



Livable Hood River
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Hood River Valley Residents Committee
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Honorable Mayor Blackburn and City Councilors:

Hood River Valley Residents Committee is one of Oregon's oldest local land use advocacy groups, for 40 years our mission has been to protect Hood River's farms, forests, special wild places and the livability of our urban and rural communities. Livable Hood River was formed in 2015 by local residents to advocate for livable, affordable, walkable and safe residential neighborhoods that offer a high quality of life to those who live within the Hood River Urban Growth Boundary. We appreciate the opportunity to provide joint comments on the proposed rezone of the City-owned property Morrison Park from Open Space/Public Facilities (OS/PF) to Urban High Density Residential (R-3).

You have a difficult decision before you. You've received hundreds of pages of passionate and well-reasoned testimony from advocates of affordable housing and defenders of parks and public open space. The truth is that they are both pressing community needs. For affordable housing, the city needs to play catch up and plan for future growth. The City's Housing Needs Analysis in 2015 showed a current deficit of 170 units affordable by households earning 80% or less of Area Median Income (AMI)¹. Going forward Hood River will need to produce about 2,000 units in the next 20 years to meet population growth; 50% of these—about 1000 units—should be at price points affordable to households of 80% of AMI and below. As the city grows and becomes more densely developed, parks become an even more important component of health and quality of life for residents. Absent a Parks Master Plan with feasible funding and implementation strategies, it is a leap of faith to give up open space that is already in public ownership with the idea that it will be replaced—and more—in newly developing neighborhoods on the Westside.

These are tough choices but we think this rezone offers a unique opportunity to effectively address both public goals on the same property. At 5.33 acres, the property can support an affordable housing project of 60+ units and a substantial park that will be a neighborhood asset showcasing the site's natural features including the year-round stream, basalt outcrops and old trees.



One of the 50% Housing/50% Park Concept Plans commissioned by City of Hood River, 2008 and designed by University of Oregon Architecture Graduate Students. This particular plan also includes a community center in the park space.

¹ City of Hood River Housing Needs Analysis, September 2015, page B-46.

Our proposal:

1. 50% housing, 50% park. Half the property should be retained as park/open space and half dedicated to affordable housing. Rezone to R-3 only the portion of the property that will be utilized for housing, the remainder of property should retain OS/PF zoning.
2. R-3 portion must be used for affordable housing in perpetuity or long (30 years?) period of time. There is some concern that the city could rezone the property under the auspices of affordable housing but then use it for something else. A deed restriction or condition of the rezone should limit the property's use to affordable housing.
3. Development of the site plan for housing and the park will include meaningful stakeholder involvement. Community members will participate in design of the project (i.e. where the dwelling units go, what they look like, sustainability features such as solar and green infrastructure, an occupancy plan, which trees and natural features are retained, a park operations and management plan etc.). The intent is that this project will be a model for the rest of the city and that inviting public input on site design will lead to affordable housing projects that get support rather than opposition from neighbors.
4. The City Council should commit to developing and adopting a citywide park plan within the next year. The plan should include implementation strategies to provide a reasonable assurance of funding.
5. Requirement for trail extension through the property as indicated in Transportation System Plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this application.

Best regards,



Jon Gehrig
President, Livable Hood River



Heather Staten
Executive Director, Hood River Valley Residents Committee