

CONVERSATION WITH THE MAYOR

June 4, 2022

Courtesy of member Sarah Sharp

This morning, Mayor Joan Peck and Mayor Pro Tem Aren Rodriguez held a public meeting to discuss housing issues. To open the meeting, Mayor Peck announced that NO GROWTH was not an option. The concept has been tried elsewhere in places like Aspen and Boulder where it was learned that NO GROWTH shrinks the tax base to an unacceptable level.

Peck is frequently asked, “Why so many apartments?” According to Peck, people who have houses want apartment building to stop. People without housing, who want to live in Longmont, want apartment building to continue.

Longmont City Council uses HUD’s definition for “affordable housing” [generally defined as housing on which the occupant is paying no more than 30 percent of gross income for housing.] In Longmont, the Housing Authority builds most of affordable housing. The term “attainable housing” is used for people who require housing but do not meet the HUD income requirements. There are numerous reasons why attainable housing may not be available to people other than income including debt to income ratio and credit score. Currently it is difficult to build a house for less than \$400,000 to \$450,000. Land is the biggest cost. Many owners want to sell and don’t want the hassle of developing the property so they sell to a developer which makes buying the property more expensive. It was emphasized that Longmont City Council is not to blame for the cost of housing.

Since 2009 growth in Longmont has been about 1% per year. Currently there are request for permits to build about 382 multi-family dwelling, 44 single units, and 555 townhouses.

A member of the public relayed that COVID had exacerbated the housing problem as people stayed put which tightened availability of units. Employment in the city had increased. Supply and demand were currently not in balance and there is a deficit of about 2550 units. [The City estimates a shortage of 2,900 affordable housing units based on goals outlines in the regional plan.] The problem is there are lots of people who work in Longmont who cannot afford to live here. These people usually don’t meet the HUD requirement for affordable housing as they have incomes above the HUD requirement but are still in need of affordable housing.

There is a limited amount of land available for housing. Since 1995, the amount of land available for building has been reduced. One reason is that Boulder County has purchased several parcels along Hwy. 66. Area North of Hwy. 66 and East of Walmart is also limited. Some of the areas that are available are not suitable for building due to topography issues, water quality, storm water, and contamination. The City tries to start conversations with people who own available land. Nine acres was set aside for affordable housing in the COSTCO project. The cost of land was about \$166,000 per acre.

The City cannot deal with the affordable housing issue without growth. Density is an issue. Things the City is looking at is reducing the size requirement for lot size. Currently 50 feet is needed for affordable housing but some other localities are getting the size down to 40 feet. One way this has been done is to move the two car garage from the side of a house to the back of the house. Putting alleys in place can

make it possible to narrow streets to save space. Height is also an issue. With so many Longmont workers living outside the City, traffic is a big issue and talks are being held with existing transit providers. Placement of growth is an issue as there is a need to avoid creating “food desert,” where food is not readily assessable to the people who live in an area.

Twenty years ago, 80% of City workers resided in the City. Today, the figure is 43%. There has also been a need to increase salaries to cover the increase in housing costs.

The City is looking at ways to deal with the housing issues including changing codes to meet today’s reality. This includes shrinking lot size requirements. Landscaping requirements also need to be modified as requiring turf and irrigations systems may no longer be valid given concerns about water supply. Existing HOA requirements may be a problem.

A resident who has a home in Old Town voiced frustration about barriers to building an AUD for her mother with Alzheimer’s (AUDs are assessor dwelling (a second unit, or a granny flat) on same grounds (or attached to) a regular single family house.) The family had already spent \$20,000 due to supply chain issues and wildfires that had driven up costs).

Currently, in Longmont, if an AUD is allowed, the owner must live in the primary house on the property or in the assessor unit. A big concern is how many units can be allowed before the neighborhood becomes a commercial neighborhood. People in Longmont are concerned that the “Longmont feeling” will be lost if too many units are allowed. There are some density caps in place. The feelings of existing residents in an area must also be considered.

There is no doubt that the cost of housing is going up due to land costs, construction/supply chain issues, and insurance costs. People should look to the Prairie Village Development as the development contains large lots, small lots, affordable housing, and rental units. People should also look around the City to see where building are higher, such as the building at the corner of 17th and main. The building does not seem to be causing any problem due to height. The City is looking to put a “Quality of Life” initiative on the ballet but not this year. The initiative would create a pool of money that would then be distributed between entities such as the library, museums, parks, etc. The City wants to create pools of money but time is now an issue. The City does not have 40 years to grow the pool. The COSTCO project is an example of the City’s use of a pool of money.

