

# Community airs concerns over Bachtold development

The resident-organized meeting Tuesday was intended to help spur opponents to action.

By DIAN VER VALEN  
of the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

Stifling heat inside the Walla Walla High School commons room didn't keep more than 100 people from spending nearly two hours Tuesday night discussing their many concerns about a proposed 105-acre, 372-home subdivision on Cottonwood Road.

Their goal was to spread the

word and get as many people as possible to write in to the city's Development Services Department in an effort to stop the project known as the Bachtold annexation.

As one community member said: "This is all going to come down to a City Council vote, so we really need some important thing to stand on so they do not desecrate the most beautiful piece of real estate in this Valley."

Developer Hayden Homes and property owners Jon and Mary Christine Bachtold finished the process of filing a development agreement application with the city in mid-July. The property is outside

city limits but is in the Urban Growth Area, and a petition for annexation into the city has already been filed.

Walla Walla City Council members paused the normal process for annexation last year when it became clear that concerns were surfacing regarding drainage, traffic and other issues on this property south of the city. They required that a development agreement be reached first.

The public has until 5 p.m. on Aug. 12 to submit written comments on the application to: City of Walla Walla Development Services

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U-B photo by GREG LEHMAN

John Bruhn, at center, speaks to traffic concerns at Tuesday's community meeting.

## Next up will be public hearing involving Council members

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Department, 55 E. Moore St., Walla Walla, WA 99362.

Elizabeth Chamberlain, director of Development Services, said this morning that next up will be a public hearing involving City Council members where city staff will make a recommendation on the development agreement application. City Council could make a decision on the application at that time.

The earliest that meeting could happen, Chamberlain said, is late September. But it could be October depending on how long it takes staff to sift through comments and conduct its own review and whether changes need to be made to the application.

"It all takes time," she said. Further opportunity for the public to comment on the project if the city moves forward will come when the preliminary plat design goes to a hearing with the hearing examiner, she said.

At Tuesday's community-organized meeting, protest signs were available for

people to take at the door along with various maps and detailed lists of concerns in the form of an agenda for the meeting with bullet lists of ideas for people to include in their letters to the city.

"This is our one opportunity; this is it," said Scott Krivoshein, who lives on Kendall Road across from the proposed development and was one of the core members of the group leading Tuesday's meeting. "Aug. 12 is our last chance."

"This is a bigger crowd than we expected here," he continued, urging everyone in attendance to show up for the public hearing that will take place after the August public comment period is over. "We have to stay strong, keep strong," he said.

He and the other residents leading the discussion said that nearly 2,000 people have already signed an online petition to stop the annexation.

"One thing that we want to make perfectly clear, the one thing that we're not trying to do is to get in the way

of Mr. Bachtold selling his property," Krivoshein said.

"(But) we do have this little corner of the world that we don't really want to be ruined, and that's our little corner. We cannot be the high-density police for the whole city of Walla Walla but when it happens in your neighborhood, we can at least fight for the community and also our taxpayers because that's who I think is going to be hurt the most."

Many of those in attendance Tuesday were stopped from commenting on the project during last week's City Council meeting when Mayor Barbara Clark announced that to keep the quasi-judicial process from being compromised people would have to use the formal process — writing to the Development Services Department — to have their opinions heard.

Vern Myrick, a nearby resident but also a commissioner with Walla Walla County Fire District 4, was one of these frustrated at not being able to speak last week. He was also one of Tuesday's event coordinators and spoke on the issue of safety.

"I would rather fight this battle and lose than not fight at all," he said after the meeting was over.

The discussion centered on six key concerns including drainage and grading, whether the proposed project is really affordable housing, traffic, safety, economics and aesthetics. Each topic was presented by a community member who stated he or she was not a

subject-matter expert but had volunteered to lead the discussion on that topic.

Grant Witherspoon and a woman who lives nearby and has a geotechnical engineering background, Renee Hadley, spoke of the soils on the proposed being problematic for development. It's known for flooding, Witherspoon said.

"If this plan is allowed, homes in the Table Rock and the Boulders (nearby developments) will have a high probability of flooding," he wrote on the agenda.

Dick Counsell and Jack Conley shared their opinion that this project doesn't meet local standards for the best place to site an affordable housing development because it is not in proximity to jobs, services, public transit, retail services and amenities.

John Bruhn spoke to traffic concerns, of which there were many listed on the agenda. Among those were the difficulty for farmers to move machinery and crops through the adjacent roads with the increased traffic projected, the need for crosswalks, bike lanes and more to keep students safe as they walk and bike the area.

Krivoshein, addressing economics, wondered how the city would afford to make all the infrastructure changes necessary with this subdivision and annexation.

"How is additional funding going to be raised to upgrade the intersections, roads and bridges? Why would the city assume the risk and liability of

annexing a property with so many issues?" he wrote in the agenda.

Finally Renee Krivoshein talked about aesthetics, saying the development will not be consistent with the already formed surrounding neighborhoods and developments.

She urged community members to "think carefully about how we want Walla Walla's rural areas to look, because that's what this is, rural," she said. "The city talks about not wanting islands of county in the city, but this will be an island of the city in the county."

Questions toward the end of the meeting from other community members included whether this project, described by one as a "horror" being "visited upon" residents, is a "done deal."

Scott Krivoshein took that opportunity to spur people into action one last time.

"The biggest part of this meeting is to make sure people know, this is not final," he said.

City leaders know this is a big deal, he said, "we need to stay strong, keep strong."

The city of Walla Walla has an online site with updated information on the project at [ubne.ws/2ysWCfr](http://ubne.ws/2ysWCfr).

Hayden Homes also maintains a site with information on their proposed development at [ubne.ws/2MvbsDy](http://ubne.ws/2MvbsDy).

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## OBITUARIES