



## Friends of Grant Creek General Meeting

Tuesday, March 29, 2022

Grant Creek Inn & Zoom

### Meeting Report

More than 50 people attended in person and another approximately 20 via Zoom.

President RT Cox introduced himself and listed upcoming events:

- April 1, 9 am – Clark Fork Coalition meeting at Highlander Brewing to create a working group for Grant Creek Restoration
- April 8, all day – Free home inspections for fire readiness. Sign-ups with John Langstaff
- April 11, 8 am – FOGC Board zoom meeting with Missoula County planners on Zoning Update
- April 23 – Grant Creek Trail Celebration, events happening 10:30 -3 pm

Important Rezoning Request dates:

- April 14 – Deadline for public comment to be included in staff report
- April 18 – City Council first reading and referral to Land Use Planning Committee (LUP)
- April 19, 6 pm – Planning Board public hearing and recommendation (online)
- May 4 – LUP meeting (council members discuss the rezoning request)
- May 9 – City Council public hearing (in person and online)
- May 11 – LUP further discussion
- May 16 – City Council final consideration and vote (last date for comments)

The iPetition will be updated and made available as there is less time to conduct a mailed hard-copy petition than there was in 2020 when the pandemic slowed the public process down.

RT shared some Power Point slides about what is allowed under current zoning and what would be allowed with the Rezone, if approved.

Both KJA's 2020 request for "Grant Creek Village" and the 2022 request asked for the same zoning designation, RM I-45, which allows 4-story apartments at 43 units/acre (high density). The difference is that this time they are proposing a "development agreement" which would in theory impose some limits.

KJA is suggesting a limit of 700 units – 625 in 4-story buildings plus 75 in townhouse-like

buildings, all market-rate rentals, with no ownership opportunities – and offering to post some signs where Grant Creek Trail crosses Stonebridge Road and Expo Parkway. Otherwise, they are offering little else beyond the apartments and some amenities for their residents, phased in over several years of build-out.

The existing zoning – which has been in place for several decades – would allow for approximately 502 dwelling units divided between apartments in 3-story buildings and single family homes. (This 502 number may actually be a little high, because there are unbuildable easements for a gas pipeline and power lines crossing the property that were not considered when that number was generated.)

Approval of a rezoning request with a development agreement would be unprecedented, as state zoning law does not allow “conditioned approval”. There is some question as to whether this development agreement would stand up legally, as well as whether future owners would be bound to an agreement that they weren’t party to if the property were later sold. These questions are being researched.

Since his last rezoning request (for 930 units) was turned down in September 2020, Ken Ault of KJA has built two 3-story apartment buildings (totaling 105 units) and has been granted permits for 2 more 3-story buildings that have not been built.

A rezoning is not like a subdivision review. There are only numbers to consider. Numbers of units. Numbers of stories. Units per acre. No layout and design are presented for consideration before approval. It is an “up or down vote” for the City Council. It can’t be “conditioned” nor can a different zoning designation be approved than what was asked for. And a zoning designation is supposed to be “applied uniformly” – to mean the same thing wherever it exists.

One thing to keep in mind is that the “reduction in number of units” presented in this request is not as large as it seems. Though Mr. Ault claimed he would only build 930 units last time (even though the requested zoning would have allowed well over 1100 units), 700 units would still be a couple hundred more than is allowed by the existing zoning.

It would also more than double the number of occupied dwelling units in the Grant Creek Valley. And all of the traffic from almost 1400 total dwelling units would be leaving and entering Grant Creek via just one road. KJA says that their traffic studies show that their new proposal will reduce daily vehicle trips from 5200 in the 2020 proposal to 3000 trips per day in the current request. This is in addition to the current traffic loads. The infrastructure in lower

Grant Creek isn't designed to handle this much additional traffic, and no plans or commitments are being made to upgrade the infrastructure (other than signing a couple trail crosswalks at Stonebridge Road and Expo Parkway).

There will probably be a need for traffic signals at one or both Expo Parkway and Stonebridge Road. There will certainly be a need for pedestrian crosswalks at both intersections. Turn lanes will likely need to be added. If this infrastructure isn't present at the time a development is approved, what guarantees are there that it will be added in the future? (As one City Councilor complained in 2020, "there are neighborhoods approved by prior city councils that are still waiting for sidewalks!")

Using maps from a 2021 report tracking how well city rules are guiding new development, RT shared slides of suitability of various Missoula neighborhoods for development based on: Transit and Bicycle Availability (Grant Creek was "not suitable") and distance from Schools and Parks (again, "not suitable"). Planners specifically addressed the quarry (gravel pit) site in this report, saying that portions of it were "minimally suitable" and the rest was "not suitable".

It seems the issue will boil down to "Planning and Long Term Goals" vs. "Housing at all costs."

Existing zoning would allow 344 apartments on the south parcel at 43 units/acre (high density) and 125 to 158 single family homes on the north parcel at 10-12 units per acre (medium to medium-high density).

Compare this to the Villagio apartments now under construction, with 200 units on 19 acres, or just over 10 units per acre (medium density). The Villagio is also providing affordable housing, and has multiple streets entering and leaving the area, neither of which the Grant Creek Village apartments would have. The current proposal would put 700 units on just over 27 acres for a density of about 26 units per acre, which is considered high density (24-43).

Several questions were taken from the floor:

How many times can Ault go back to the well with this proposal? As often as he likes (and can afford his consultants' fees).

Who put the traffic counters on Grant Creek Road? The City is doing a speed limit reduction study from Prospect Drive south to I-90. FOGC has requested a dedicated traffic study of Grant Creek Road, presenting the city with a 40 page request, but though the need is recognized, the funding isn't there, and they are busy with other projects.

Chat Question: During a fire evacuation, would both lanes carry downhill traffic? Probably not, because how would fire engines get UP the canyon? FOGC has asked how emergencies would be dealt with, and the answer is every emergency is unique, the sheriff would be put in charge, and yes, they can evacuate the valley if they need to. (But no specific plan.)

What will be the impact on Hellgate Elementary, which is already overwhelmed with new developments on Mullan Road? Mr. Ault says he isn't expecting a lot of kids. (And schools always say they can accommodate more kids.)

Grant Parker from Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation asked, Were FOGC's concerns with the previous proposal addressed by the development agreement? No. A PUD would have been a better way to "get to yes", but would require subdivision review, a time-consuming and expensive process for a developer. So this new proposal is ALL rentals, no ownership opportunities, and all at market rate, so no attempt at affordability.

The next presentation was made by Mike Cole, the leader of the Fire Risk Management Task Force appointed by the Friends of Grant Creek. The members of the task force include Mike, RT, John Langstaff, Rich Lasko and Tim Hunt, and between them they have many years of professional fire-fighting experience. They spent much of the past year searching for viable alternate egress routes in the event of a fire emergency. Nothing panned out, as old ranch roads heading east into Sawmill Gulch or west into Butler Creek have fallen into such disrepair that passenger vehicles could no longer use them. (The Dodd Ranch Road off the Snowbowl Road would be a feasible route from the Grant Creek drainage into Butler Creek, but it is not generally advisable to send people up-canyon in a wildfire situation.) So we are stuck with Grant Creek Road for the foreseeable future.

Mike's Power Point presentation was called "Situational Awareness About Where You Live" and included slides from the December 2021 Superior Fire in Boulder County, Colorado. Pictures from Colorado were placed next to pictures taken from the Prospect subdivision's hilltop common area, and they were strikingly similar. The grass fire that swept through Superior was similar to the kind of fire that could start along I-90 west of us and sweep over the grassy hills into our valley. Even the wooded parts of Grant Creek, seen from the air, are surrounded by grassy hills that could quickly bring a fire to us where we live.

Another photo from the Colorado fire showed an apartment building engulfed in fire. Though the KJA consultants consider their apartment dwellers safe from wildfires, apartment buildings

adjacent to grasslands DO burn, especially when ember showers land on balconies and set flammable patio furniture on fire. Or get sucked into vents, or land in nooks and crannies.

It's time for a reality check. The Superior fire was an "urban fire". It burned 6000A in 4 days, destroying 1000 structures, and was the 10<sup>th</sup> most expensive fire in history, costing \$1.2 billion.

Compare Superior to Prospect. We have lots of dry grass, both in March and in late summer into fall. Missoula had winds of 50 mph in November. The risk is becoming year-round.

"Large fires" used to be 100,000 acres. Now those hardly get mentioned and large fires are a MILLION acres. (For comparison, Missoula County is 1.67 million acres.) The Lolo Peak fire in 2017 burned 54,000 acres; the City of Missoula covers 22,180 acres.

There are not enough resources and no guarantees of resources to fight these fires. Many things can go wrong. With high winds, there is no time to put down a fire quickly. Other emergencies occurring elsewhere can cause a lack of resources and personnel. A traffic accident can tangle up traffic and cut off access for emergency vehicles as well as evacuees. Grant Creek Road itself could be cut off somewhere in the middle by a wildfire, with people stuck both above and below the blockage.

Since 2019, 41 vehicle accidents were reported on Grant Creek Road. Last August there were two accidents 3 days apart (one by Starbucks and one by the I-90 interchange) that blocked parts of Grant Creek Road. (One of the collisions involved a vehicle hitting an ambulance that was responding to another accident!)

From a Fire Risk Management perspective, there are several things to consider regarding this rezoning request. The report prepared by Fire Logistics for KJA offered some suggestions, but no requirements. Many of the Task Force's concerns are detailed in letters prepared and sent by the Task Force, and posted on the Engage Missoula site. Letter #1 was dated August 26, 2020, and #2 was from April 26, 2021. New research and new information keeps coming to light, so Letter #3 is being drafted and will be uploaded after the Staff Report is posted, within the next few weeks. The letters are available to see on the Friends of Grant Creek website as well: [www.friendsofgrantcreek.org](http://www.friendsofgrantcreek.org)

Some points include: doubling the number of homes doubles the congestion; one-way-in, one-way-out; the Abelin traffic analysis was flawed and didn't take into account ski season or tourist season peaks; cumulative effects of incremental development elsewhere in the valley (including Gleneagle and un-built existing lots) are not being considered; the development of the Blue Bird

Trailhead will add more traffic; Snowbowl expansion and increased use in both winter and summer; major traffic improvements will be needed, including signals and turn lanes; pedestrians crossing Grant Creek Road need designated crosswalks.

RT again addressed the group, saying that FOGC has yet to take an official position because we wanted to hear from our neighbors first. Should we support existing zoning like we did in 2020? It provides ownership opportunities, the market is good for single family homes, 450 to 500 more dwelling units is still almost doubling the population of Grant Creek (an 80% increase).

Dennis Muth, a retired engineer who lives in Prospect, said that he participated in the public process that created the original/existing zoning, about 30 years ago, and that it was done in good faith with lots of public input, creating a buffer zone of single family homes adjacent to Prospect, and higher density 3-story apartments south of the homes and some commercial development along Expo Parkway. There's nothing wrong with the existing zoning.

Individual comments - via Engage Missoula or by mail or email - are very important this time around. Also watch for links to the iPetition on the FOGC website.

RT asked for comments from those in attendance, and all who spoke, spoke in support of the existing zoning. RT asked for a show of hands for supporting the existing zoning, and it was unanimous in both the in-person and zoom audience.

Meeting was adjourned around 8:45 pm.

FOGC Secretary, Kim Birck