7500 Manastash Road
Ellensburg, WA 98926
August 31, 2013

Ellensburg City Council
501 North Anderson
Ellensburg, WA 98926

Dear Council members:

As a member of both the 2008 Nonmotorized Transportation Plan Committee and the 2009-2010 Nonmotorized Transportation Code Committee, I have been involved with this issue for many years and am familiar with the research related to what has worked in other cities to create pedestrian and bicycle friendly communities. Chapter 4 of the Land Use Development Code Final Draft incorporates many of the recommendations made by our code committee as well as input from the Planning Commission, the public, city staff, and consultants. It has been thoroughly researched and reviewed over a period of five years, and I encourage you to vote to approve this section as it is written.

I would like to explain the rationale for the proposals as they relate to the issues on the agenda for Chapter 4:

<u>Reduced lane width on local streets</u>

- Narrower streets are safer. Studies indicate that street width is the single factor most closely related to accident rate on residential streets. As the street width increases, accident rates per mile increase exponentially, because narrower streets slow traffic regardless of speed limits. The chances of a pedestrian surviving a traffic collision are 95% at 20 mph, 60% at 30 mph, and 10% at 40 mph. The Final Draft recommends a system with three possible street widths (20, 24, and 30-feet) for local access roads, providing flexibility for development and enhanced safety for both drivers and walkers.
- In addition to improving safety, narrower streets provide a more amenable walking environment due to reduced traffic speeds, smaller expanses of pavement to radiate heat, decreases in distances crossing streets, and a more close-in neighborhood feel. (Compare the experience of walking in the historic district with walking in some of the newer developments near Mt. Stuart.)
- Narrow streets are less expensive to build and maintain.
- The specific street width/parking configurations in the proposal have been tested in multiple communities, large and small, all over the country, including many communities in Washington and Oregon. The trend throughout the country is towards more narrow streets, not fewer, and Ellensburg would become a safer, more livable community by embracing this change.

ROW width/planting strips

- Planting strips provide a buffer between pedestrians and traffic, resulting in a safer and more appealing pedestrian environment. When a sidewalk is built adjacent to the curb, pedestrians must walk next to the street, compromising the safety of children, people with disabilities, and the elderly in particular. Walking next to a planting strip is a much safer and more pleasant experience, as pedestrians are set back from traffic noise and cars splashing and creating slush puddles, and children or others cannot fall or step into moving traffic. The proposal to require planting strips on all streets is critical to providing a safe, enjoyable walking environment for everyone, and this goal should not be sacrificed to avoid widening the ROW (my understanding is that utility corridors are rarely disturbed) or pursing other options for utility placement, such as under sidewalks or in alleys.
- Planting strips also provide a drainage area to reduce runoff, a place to locate mailboxes, signs, etc. out of the walkway (an important consideration for people using wheelchairs), and a space to plant street trees to shade the street. The size of the planting strip dictates the size of the tree that can be planted there. Thus the Final Draft recommends ten-foot planting strips, required for planting large shade trees. If the size of the planting strip is reduced, only medium to small trees could be planted there, eliminating the option of creating streetscapes featuring large trees shading most of the street and sidewalk.
- Although not specified in the Final Draft, I believe the intent of the committee was that planting strips should be ***planted***, with maintenance required by property owners or homeowners' associations. To assist owners, the city of Ellensburg has a street tree program and has partnered with Master Gardeners to provide an informational brochure about xeriscaping options.

Rolled vs. vertical curb:

- Driving and parking areas are more well-defined in areas with vertical curbs. Since rolled curbs are easily mountable by cars, some drivers park their cars and other vehicles partly on the sidewalk, blocking pedestrian access. According to Public Works, this is already a problem in areas of Ellensburg with rolled curbs and the problem will increase if this option continues to be allowed in new developments. Rolled curbs almost invite some people to "plant" their cars on the planting strips.
- Rolled curbs provide additional challenges for people using wheelchairs due to difficulties negotiating the curb at the driveway/street interface. Vertical curbs with the typical cuts for driveways are less steep at that interface and make it much easier or even possible for people using wheelchairs to go from the street to the driveway.
- Vertical curbs provide an extra safety margin as a barrier between pedestrians and motor vehicles, as emphasized by Kittitas Valley Fire and Rescue Chief John Sinclair. Rolled curbs are easy to roll down, making them particularly hazardous

for children on tricycles or other wheeled vehicles. They are also easier to roll up for cars driven by distracted or impaired drivers. Pedestrians are especially vulnerable in areas that combine rolled curbs with adjacent sidewalks, a situation that approval of the Final Draft would correct for new development.

None of these changes are revolutionary. Planting strips, narrower streets, vertical curbs, connectivity among neighborhoods, and street-facing housing on arterials are common in newer and older neighborhoods throughout the country. Objections about increased costs to builders are short-sighted. We need to take the long view. Providing a more livable, walkable, and aesthetically-pleasing community with safe streets and neighborhoods will increase property values and attract businesses. Studies indicate that projects in pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods command higher prices because buyers are willing to pay a premium to live there, providing more return on investment and generating more revenue for local governments, and that making a city more pedestrian and bicycle friendly often spurs development.* The proposals included in Chapter 4 of the Land Use Development Code Final Draft would provide these benefits and more to the Ellensburg community. Please vote to accept them.

Sincerely,

Karen Raymond

*See US Environmental Protection Agency's December 2012 report titled "Smart Growth and Economic Success: Benefits for Real Estate Developers, Businesses, Investors, and Local Governments" and "New Urbanism: Comprehensive Report, 2006."