

The Table Rock Homeowners Association Position Statement on the Proposed South Side Subdivision Development

April 14, 2019

The Table Rock subdivision is located on Cottonwood Road approximately 2.75 miles south from the epicenter of Walla Walla, Second Avenue, and Main Street. It consists of 96 homes and has the reputation of being one of Walla Walla's great neighborhoods. It was recently joined in the last couple years by another wonderful development, The Boulders, to the north, consisting of 29 homes. Both neighborhoods reflect good space planning, traffic flow, and a wide variety of architectural styles made possible by homeowners utilizing the builders of their choice. As a result, The Boulders was a development that was welcome. Table Rock, as a community, understands and supports new development that reflects these standards.

There is now another subdivision development in the planning process. It is to the south and east of Table Rock on a 100-acre parcel, which is now farmland. It's only direct connection to downtown Walla Walla will be Cottonwood Road, which becomes Howard Street. The City of Walla Walla is currently considering annexing this property. Hayden Homes submitted a preliminary plat showing 406 building sites. The City of Walla Walla has recently changed its zoning ordinances to reflect higher densities. Should the annexation be approved the parcel would be eligible for the highest possible density.

Unfortunately, the planned development faces a number of issues:

- 1. Drainage.** The Table Rock area has a significant history of drainage issues. In 2005 the neighborhood suffered flooding with redesign and construction of new drainage infrastructure required. These drainage issues have been mentioned in every major hydrologic survey and cautioned for any growth in the Walla Walla 2040 Plan. It is also our understanding that this particular UGA (Urban Growth Area) was a fallback resulting from not getting land to the north of HWY 12, where existing infrastructure provides several avenues for access to the city center with its attendant services of stores, restaurants, public transportation and other amenities.
- 2. Infrastructure.** To make the proposed development possible, significant infrastructure improvements are required. Water, storm sewers, sanitary sewers, the widening of Cottonwood Road, curbs, gutter and sidewalks are among the required improvements. Will the City of Walla Walla require all these infrastructure upgrades be in place before house construction is permitted?
- 3. Traffic.** A traffic study is being conducted. The traffic issue threatens to have the widest impact on all living on the south side of the city. The impact on Cottonwood/Howard will be very detrimental. The route passes Prospect Point School and impacts traffic to Walla Walla High School to the east on Reser. It would affect both schools' multiple student street crossings. Per the proposed development plan, traffic would also be directed toward Kendall and Fern. The city freely admits that there is an existing traffic issue at Abbott and Fern. It should also be

noted that students attending Walla Walla Community College also use the Prospect/Reser route to commute to the college. It's an unescapable conclusion that the present street infrastructure has insufficient capacity for these significantly expanded traffic densities if this development is allowed to be developed as proposed.

4. **Zoning density.** As mentioned, the City Council has zoned this with the highest zoning density possible. Should that occur it would be way above the norm to the existing population density of Walla Walla. Currently Walla Walla has a population density of 2,490 per square mile. Should the development be approved in its proposed form, the density of this annexed parcel will increase to 10,903 per square mile, a density that is 4.17 times greater than the existing population density for the rest of Walla Walla. This would make the development out of character for Walla Walla and more like the population densities found in developments in heavily populated Western Washington.
5. **Tourism.** Is this type of development density conducive to the tranquil wine-growing region that Visit Walla Walla and Chamber of Commerce promotes? Does this high density connect to the local landscape and existing developments around it? Good urban planning requires that developments blend into exists, not to be a complete settlement of their own with no character, no parks and no reason to go there.
6. **Cost/impact.** The Table Rock Board HOA was represented at a working City Council meeting on March 25, 2019. At that meeting, councilmember Cummins raised a valid point about the costs of annexing this parcel and its consequent development. Elizabeth Chamberlain, Director of Development Services for the City of Walla Walla, stated that it would cost the city \$1 to provide services and in return would get 85 cents back. Weigh this against other needed projects within the city that will be delayed or put on hold altogether based on what could very well be a significant cost and liability to the city related to flooding. The bottom line is that a project of this size impacts the entire community. Every taxpayer is affected.

At another City Council meeting last month, the question was asked, "What is the policy for annexations?" The point being that there seems to be a lack of clarity in the planning department regarding the current policy. We mention this since it appears that even in the planning department there is limited support for this specific annexation/development.

It is also unclear who pays for all the infrastructure installations, whether it is the developer, the city, or a combination of both. Also, what exactly are those costs? Estimates are rarely dependable.

7. **Justification.** We agree the city has a responsibility to review this project based on the request of an interested developer. Walla Walla has had nominal population growth for the last two decades. Although housing affordability is an issue for cities, including Walla Walla, developments with \$350,000 homes are generally not the solution. For example, the median house value in Walla Walla is \$248,000, according to Windermere Real Estate. With that disparity in mind, just how affordable would a \$350,000 home in the new development be?

The Board would also welcome figures that indicate what percentage are owner occupied homes vs. investor owned homes (rentals) in other local Hayden developments.

Conclusion. We raise these concerns because the development as planned—especially related to drainage, traffic and a population density that is totally out of character for the city—threatens to have a large negative impact on the south side of Walla Walla and to the city in its entirety.

Sincerely,

The Table Rock HOA Board of Directors
and Concerned Homeowners