



League of Women Voters of Pullman

P. O. Box 366, Pullman, WA 99163

October 2007

The Honorable Glenn Johnson

Members of the Pullman City Council: Francis Benjamin, Keith Bloom, Ann Heath, Bill Paul, Al Sorenson, David Stiller and Barney Waldrop

Dear Mayor and City Council Members;

The League of Women Voters of Pullman is pleased to present to you a pre-land development community meeting ordinance for your consideration. This ordinance would require a developer to hold a community meeting as part of the application procedure for all significant development applications.

The mission of the League of Women Voters is to encourage informed and active participation in Government. In its 87 year history the League has gained much respect for its commitment to accomplish this goal through civil discourse. The Pullman League finds there is an urgent need for more public discussion early in the planning process in Pullman to ensure civil and reasoned discourse as our city grows. We realize that current state law severely limits public participation once a development application is complete. However, at least two cities in Washington, Spokane and Bellingham, have long utilized effective, legal ordinances to allow early public comment on development*. These ordinances require a developer to hold at least one well advertised community meeting as part of the land use application process before applying to the City for permits. An early community meeting enables all sides to ascertain the facts and to provide suggestions early in the process before changes become difficult, rumors flow and bad feelings mount. Representatives we spoke to in the Planning Departments in Bellingham and in Spokane strongly endorsed such a requirement as having solved many potential problems by letting developers know public concerns and giving them time to alter proposals adequately**. Developers have discussed overall plans for large pieces of property that will be developed in small parcels, learned of community desires for certain types of businesses and even of additional available land. A pre-application meeting also allows the City, if it so chooses, to attend the meeting and learn more about the development before the application is filed without jeopardizing subsequent public hearings.

In the recent concern over a new assisted living center on Sunnyside Hill, factual comparisons between assisted living use and the number of R1 homes that would occupy the same property in relation to traffic flow, number of employees, water use, etc. would have calmed neighbors before opinions were set in stone. In the High Street Development, had there been a pre-planning meeting, the community could have raised its concerns about the absence of adequate parking with the developer earlier and even suggested possible solutions to the problem. We note that the College Hill Study

Consultants, Studio Cascade, specifically suggested that “real estate developers should communicate plans for new development openly with community members to build trust and gather beneficial input”. This ordinance provides a simple, effective way to insure this is done while conforming to Washington State land use laws.

The League of Women Voters of Pullman believes “good planning is open, deliberative, respectful and inclusive.” The sharing of information helps build a consensus and the sharing of facts is necessary to keep all citizens talking to each other and not forming a barrier to halt desired construction. The League urges you to schedule discussion of this ordinance with all deliberate speed. We believe it is a gift that will benefit all citizens: developers and community members alike. We thank you for the opportunity to present it for your review.

Sincerely yours,

Alice L. Schroeder
President, League of Women Voters of Pullman

Attachment: Pre-Land Development Application Meeting Ordinance

Cc: Pete Dickinson, John Sherman, and Laura McAloon

* The ordinances referred to are: Section 17G.060.050 et seq. of the City of Spokane Municipal Code and Section 21.10.180 et seq. of the City of Bellingham Municipal Code

**Our conversations with city planners in Bellingham and Spokane indicate this type of ordinance is effective in facilitating development.

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