



CP16#0677

In Our View: A Myopic View of Land Rules

Alternative 4 would open floodgates to unhealthy suburban sprawl

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While property owners will understandably view the world through their own self-interests, elected officials should be expected to see the bigger picture.



That is the issue surrounding one of the proposals for an update to Clark County's Comprehensive Growth Management Plan in accordance with the state's 1994 Growth Management Act. Alternative 4, which was developed and proposed by County Councilor David Madore, reflects the wishes of many rural landowners, yet it stands as a myopic failure of both foresight and process, and should be rejected.

Alternative 4 would reduce the minimum number of acres for a rural parcel of land, allowing landowners to subdivide properties to sell, give to family members and develop. Critics say that could lead immediately to 8,000 possible new housing sites, with the potential for more than 17,000 if landowners subdivide their properties as much as would be allowed under this proposal.

This would open the floodgates for the kind of suburban sprawl the Growth Management Act was designed to combat the kind of sprawl that decentralizes communities and is environmentally devastating, the kind of sprawl that, studies have shown, is detrimental to the health of residents.

Madore is not alone in his support for the proposal. Clark County Citizens United, which represents rural landowners, has long fought the Growth Management Act as a matter of intrusion upon people's right to manage their land as they wish. As Madore wrote in a Facebook post on the topic: "Alternative 4 proposes to correct the massive mismatch between the actual rural land and the inappropriate zoning map that was imposed 20 years ago. As elected representatives of the people, our job is to listen and faithfully represent their interests in compliance with state law."

Putting aside the question of whether Alternative 4 would, indeed, be in compliance with state law, Madore's assessment is shortsighted pandering to a specific group of constituents at the expense of others. While we can empathize with landowners who might want to subdivide their property, the underlying truth is that if you buy a farm, you've got a farm — not 20 separate parcels.

The state's Growth Management Act was developed to reflect the kind of land-use management that is best for Washington. It has been in place for more than 20 years because it enhances the culture and lifestyle that most state residents hold dear.

It is telling in this debate that most public officials throughout the county are opposed to Alternative 4. Considering that new lots require infrastructure such as roads, water service and schools, leaders from the county's seven largest cities requested that county councilors add a 1-mile-deep buffer around cities to the proposal.

Those officials also understand the negative impact that Alternative 4 would have upon the economy by limiting access for large employers that enhance the tax base. As Camas City Administrator Pete Capell explained: "When you've got 1- or 2-acre parcels that have been built on, it's very difficult then to aggregate them and to be able to create the urban development that's going to be needed in the future. Potentially, 10 or 20 years from now, it could really limit what we're able to do in the urban areas."

Madore took it upon himself to develop Alternative 4, eschewing input from the county's planning staff, and from people who understand state policy and the long-term impact of growth management. In the process, he failed to see the big picture.

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21 comments

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John Burke · Top Commenter · Vancouver, Washington

If a style book for land use planning advocates were ever written, it would surely have the following rule: "whoever repeats the word 'sprawl' most often wins the argument."

"Sprawl"...its the thought substitute.

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David Clark · Top Commenter

Columbian — This would open the floodgates for the kind of suburban sprawl the Growth Management Act was designed to combat

ME — It will help to keep housing affordable. More supply relative to demand = lower prices. Why do you argue against affordable housing?

Columbian — the kind of sprawl that decentralizes communities and is environmentally devastating, the kind of sprawl that, studies have shown, is detrimental to the health of residents.

ME — Decentralized communities are lower cost, less congestion communities. It is high density development that paves over the land and destroys the environment and inner city people are actually less healthy.

Columbian — Madore's assessment is shortsighted pandering to a specific group of constituents at the expense of others.

ME — OF course that specific group of constituents are those who want to keep Vancouver from becoming Portland with it's high taxes, unaffordable housing, traffic congestion and crappy schools.

Columbian — the underlying truth is that if you buy a farm, you've got a farm

ME — You forget those who bought BEFORE the GMA.

Columbian — The state's Growth Management Act was developed to reflect the kind of land-use management that is best for Washington.

ME — Bologony. It was written at the direction of the extreme envors who simply don't care if housing is unaffordable.

Columbian — It has been in place for more than 20 years because it enhances the culture and lifestyle that most state residents hold dear.

ME — Most residents DO NOT want increased traffic congestion that results from concentrating driving in a small area. They do not want unaffordable housing. They do not want higher taxes. Just look at how Oregon's people are suffering with its GMA.

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Ed Rutledge · Top Commenter · Salem, Oregon

Well - Golly - it IS all about ME isn't it?

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David Clark · Top Commenter

Ed Rutledge



No Ed, it is about people being able to afford a home, unlike Portland. Are you against that?
 It is about less traffic congestion, unlike Portland. Are you against that?
 It is about less pollution. (Density concentrates pollution where the people live.) Are you against that?
 It is about not paving over every square inch like in Portland's showcase developments: the Pear, South waterfront & downtown. Are you against that?
 It is about having living space and a back yard, unlike Portland. Are you against that?

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Ed Rutledge · Top Commenter · Salem, Oregon

David Clark : If you hate Portland, don't go there. In fact - stay north of the river ... close to an oil port.

Enjoy.

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Mike Briggs · Top Commenter · CEO at Ex-Candidate WA

Having read this editorial and having discussed with different people in this area- I do think Madore has discovered a group of people who feel that their property, due to the 1994 GMA, have not been dealt with good. BUT- I do not think a single blanket approach to solving some of these landowners complaints is the way to go. From what little I know about the (now) four different Alternatives- I think [Chuck 4 Clark Council](#) has the right idea. I was kind of saddened to see the heavy hand of C. Madore treat Mr. Green's ideas and then to quote the Preamble of the Constitution as some kind of meaningful way to silence Mr. Green.

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Michele Wollert · Top Commenter

Are you referring to [Chuck 4 Clark Council](#)? That's a rhetorical question, BTW. :)

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Dylan Normington · Top Commenter

This editorial neglected to mention that if Alternative 4 is approved, property taxes will increase for rural landowners and decrease for urban landowners. All rural landowners should be made aware of this and should let the County Council know if they want their property taxes to increase while urban landowners will get a reduction in property taxes.

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Lorretta Thomas · Top Commenter

Monofunctional construction, in this case auto-dependent single family housing in a rural landscape, has little or nothing to vindicate it's location, or a change in land use rules for the whole county, in order to placate only one group of land owners. Where are the environmental impact studies, the sustainable water source reports, the well reasoned calculations between the needs and desires of the present that won't compromise the future?

Just because something can be done, it doesn't mean it should be done, even by politicians who regularly attempt to tilt opinions and outcomes in their favor.

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Ed Rutledge · Top Commenter · Salem, Oregon

Yes, but your comment reflects reason and prudence - two qualities held in unmitigated disdain by those who run Clark County (as well as the majority of those who vote in Clark County, except that group probably doesn't know what "unmitigated disdain" means).

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David Clark · Top Commenter

Lorretta Thomas — Monofunctional construction, in this case auto-dependent single family housing in a rural landscape, has little or nothing to vindicate it's location, ME— Why do you oppose people having affordable homes with back yards? Who gave you the right to tell others how or where to live? Why do you oppose the fastest, lowest cost, most energy efficient transportation - the modern private car?

Lorretta Thomas — the needs and desires of the present that won't compromise the future? ME — Are you seriously saying that you can know the future? That is what it takes to know the needs of the future. Do you really think you could have seen the need for the first jet airport before the first jet flew, just a few years earlier?

Lorretta Thomas — Just because something can be done, it doesn't mean it should be done, even by politicians who regularly attempt to tilt opinions and outcomes in their favor. ME— Are you saying we need the approval of the government to do anything? Did you get your license to go to the bathroom?

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Val Alexander

Thanks, Michele, Ed, Dylan, Lorretta. Your comments show that you have studied the issues and have much more knowledge and background then some of the other commenters. Here is my response to the editorial Sunday:

I have lived in rural Clark County for more than fifty years, and am chair of our neighborhood assn. I am pleased that the Columbian editors finally addressed the impending disaster with the comp. plan update in their opinion on Sunday, April 19th. As a founding board member of Friends of Clark County, I have been involved in protecting rural lands since the 1980's as I saw properties surrounding me being split into 5 acre lots. One of my wells dried up as houses were built nearby. I take issue with one part of the editorial where you say in referring to Alternative #4: "Madore is not alone in his support of the proposal. Clark County Citizens United, which represents rural landowners,..." Most rural landowners have never heard of that group, although they claim to represent 6000 rural residents. Along with other stretches of the truth, this group only represents a handful of residents who want to divide their properties, mostly for financial gain. Friends of Clark County works with farmers, local food advocates and rural people who prize quality of life over using property as income.

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Michele Wollert · Top Commenter

For someone who is so proud of being a good steward of the taxpayers' money, Councilor Madore just blew a wad of our hard-earned cash by forcing Alternative #4 into the mix at the eleventh hour. Next time you see him, make sure you thank him for adding a 50% higher bill to the environmental review process.

On Engage Clark County, a new online comment site, 83% of the respondents' published opinions opposed Alternative #4, as did the majority of the persons testifying in person.

For feedback that echoes the points presented in this timely editorial, visit the following link:

http://www.clark.wa.gov/engageclarkcounty/?pd_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.peakdemocracy.com%2Fportals%2F192%2F2623

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David Clark · Top Commenter

Michele Wollert — Next time you see him, make sure you thank him for adding a 50% higher bill to the environmental review process.

ME — A better idea is to get rid of that wasteful process and just check the plans for conformity with zoning.

Michele Wollert — On Engage Clark County, a new online comment site, 83% of the respondents' published opinions opposed Alternative #4, as did the majority of the persons testifying in person. ME— truly sad the number of people tricked into hurting the community by the lies from the Envoros. Do you agree with their plan to increase traffic congestion, get rid of affordable housing and concentrate the pollution in a small are where all the people live?

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