Comments on Revised Staff Report for 9/28/2023 Continued Planning Commission Hearing; Dated: September 21st, 2023

From Ralph Christensen, September 22nd, 2023

We are not necessarily dropping the Phase 2 Plan, we offer that as a way to bring focus on the issues before the planning commission and the applicant. Phase 2 was prepared because the language of the WDC implies a full build out Master Plan be considered. We took that to mean: what would be the possible end build out of the land based upon its zoning. If instead it is meant full build out that the current owners contemplate, then Phase 1 is the full build out. The current owners do not anticipate further development, and would expect to come back to the City for any development beyond that described in Phase 1.

Yes there is disagreement on the infrastructure to be required. Would it be ideal to have a gravity sewer line. Probably so. However, it was the City Engineer who suggested we look at a pressure sewer when we were asking to have on-site sewage disposal systems for the Phase 1 lots. We looked at a pressure sewer line and determined that was something we could potentially do. Now, instead of $170,000 to $180,000 for a pressure sewer trunk line the City engineer is suggesting we be required to install a $450,000 gravity line (more along the alignment suggested in the conditions of approval). The City Engineer also suggests the "downtown area" would be forced to install a pressure sewer line if one existed on the Mill Site property. How does the City Engineer suggest the gravity sewage lines to be installed in the "downtown area" get the sewage to the treatment plant? The sewage will, in all cases, have to be pumped across the river (through pressure sewer lines). The "downtown area" can be gravity sewered to a pump station that pumps the sewage across the river, whether to a pressure sewer system or a gravity system. And what about those houses stretching out to the west along the Oakridge-Westfir Road. What gravity line will they connect to? Currently proposed activity in the "downtown area" could potentially provide the pump station for the City without significant cost to the City.

We suggest the City sewage system operator contact Orenco systems, the supplier of all your treatment system equipment and a company familiar with the installation and operation of pressure sewer systems, and find out from them how difficult such a system is to operate and maintain for a small city. Call the City of Glide or the Green District of Douglas County and see what issues they have had with their pressure sewers relative to gravity systems. In alternative, we could go back to on-site systems for Phase 1. The City could simply refuse to accept the pressure sewer as City property and require the land owners who utilize that system to deliver the sewage to the City in an acceptable manner as a private system. If a gravity sewer is required in Phase 1, we simply will not move forward and will withdraw the application as it is too economically risky.

The WDC was compiled from existing codes adopted in other Cities. It was not tailored to the actual existing conditions in Westfir, nor to the economic conditions in Westfir. The WDC for streets is not reasonable, or even rational, for the City of Westfir. It includes street types that will never be built in Westfir. Most importantly, wide curb and gutter streets invite increased speed, which is fine for a street the City is trying to clear of traffic. But the street we propose will be used by 18 residents at most. It will be very long and pretty straight, which invites speed already. We propose narrower streets to calm traffic. Ask the citizens of Westfir would they like to have wider streets in front of their houses? Would they like faster traffic going by on wide curb and gutter streets? If required to put in a paved curb and gutter street as proposed by the City Engineer in Phase 1, about $900,000, we simply will not move forward and will withdraw the application as it is too economically risky.

A water system to supply houses in Phase 1 would need to be built to fire fighting standards. This would mean large diameter pipe and fire hydrants. Costs could range from $375,000 to $425,000 or more. If a water system is required in Phase 1, we simply will not move forward and will withdraw the application as it is too economically risky.

A partial water system is unlikely, as only a lot or two at each end of the project can feasibly be served by a “partial” water line. For 18 lots is there an alternative that meets the fire fighting requirements and provides some looping othe water system? For example, storage at each house, as its constructed, that includes a stand pipe for fire fighting. Storage could be up to 5,000 or 10,000 gallons. Then the delivery pipe can be much smaller and the need for fire hydrants obviated. However, coupled with a pressure sewer line, even this alternative is too economically risky.

As an aside, Lane Electric indicates that to get power along the street will take more than $215,000. Thus, the pressure sewer line and electricity come to more than $400,000. Probably more than the risk is worth.

The State Fire Marshall has indicated that a street surface of 26 feet is required on a dead end street over 500 feet in length. Streets over 750 feet require special review. Is their no exceptions process? No driver training for fire truck drivers? We will take this back and review it, but this may necessitate withdrawal of the application, we will have to look at the costs associated with adding 6 feet of surface. Further, we would like the Fire Marshall, when less busy with wildfires, to explore alternatives with us that meet the objectives. Mr. Christensen has experience with fire fighting, and was the training officer for the Pleasant Hill Fire Department.

Building design for fire protection seems reasonable to us.

Public access easement, check.

Staff Proposed Conditions of Approval:

Condition #1: Unacceptable. Not economically feasible under current conditions. The WDC was never vetted nor discussed for its feasibility and how it actually fit the City's neeeds. In Eugene, Springfield, Junction City, Creswell, and Cottage Grove, where development is more regular and lots sell at much higher rates than in Westfir and Oakridge then this development code may work, but to blindly apply this development code here to a 50 acre parcel is simply not feasible. It is a very large code, adopted all at once. Going over details carefully was not reasonable to expect from those adopting it. Those preparing it would have no reason to really understand the situation here. But once things in the code are shown to be counter productive, then future decision makers can, and should, to the best of their ability make reasoned choices.

Condition #2: A gravity sewer down the Sunset Avenue street alignment requires nearly all development, whether Phase 1, Phase 2, or any other future development, to PUMP THEIR SEWAGE UP TO THE GRAVITY LINE. Thus, at full build out, approximately 75% of the sewer lines on the site will be PRESSURE SEWER LINES. Need I say more.

Condition #3: Ok, if pressure sewer allowed.

Condition #4: Ok

Condition #5: We are particularly fond of this condition.

Condition #6: Ok

Condition #7: No, that is the responsibility of those that maintain those roads.

Condition #8: Ok

We understand that the economics is generally not the City's concern relative to development. However, in this case, the economics matter to the City as much as they do to us, the owners. For people wanting a lot in the Oakridge-Westfir area, they can buy one tomorrow for under $35,000 with a curb and gutter street and all utilities at the curb. Generally, this is less than it costs to build the infrastructure. A number of lots have been on the market for over a year. Some much longer than that.

If Westfir is to have developable land, the lots have to be in smaller pieces than they are today. But if the infrastructure cost is too high relative to the price the lots can be sold for, and the rate at which the lots will sell, then there is NO reason to divide the land.

We all want the same final outcome. City water serving the entire mill site. A sewer collection system. Nice paved, safe streets and ways to get around without traffic conflicts between cars, pedestrians, and bikes. The question is how does the City get there? Demand it all right now? Well, in Westfir that is like a young couple, just married, wanting a 5,000 square foot, 5 bedroom house as a starter home. You have to crawl before you walk, and walk before you run. We are offering a crawl, knowing it is not running. But it is a start.

Given today's economic situation I, Ralph Christensen, believe that fewer than 3 homes will be built in the next 5 to 10 years. In fact we may be in for a major recession and terrible inflation. There may be no homes built for a decade. But suppose I am completely wrong. That some data center moves into the Oakridge industrial park and builds a facility that will employ 300 workers. Then, there is a buyer for every one of the 17 lots. What will happen? The demand will be such, and prices will be such, that applications will be coming into the City to divide nearly all those 17 lots, and the infrastructure the City really wants and NEEDS, will be on its way to reality. But you can't get there if it has been made too risky to even begin; if those smaller lots aren't there ready to be further divided when that time comes. Some do not want to see this site divided at all, and are against all development. That is not what Cities are to do. But, it looks to me, Ralph Christensen, that this place will look very similar to today for quite some time.