

To: COBI City Council
COBI Planning Commission
COBI City Manager

Re: Equitable housing not affordable housing

Affordable housing has been a "hot topic" for some time on Bainbridge Island and in other cities as well. To be clear, most all of us would agree that having a diverse island population with a range of incomes, cultures, ages (children to senior citizens) and work force types is absolutely vital for Bainbridge Island at an affordable price. This would ensure that our island is interesting, vibrant, and an enjoyable place to live. Therefore we should all support housing initiatives that promote these goals.

However during our recent public discussions our zeal for affordable housing has overshadowed the need for environmental justice. I would hope that we all agree that everyone deserves the same housing amenities, resources, and opportunities regardless of need. Equitable design ensures access to nature, a safe and secure home suitable for raising children, in an environment that is free of unwanted noise pollution, that is walkable and stimulating.

Keeping this goal in mind I would like to jumpstart this conversation by suggesting we talk about "equitable housing" rather than the politically charged term "affordable housing". Ask yourself the following questions:

1. would you like to live by SR 305 with only a 25 ft buffer
2. Would you like your home where your children live to be placed inside a commercial development, with all it's noise, lighting, traffic, truck deliveries and safety issues
3. Would you like your ONLY access to your home be available through a bank parking lot, Virginia Mason parking or the truck delivery area and drive-up window behind Walgreens Drug Store?
4. Would you like to live in a house that is only 12 feet wide with no side windows - only front and rear doors/windows
5. Would you like to live in a home with a bathroom so small that should you become disabled in the future you could not remodel it for a wheelchair, nor have room for an elevator that in any event you would have to pay for?

I would guess that most of you would not want to live in a development with these problems and deficiencies. Yet these site plan and building deficiencies in the Wintergreen housing project above (among many other deficiencies) have been identified by the Design Review Board in their 44 page worksheet available to the

Planning Commission. This worksheet and analysis is based on the 23 design standards adopted by COBI which describe the quality of development wanted by the City.

At the last Planning Commission meeting more than one commissioner said that affordable housing is SO important that these site plan deficiencies would be acceptable and could be overlooked and dismissed. Furthermore, the Wintergreen applicant (and others in favor of affordable housing) have publicly argued that if you are for quality housing, you must somehow be against affordable housing and therefore you are a Bainbridge Island elitist. In effect, this attitude is saying that it is OK for "those people" (low-income people) to live in "that kind of housing" in "that location". Nothing speaks more of elitism than this statement. History will tell you that this type of shameful thinking is why we have ghettos in cities across America. Let's take this opportunity to move beyond this old and tired way of thinking about housing. Portland and Seattle are leaders in the movement towards equitable housing. The city should hire a housing expert to research and bring forward innovative equitable housing ideas that are inclusive. This is a much better approach than to lower our standards just to say we support affordable housing.

Lastly, the DRB has recently reviewed and is very supportive of a housing project being proposed at Wyatt and Madison that includes several designated "affordable housing units". DRB is supportive of this project because the units are equitable and indistinguishable from other housing units in this proposal and provide the same amenities to all units. The City should base all future housing projects on this exemplary housing project.

I very much look forward to working with you to build equitable housing, not just affordable housing.

Joe Dunstan
Chair, Design Review Board