

The other side of the story...

Housing Mitigation Folly

Local housing 'mitigation' requirements have been around for decades, but our electeds have kept the mitigation rate at a laughably low level. They've focused on business growth; lots more.

Now our housing problem is painfully obvious, and mitigation requirements are under review. In 2017 our electeds voted for 100% mitigation. Developers would need to provide housing for 100% of new employees priced out of the local housing market. Our electeds did the right thing for the community. We praised them for it in this column.

But in politics, things often change. And last week the simple 100% idea had become a confounding 145-page document that no one can understand.

It gets worse. When a simple idea like 'house all your new employees' grows into 145-page regulation, there's room for monkey business.

Take a simple case: Say a 3,000-sf restaurant generates an estimated 12 year-round employees and another 7 seasonal workers. That's 19 new workers, some with families, all looking for housing.

Currently, that restaurant developer has to supply less than two housing units, 1.8 units to be exact. Recently, town and county leaders said the new requirement would be 3.5 units. So, by simple arithmetic, instead of providing 100% mitigation, the new requirement would provide just 18%.

While 18% is an improvement, it's nowhere near 100%. It hardly moves the needle in terms of what's really needed.

So how did the 100% requirement become 18%? Two reasons: Pressure from Jackson's Big-Growth Coalition and manipulation in crafting the bloated 145-page regulation.

Governments are experts at making simple things complex. At their last meeting, planners told electeds that the 'adjusted' 100% requirement was really just 73%. That number has since been whittled to 55% and the math just gets fuzzier.

A lot has happened since that first 100% mitigation vote. The Chamber of Commerce, the *News&Guide*, and pressure groups like JH Working badgered planners and politicians to roll back the 100%. And they've been successful.

The Big-Growthers are winning and ordinary folks are losing. A "Livable Jackson Hole" is losing. Quality of life is losing.

We need a simple 100% regulation. Instead of 145 pages of planner-speak that only a senior planner can understand, it should be 10 pages.

*A simple solution is
now a complicated mess*

An easy solution has become bewildering.

Commissioner Rhea said she leaves these meetings more confused than when she came. Councilor Lenz said we're comparing oranges to watermelons. After looking at the massive document, Commissioner Epstein said he feels railroaded into a result the planning department wants to arrive at.

It's impossible to decipher housing mitigation when the numbers appear meaningless. Councilor Stanford called the proposed mitigation rate a slight increase from 33 to 36%. Developers do the math differently. One local developer claimed it was an outrageous 600% increase.

Do we have 145 pages of gamesmanship?

Developers and employers will skirt their responsibilities if they can. Politicians provide the loop-holes and folks take advantage of them.

A simple solution is now a complicated mess. We're hoping government is better than this.