

## Light Industrial Mixed Use: A New Zone for the Waterfront

The Hood River Valley Residents Committee's mission is to protect Hood River Valley's farm and forestland and the livability of its cities and rural communities. While we are perhaps more known for the protection of resource land, land-use within the City of Hood River has always been a focus for us. Planning is a regional activity. We have learned that the very best way to protect farmland from sprawling development is by creating a great city within the urban growth boundary.

Using our limited amount of urban land wisely and creatively is a challenge and often fraught with controversy as there are many competing interests to balance. Over our 38-year experience in land-use planning, we have come to embrace the ideas that frequently go under the terms "Smart Growth" or "New Urbanism" which advocate policies to concentrate growth in compact, vibrant, walkable urban centers to avoid sprawl.

The Waterfront Refinement Planning process currently underway provides an opportunity for our community to make some fundamental decisions about the direction future development the waterfront will take. Most of the waterfront is currently zoned Light Industrial which allows for low-impact manufacturing and offices related to research and development. Our suggestion would be to expand the possibilities by creating a new zone for the waterfront "Light Industrial Mixed Use." Light Industrial would continue to be the predominant use at the waterfront but commercial, residential and recreational uses should be layered in to increase vitality, livability and spur economic development. Other cities have employed various methods to achieve this mix of uses (e.g. require a minimum Floor Area Ratio FAR for industrial uses with density bonuses for other uses once the industrial FAR is met or set maximum percentages/square footages for the auxiliary commercial and residential uses so that most of the square footage is preserved for industrial uses). HRVRC has advocated mixed use at the waterfront for over 30 years.

## Mixed Use and Economic Development

Mixed use is good for economic development and will provide a competitive advantage to Hood River in attracting businesses to locate here. The current economy values proximity and clustering. Placing jobs, retail, homes and recreation in proximity increases business opportunities, creates a sense of place and functions as a recruiting tool for employers. 24/7 communities, as opposed to 9 to 5 Monday-Friday environments, are increasingly attractive to young professionals and the "creative class" who value vibrant street life and a hip urban energy, even in a small town. Traditional office and industrial parks, with buildings surrounded by parking and landscaping, are inward focused and do not provide many opportunities for spontaneous employee interaction. When asked if the new restaurants on Portway Avenue added value for the day-employees commuting to work at the waterfront, property owner and employer Andy von Flotow, responded "I think the answer is an emphatic YES. A "pure" industrial park is a hideous thing, particularly when on a park-enhanced shoreline." Indeed, in order to stay competitive, business parks around the country are converting to mixed-use developments.

### The 10 Principles of Smart Growth

- Mix land uses.
- Take advantage of compact design.
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
- Create walkable communities.
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
- Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities.
- Provide a variety of transportation options.
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

Mixed-use settings have been found to produce more employment and higher occupancy rates. Cities around the country are increasingly using mixed-use industrial districts to preserve industrial land and increase density with a payoff in higher property values. The City of Hood River Economic Opportunities Analysis, 2011 predicts a far greater need for commercial land (C-1 and C-2) than industrial (LI and I) in the 20 year study period (2010-2031) with commercial land use needs projected at 39 acres compared to 16 acres for industrial land. Employment creation is similarly weighted—530 retail jobs and 835 service jobs are expected to be created in that time period compared to just 116 industrial jobs. Hood River’s largest deficiency is in Class A office space.

In 2013, EcoNorthwest prepared an Economic Impact Analysis for the Port of Hood River that recommends the very same shift from pure industrial to mixed use that we advocate:

*“ . . . what is the best use of remaining Port property at the waterfront? Many cities provide evidence of a transition from industrial uses to other uses as property values rise. The Port has already accommodated a shift from traditional industrial and warehousing toward light industrial and commercial. The Port should consider furthering this transition, focusing on the kinds of businesses that are most compatible with waterfront recreational amenities.”*

## **The Waterfront and Downtown**

Some have expressed concern that development at the waterfront will come at the expense of downtown. HRVRC would never advocate a waterfront policy that would turn our historic downtown into a ghost town. We believe the opposite is true: No part of town has as much to gain from a vibrant waterfront as downtown. This is not a zero sum game. Growth at the waterfront will be good for all of us. The two districts are geographically close—Lot 1 is only a 3-minute walk from the corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> and Oak and development at the waterfront can and should complement and enhance downtown. HRVRC encourages the City and Port to make infrastructure improvements that strengthen the pedestrian connections between the two areas. Structured parking at the waterfront paired with a trolley service to downtown could help alleviate parking issues in both areas.

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