

## OUR READERS' OPINIONS

UB 8-21-19

### Stealth zoning in the Valley

It has been pointed out that the Bachtold property (being considered for annexation) has been part of the Urban Growth Area for 23 years.

This is true.

However, for 22½ of those years, it was assured that any lots built there would be a minimum of 9,600 square feet due to being in an R-96 zone. That is what neighbors were expecting if the wheat field was ever developed.

For many of us, the first realization that zoning had been changed came to light in January when Hayden Homes published a concept plat map for the Bachtold property showing tiny homes (as small as 400 square feet) on tiny lots (as small as 2,520 square feet). The zoning changes happened just a few weeks before. It seems that Hayden Homes must have been in the loop early on since they were able to get this map released so quickly.

How did substantial zoning changes go into effect without the citizens of Walla Walla being aware?

In other cities (like Seattle) when there

are plans to change zoning, you'll see a lot of public discussion about the proposed changes well before they might be implemented.

It appears that even the Union-Bulletin was unaware of the potential changes in Walla Walla until the day of the vote on Dec. 19, 2018. Searches in the Union-Bulletin news archives show no results when looking for references to the zoning change prior to Dec. 19.

Here's how everyone missed it. The change was hidden in the City Council agenda as a generic topic. This was the agenda item: "Ordinance 2018-53: Approves amendments to the Walla Walla Municipal Code to implement the Goals and Policies Walla Walla Comprehensive Plan 2040."

The same vague wording was used in the public announcement in the Union-Bulletin on Oct. 19, 2018.

Who would have realized this included major zoning changes for the entire city? Apparently, nobody would — and that may have been the intention all along.

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Walla Walla