Submitted Aug. 12, 2013
Council meeting

KITTITAS COUNTY CHAMBER of COMMERCE

Dear Council Members,

Since I was unable to attend the Council meeting on July 29th I would like to clarify my previous letter with some additional remarks.

Although the majority of the code is fine there are elements that need consideration and input from those who will be directly affected. The question to ask is why these elements were added to the code and will they accomplish what was intended without negative unintended consequences. In my initial letter I mentioned some minor suggested changes to the definitions in Article 1, General Provisions. These were made based on interactions with businesses over the past few years and I feel the changes will provide clarity. The more substantial issues can be broken down into the following 7 points.

1. Article 2 Permits, Legislative Action and Procedures, 15.210.050. A Hearings Examiner should be used as the decision maker for zoning changes, conditional use permits and other land use issues (type III & IV). Hearings examiners are land use professionals that base decisions on the code and findings of fact, ensuring a dispassionate application of the law. An appeal to City Council in a closed hearing assures the right to challenge a finding while again allowing for a decision based on law and fact.

2. Article 3 Zoning, 15.310.040 Non-Residential Uses. Office buildings should be allowed as a permitted use in the C-T zone, and in the I-L zone without condition. If Ellensburg is to establish itself again as a venue for conventions and conferences then the City must allow more flexibility in the type of uses that are clustered together. Trying to force office into the CC or CC-II zone by restricting or conditioning it in other zones hasn't worked in the past and will not in the future. Modern offices base location decisions on the needs of their customers, which means space for the building, landscaping and but especially for parking. This more than anything inhibits office development in the Central Commercial districts. If the intent is to encourage offices there, the only successful approach is to ease parking and design review disincentives in that district.

3. Article 3 Zoning Districts and Land Uses, 15.320.030. The minimum density for dwelling units in the R-S and R-L zones should be 4 D/U per acre. The average home buyer in Ellensburg has different expectations than a home buyer in Seattle, Portland or Tacoma. Local consumers are looking for a modest one story home on a 7,000 to 10,000 sq. ft. lot. Once streets, curb, gutter and sidewalks are put in there is not enough land left to put 6 dwelling units on an acre. Again, this is market driven and cannot be forced. The developers and builders must be able to provide a product that consumers will purchase or they won't invest. The end result will be driving consumers outside of the city, either creating sprawl in the county or sending housing to another community.

4. Article 3 Zoning Districts and Land Uses, 15.330.030 and 15.320.070 Ellensburg's annual precipitation is less than 1/3 of Western Washington's. With the storm water retention that is already required there is no need for additional restrictions for floor area ratios (FAR) or impervious surfaces. Although the intent is good the implementation will have a negative

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impact especially on infill and medium density projects. For example there is a 10 unit infill project on Helena that is a good project and appropriate for the area with apartments to the east and single family residents to the west. Because of the shape of the available land this project could not meet the new standards and would not be built. This lot would remain an empty lot instead of 10 affordably priced rental units. This is just one example of how the end result will be counterproductive and discourage higher density housing.

5. Article 5 Project Design, 15.540.050. Accomplishing the City's goal of developing higher density and affordable residential units means allowing for private roads in Cluster Communities/PUD's, with access and standards for fire and emergency services. Prohibiting private roads will prevent this attractive form of housing from being developed.

6. Article 5 Project Design, 15.550.030 Computation of Required Off-Street Parking Spaces. While being a bike-friendly community is a commendable goal, proposed bike rack requirements are too strict, especially with regard to hotels and motels.

7. Article 2 Landmarks and Design 15.280.050. Only require design review in the CC and CCII zones. There is sufficient clarity in the new codes to allow for staff to determine whether design criteria have been met.

Because of the impact of the above actions on the community, and the fact that the final draft was only released July 5th, we are requesting a roundtable study session to discuss these recommendations and their impacts on our community with the City Council and their consultant.

In closing I would like to commend the Council for its consistent support of intelligent economic development for Ellensburg. As to why this is important, consider the economic impact of a new 10,000 sq. ft. professional office building. The direct output effect (the immediate impact) is $2.55 million, and when combined with the indirect and induced effect the total output is $3.7 million. The direct employment is 26 employees with labor income of $1.1 million, with a combined (multiplier) effect of 37 employees and wages of $1.5 million. Driving those impressive benefits elsewhere makes no sense. (Statistics are from Hebert Research Inc.).

Sincerely,

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Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce

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