivisions have been submitted (Glenmoor, a 62 lot affordable housing community due in Q4 of 2023 and High Point, a 49 lot community due in Q3 of 2022). All of the new homes being built 2011-2018 were built in subdivisions approved in 2007-2009 had been foreclosed upon and eventually resurrected.

In the course of doing 12-24-36 month plans for my business I created a spreadsheet that showed the City would be out of building lots in mid-2021....sure enough, as of October 2021 there were 13 lots available to build on in the City between then and late Spring of 2022. And then there is only 1 subdivision entering the market.

When attempting to discuss this with DS I was dismissed.....DS was experiencing high volumes of permit activity and told me I was way off base. The analogy I offered was one of a grocery store that was selling everything on its shelves but had nothing in its' warehouse or on order.

I took my findings to CM Richard Brocksmith. He expanded upon my findings and created his own spreadsheet which is attached.

DS has touted the high level of activity it's experiencing.....an indicator of future business. There's a pronounced difference between activity and productivity. If you were a salesperson who had a 100 leads and hadn't closed on a single one you'd be fired for incompetence. What they tout as an indicator of future productivity is actually confirmation of the necessity of change in current conditions as stated by Berk.

Bottom line...numbers don't lie. Show us where we're wrong, don't "cook the books" as in the past with ghost or expired projects and undevelopable land. If we're right then change it. Don't let the same people keep doing the same thing or you'll get the same result. The housing crisis of 2021 will become the housing crisis of 2026 and the housing crisis 2030, etc.

The existing crisis is not new, it has been several years in the making. The City has the power to encourage or discourage development through regulations. Local developers have left the City because of the environment in DS, outside developers are reluctant enter this market for the same reasons.

When looking ahead at the lack of proposed housing it follows that this will stymie job growth, tax revenues will fall and the crisis will only get worse. There's more involved in this than simply building homes and apartments. Look at the City's 2022 budget and the revenue projected from impact fees and weigh that against the number of new homes projected to be built.

Two Specific Examples: Following are two examples that underscore only a couple of the issues the development community has dealt with when dealing with the culture at DS. There are many, many more.

In 2018 we became aware of logistics problems created by the City's adopted Clearing Ordinance. In short, it only allows a clearing permit when you have a building permit in hand and it must be done one lot at a time. Each lot requires its' own clearing permit. Each lot requires an individual arborist report to get its' own clearing permit. The logistics are mind numbing and the effects can be discussed. DS agreed to convene an ad hoc committee and this issue became foremost in discussions (Paul Woodmansee, Rex Orkney, Dan Mitzel and myself all weighed in on the Clearing Ordinance) addressing this and other issues. In late 2019, after several months and meetings, a compromise was reached that DS said would be brought forward to Council in early 2000 for action. We are now entering 2022 and, as I understand it, this issue may be docketed for 2022.

Here's the effect. We are presently completing clearing for our 49 lot High Point development on North 53rd Street in front of Harriett Rowley Elementary. The equipment required to clear a site includes, excavators, chippers, logging trucks, dump trucks and bulldozers. Add to that the heavy equipment involved in the building of homes, excavators, concrete trucks, lumber and roof truss deliveries. That means for the next 2 years we will be having clearing equipment and home building operating side by

side, which will be a mess. It means a high likelihood that the newly installed streets will be severely damaged and that the flow of construction traffic onto North 53rd will conflict with school traffic. None of these issues are a consideration for expanding clearing limits or amending the timing of clearing of lots. The only consideration is safety from falling trees onto existing homes, the additional costs do not matter. Estimates are that it's adding \$7,000-\$10,000 to the price of a lot/home.

We have met, and will continue to meet, with MVSD about potential conflicts with school traffic and have a plan in place but none of this would be necessary if DS had acted as they indicated in 2019. DS has challenged that they "promised" to move it forward to Council but there are 6-8 witnesses who beg to differ. You can replace "promised" with any other verb, but the message is still the same.

Second example: Design Standards, Garage Facades.

Why is this a problem? Every CM I've read or heard speak about the Housing Ordinance touts the aggressive density increases allowed. Problem is that in the case of sfr those density increases cannot be achieved. The Design Standards undermine such increases. The Council was sold a bill of goods. There are more elemental issues with Design Standards that would be suited to later conversations.

Under Single Family Standards, SF-G, item #3 states: "Garage Doors facing access ways shall not exceed 40 percent of the length of the building façade."

The Affordable Housing Ordinance states there shall be "no minimum lot size" in SFR zones. Here's the reality:

- a) garage maximum of 40% of front elevation
- b) required parking is 2 cars under cover
- c) minimum size required for a parking space is 9'x19'
- d) minimum required driveway width is 20'
- e) minimum required setbacks (side yard) are 15'.

Here's how the math works out:

- 1) minimum garage size: 18'
- 2) 18' is .40% of 45'
- 3) add the side yard setbacks of 15'
- 4) you add 45' house width and 15' side yard setbacks and you have a minimum 60'.

I know of 2 projects that were rejected over this. They were lured in by the "no minimum lot size" and left after the reality was realized.

Previously you received a spreadsheet showing past, current and projected development lot/unit counts. That was compiled by the private development community and augmented by City records.

There are several truisms to keep in mind when reading all of this that have stood the test of time:

1. The City of Mount Vernon (CMV) 2016 Comp Plan targets.
2. 2017 Berk Report which advised "something has to change at CMV if it is to achieve its' 2016 Comp Plan goals".
3. Numbers don't lie.
4. Time doesn't stand still.
5. The need/demand for housing isn't going away but rather will only grow.

PRIVATE SECTOR (DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY) REVIEW OF 2020 BUILDABLE LANDS EXISTING PIPELINE DEVELOPMENT/LOT COUNTS.

An assessment of the 2020 Buildable Lands and Land Capacity Analysis shows that the City of Mount Vernon (CMV) has failed to meet its' obligations under the Growth Management Act (GMA).

The spreadsheet previously provided you shows CMV's lack of buildable lots, lack of projects in the development pipeline, and the lack of development applications over the last 10 years.

The 2020 Buildable Lands Inventory shows distorted numbers in the report. Table 7 (pipeline developments) shows 42 projects totaling 2,473 homes. Examination reveals that 1,500+/- of those have either expired or been withdrawn and includes 450 that are not actual developments but hoped for Downtown Redevelopment, 648 lots have been built out, 153 are still attempting to resolve issues with CMV after 12-15 years, and 172 can't be determined. That equates to 87% of the Existing Pipeline Development/Lot Counts don't exist.

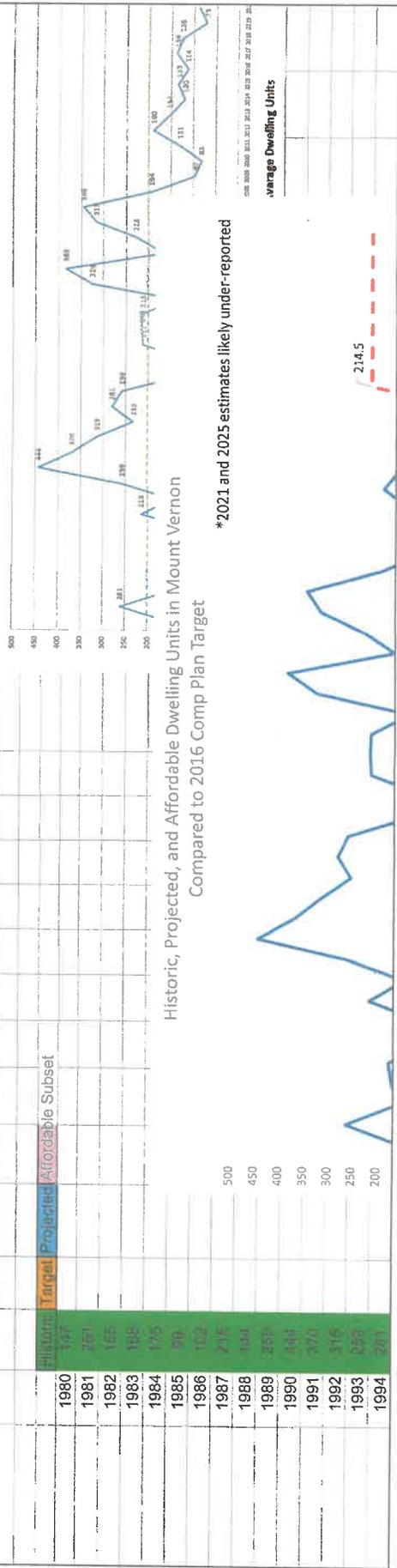
When the Buildable Lands inventory was presented for inclusion in the 2016 Comp Plan several of the projects show by DS staff were disputed as being undevelopable or unrealistic, i.e., 507 lots in Eaglemont, 365 in Hidden Lakes, and 450 units in Downtown Redevelopment. Now, in 2022 those objections have born themselves out and staff's defense of them has proven incorrect.

To repeat the introduction points, CMV is failing to meet GMA standards, something has to change to achieve stated goals; time doesn't stand still.....we're now entering 6th year of a 10 year plan; numbers don't lie.....the spreadsheet and this assessment produce numbers that are alarming deficient; there are currently 9 new homes for sale in CMV and they will sell out in next 30 days and nothing will enter the market until Q2 of 2022, the Affordable Housing Ordinance has been a bust because of DS. All of this will come to haunt the City Council.

Projected SFR and MFR into Market Place in Mount Vernon WA 2022 to 2024

| PROJECT | Timing | | | | | | | | | | | | 2025 & beyond | Total | *adsorption rates divided equally *unit estimates provided by owner *2021 and 2025 likely under-reported Subset that are Affordable | | |
|----------------------|--------|--------|------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------------|-------|--|--------|--------|
| | Q3 '21 | Q4 '21 | Q1 '22 | Q2 '22 | Q3 '22 | Q4 '22 | Q1 '23 | Q2 '23 | Q3 '23 | Q4 '23 | Q1 '24 | Q2 '24 | | | | Q3 '24 | Q4 '24 |
| SFRs | 6 | 6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 12 | 0 |
| Montreaux West | | 6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 7 | 0 |
| East Village | | 7 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 48 | 0 |
| Swan View Estates | | | | | | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 | | 49 | 0 |
| High Point Estates | | | | | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | | 46 | 0 |
| Highland Greens | | | | | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 4 | | 6 | 0 |
| Walter Street Lots | | 6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 18 | 0 |
| Center Hill Village | | | prelim plat with no projected date | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Eaglemont IIC | | | guessing on dates | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Glenmoor SFR | 6 | 19 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 13 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 22 | 6 | 38 | 0 |
| SFR Total | 6 | 19 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 13 | 26 | 20 | 28 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 22 | 6 | 229 | 0 |
| MFRs | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 24 | 15 |
| Glenmoor MFR | | | | | | | | | 24 | | | | | | | | |
| Rex LaVenture, etc ? | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| CCH and PSH | | | | | 70 | | | | | | | | | | | 70 | 70 |
| HASC | | | | | 51 | | | | | | | | | | | 51 | 51 |
| BYK Summersun | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 10 | 3 |
| 403 N 21st | | | | | | | | | 10 | | | | | | | | |
| 420 Taylor ST | | | | | | | | | 4 | | | | | | | | |
| MFR Totals | 0 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 121 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 24 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 130 | 145 |
| Future Applications | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Quarter Totals | 6 | 19 | 0 | 14 | 127 | 13 | 26 | 20 | 52 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 22 | 6 | 0 | 369 | 160 |
| Annual Totals | 25 | 154 | | | | | | 124 | | | | | 80 | | 0 | 369 | 160 |

Red areas indicate periods of no or limited sfr building activity



*2021 and 2025 estimates likely under-reported

214.5



COURTESY OF PETER DONOVAN

Mount Vernon mayoral candidate Peter Donovan smiles as he speaks to a group of people.

Mayor/*from A1*

"I believe he's the most qualified candidate for mayor in the history of the city," she said.

Contrary to popular opinion, she said the mayor position is more about management than politics. Donovan will hit the ground running with a knowledge of how the city works, which Boudreau said is "the absolute best preparation."

"He's been exposed to everything from capital improvement plan preparation to the budget to problem-solving (between departments)," she said.

A mayor can only be successful if they have positive, productive relationships with the City Council, staff and other local leaders, she said.

Boudreau believes this puts Donovan on a better footing to tackle complicated issues like homelessness, housing affordability and behavioral health — all of which require cooperation between the mayor and council, as well as between Mount Vernon and other local governments.

"That's how we actually accomplish our day-to-day services," she said. "When that relationship doesn't exist, the community suffers."

Mark Hulst, who's served on the council for the past 12 years and worked with Donovan for the past seven, attested to this.

"I've always had a great relationship with Peter," he said. "He's got a real pulse on the needs of the community."

Gary Molenaar, the longest-serving member of council, said Donovan's vision for the city is aligned with the council.

"Peter is just a really great guy," he said. "I feel like he gets along with everyone."

Council member Melissa Beaton said Donovan has "good, strong working relationships with our state legislators and local leaders."

His time working under Boudreau has given him an understanding of both the requirements and the challenges of the job, Beaton said.

Donovan said he's learned a lot from Boudreau, most notably her commitment to remain accessible to the public. Early on, she started holding regular "Mayor's Coffee" meetings, where anyone could come tell her about their needs.

Residents' issues that may otherwise go to the council or to some kind of protest could get solved quickly at the staff level, and the community's concerns informed the mayor's agenda, he said.

"An open meeting with the public every week or every other week is pretty significant, and it's an opportunity to do exactly what I was talking about — open lines of

communication," he said.

Donovan plans to continue these meetings as he sets an agenda for the next four years. Specifically, he said he intends to seek public input on the future of downtown.

With the floodwall protecting the area from an overrunning Skagit River and the Library Commons adding a three-story parking garage to the area, downtown will soon be primed for growth — specifically along the riverfront, where the city owns several parking lots that could be converted.

"We need to find out what our community wants down here," he said. "Do we want condos or hotels on the water? What is it?"

Seeing housing availability as the crisis it is, Donovan said he aims to remove barriers to creating new multifamily housing.

He acknowledged concerns from housing developers in the valley who have long complained of the city's inflexible permitting. He said he wants to streamline the process of building homes.

"We can get in our own way of seeing successful development," Donovan said. "Those (regulations) are unnecessary things that we're going to change."

Brandon Stone can be reached at bstone@skagitpublishing.com, 360-416-2112, Twitter: @Brandon_SVH

~~Glenmar~~
TROPHY TEE DESIGN AND BUILDING STRATEGY

“Adding a multifamily element to a single family community varies the product lines and price points.....A community can accommodate a variety of housing products as long as common design elements and scale exists.” - Steve W. James, Downing, Thorpe and James. Boulder, Colorado.

- **The design and building strategy for Trophy Tee will be to employ common design elements and compatibility of scale throughout.**
- **All product will have to be reviewed and approved by the Indian Summer ARB. Additionally, before submittal to the ARB, it will be reviewed and approved by Boston Harbor to assure employment of the common design elements and compatibility of scale.**

Boston Harbor will provide builders with multiple examples of housing product that meets both the design and scale criteria.

DESIGN THEME

The design theme for Trophy Tee will be Craftsman style. The goal will be to create a charming, warm and inviting community offering varied housing product and price points. Great attention to design and finish details, both interior and exterior, will be required.

Indian Summer attracts affluent and discerning buyers. Diligent attention to details will make Trophy Tee a very successful project.



THE TROPHY TEE

AT INDIAN SUMMER GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

“A community can accommodate a variety of housing products as long as common design elements and scale exist.”

**Steve W. James, architect
Downing, Thorpe & James
Boulder, Colorado**

Our goal is to work with the builders of the different areas within Trophy Tee to assure that the elements of design integrity, construction quality, common design and scale exist. The different areas provide exciting opportunities for synergy and cross-selling and we will work with our builder partners to assure that Trophy Tee not only maintains the design and construction integrity of Indian Summer but enhances it.

Boston Harbor Land Company LLC

HIGHPOINT EAST



DESIGN AND BUILDING STRATEGY

“A community can accommodate a variety of housing products as long as common design elements and scale exist”.

“Adding a multifamily element to a single family community varies the product lines and price points....A community can accommodate a variety of housing products as long as design elements and scale exists.”

- Steve W. James, Downing, Thorpe and James, Boulder, Colorado

- **The design and building strategy for the Highpoint Communities will be to employ common design elements and compatibility of scale throughout.**
- **All product will be reviewed and approved by the Highpoint Communities ARB. Additionally, before submittal to the ARB, it will be reviewed and approved to assure employments of the common design elements and compatibility of scale.**

DESIGN THEME

The design theme for the Highpoint Communities will be a modern Craftsman style. The goal will be to create a charming, warm, innovative and inviting community offering varied housing product and price points. Great attention to design and finish, both interior and exterior, will be in place.

