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Comments pile up on Bachtold proposal

City staff expect to spend the next 4-6 weeks working through 275 letters regarding the planned housing development.

By **DIAN VER VALEN**
of the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

As of this morning, 275 letters have been logged in response to the proposed housing development on Cottonwood Road known as the Bachtold

annexation — with a few more to count, according to the city.

Monday was the last day for public comment.

"I don't know how many individual commenters yet," Development Services Department Director Elizabeth Chamberlain said this morning. "Some people sent in multiple letters."

Some of those letters have been in support of the project, she said, but a majority are not in favor. Nobody in Chamberlain's office can remember another

city project receiving this many comments — although the Illahee development proposed more than a decade ago east of town that never came to fruition might have come close, she said.

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 was started

two years ago.

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

Now Development Services staff will spend the next four to six weeks reviewing the many comments from people, various city department staff, and other

government agencies — such as the county.

"A review comment letter will be provided back to the applicant for what edits/corrections need to be made to the application," Chamberlain said. "A SEPA (State Environmental Policy Act) determination will be issued, then a public hearing scheduled on the application."

She expects that, at the earliest, this public hearing might happen at City Council's Sept. 25

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✓ Bachtold proposal draws opposition, support

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meeting, but it could take until October for the city and applicant to be ready for that hearing, she said.

An updated timeline will be posted on the city's website sometime in the next week or so, after the city attorney is able to approve it for publication, Chamberlain said Monday.

Voices in opposition

Among many concerns voiced and penned by opponents over the last few weeks, the key topics have been flooding in the area (the adjacent Table Rock subdivision experienced flooding even while homes were under construction in 2005, according to their documentation), traffic and safety with the possibility of up to 1,200 people living in the Cottonwood subdivision, and the density of development with 372 homes on about 105 acres.

Comments officially filed with the city are not yet available for the public to read, but the dozens of letters to the editor submitted to the Union-Bulletin recently and posts on a local social media page protesting the development likely indicate what those notes of opposition say:

"Is the same catastrophe that ruined my old hometown now coming to Walla Walla?" Curtis E. Stone of Dayton wrote in an Aug. 9 letter to editor.

A resident living closer to the proposed development, Brad Green of Walla Walla, wrote to the U-B: "I write to alert our city to the dangerous annexation planned for the south side of town. A subdivision for a population the size of Waitsburg is planned by Hayden Homes in a hundred-acre wheat field ... How is this small city of people going to get to work, or to the store or to school? ... Are you ready for some traffic?"

And after Sunday's deluge, a post on the Bachtold

Cottonwood Road filled with water. "It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see this is nowhere for a cultivated field to be taken out by cement and asphalt, can you imagine where more water would go?"

Caution urged

Walla Walla County commissioners, in their official letter to the city, stated that while they do not oppose the annexation, they were concerned about county roads surrounding the proposed development. The letter, provided Monday to the U-B, requested the city either add nearby intersections to the annexation for upgrading to city street standards or that upgrades be made outside of annexation at the expense of the developer or the city.

"We see no reason Walla Walla County should have to pay for the upgrades," the letter stated and continued by saying, "County commissioners in the future will be looking much closer at proposed UGA amendments and how they may affect county roads to reduce the chances of this situation happening again. This proposed subdivision would have drastic affects to our transportation plan and usage of county roads."

A final point of concern mentioned by commissioners deals with the county's critical aquifer recharge area — a place where water is able to seep into the ground and refill an aquifer.

"In 2012 and 2013, ... Walla Walla County designated a northern portion of the Bachtold property as a critical aquifer recharge area for the Walla Walla River shallow gravel aquifer," the letter stated. "The southern portion of the property was designated as an area of moderate vulnerability. The development agreement should contain measures to ensure that no pollutants, particularly from stormwater, are allowed to harm

county's Critical Area Regulations for the shallow gravel aquifer and areas of moderate vulnerability into the Development Agreement would likely address those concerns. If necessary, planning staff would be happy to share the best available science documents prepared by Golder and Associates."

Voices in support

Walla Walla attorney James K. Hayner wrote a letter in support of the Cottonwood subdivision and annexation. As part of their comments to the Union-Bulletin, staff with Hayden Homes sent a copy of that letter.

Hayner wrote: "There were similar objections to every major housing development south of town, including Sydney Heights, Triple Creek, and even Table Rock. However, the Urban Growth Area has always encompassed this land, and it is logical to allow development of this land because of availability of city services and proximity to schools."

Hayner wrote that while there is significant opposition, "the fact that there is opposition should not deter the City Council from doing the correct things and approving this development, which meets all of the legal development standards."

"It is not unusual for people to oppose change. When the proposal to move the high school to its present location from the downtown location (where the YMCA is now located) was first broached, there was significant opposition. There was a petition that contained over 5,000 signatures in opposition to moving the high school. However, moving the high school was the correct decision. Can anyone now imagine the high school trying to fit into the downtown location of the YMCA?"

He goes on to rebut many of the concerns

will be significantly impacted by the development. The scale of the 'impact' should be recognized. The primary intersection impacted is at Howard Street and Second Avenue and Abbott Road. The current level of service shows that the approximate delay a motorist might expect at that intersection during peak hours is 20 seconds. The estimated delay at the same intersection five years from now is expected to increase to about 25 seconds. This project, once it is fully developed, would increase the delay to an estimated 1 minute."

Hayden Homes has stated that such mitigations as turn lanes and bicycle paths will be paid for at their expense.

"Hayden Homes pays for all water, sewer, roads and infrastructure to the neighborhood. We will also pay substantially to the city in fees and taxes to ensure Cottonwood is not a burden to the community, but instead an asset," staff wrote in an email to the U-B on Monday.

Addressing flood concerns, Hayden Homes wrote: "We have worked with engineers to design a stormwater retention system that will solve the drainage problem plaguing Table Rock and other southeastern Walla Walla neighborhoods, saving our Table Rock neighbors an estimated expense of \$1 million."

Concerning the density of housing, Hayden Homes stated: "The city's Comprehensive Plan allows for up to 1,500 multifamily units to be built under the current zoning. We believe that the Cottonwood design at 372 homes is a better fit for Walla Walla."

With a core focus on community giving to charitable organizations throughout the valley, and our 20 years of building in Walla Walla, we believe that we are the right part-

Annexation and Hayden
Home Opposition page
on Facebook showed a
muddy culvert alongside
the Walla Walla River shall
low gravel aquifer.”
Commissioners suggest-
ed that “incorporating the

voiced by opponents, in-
cluding the traffic impact.

“The traffic study shows
that only one intersection

ner to develop this land.

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