

To the Planning Board and City Councilors:

I am writing to oppose the rezoning request for 2920 Expo Parkway. I am in favor of the existing zoning, which would allow approximately 500 homes of the types of housing that are in greatest demand in Missoula at this point in time.

The new proposal put forth by KJA for RM I-45 zoning on both parcels looks pretty much like the last proposal, but with a Development Agreement of questionable legality and enforceability. Aside from limiting the number of apartments to 700, and offering some amenities to his tenants, the new proposal does nothing to address the concerns that had both the Consolidated Planning Board and the City Council voting against it in 2020.

Public safety was the number one concern then, and it has not been addressed in the new proposal. There is no commitment on the part of the developer to contribute toward improvements to infrastructure that is clearly insufficient to accommodate an additional 700 vehicle-dependent dwelling units in a valley that now has only 635 occupied residences. The very existence of a 700-unit apartment complex at the pinch point that is the I-90/US 93/Reserve Street intersection is not just a headache for commuters, but could be a life-threatening bottleneck during a wildland-urban interface wildfire, when all of Grant Creek might need to be evacuated in a hurry. Recent destructive fires in Colorado, California and Denton, Montana, have shown how much more severe fire seasons have become in recent years. Grass fires throwing ember showers present risks even to apartment-dwellers living far from the forests of middle and upper Grant Creek. And the fire danger is only increasing with ongoing climate change.

If Mr. Ault wanted to be a good neighbor, he would seek to be part of the solution by offering to help with needed infrastructure. He could finance crosswalks across Grant Creek Road at both Expo Parkway and Stonebridge Road, petition into the transit district, pay toward dedicated turn lanes into and out of the entrance roads to his Grant Creek Village, and perhaps even contribute to the traffic signal or roundabout that will be needed at Expo Parkway to prevent accidents caused by too many drivers trying to be in the same place at the same time. He would also be committing to preserving options for future additional egress routes out of lower Grant Creek, including connections to Airway Boulevard (and the Wheeler Tunnel) via Old Indian Trail, as well as an emergency route out of the Prospect subdivisions.

Other pieces of infrastructure that need improving are the Northbound lanes of Grant Creek Road, with a confusing lane reduction, a double left turn lane, and too many entrances and exits from commercial properties east of the road. As traffic waiting to turn left into Expo Parkway backs up, traffic trying to turn south from the commercial properties will be stymied. Accidents are already increasing every year in this stretch of road. It will only get worse with a 700-unit apartment village.

No one in Grant Creek has argued that NOTHING should be built on the old gravel pit. It is clearly a good site for some housing, and Missoula needs housing. Especially the “missing middle.” Zoning maps since the 80’s have suggested some development there. Most of us are supporting existing zoning that would increase Grant Creek’s housing by almost 80%. **Approving KJA’s request to increase by 110% (or more) would be the equivalent of throwing in an entire Villagio complex on top of existing zoning.**

Unless and until there is a plan for building the infrastructure needed to preserve public safety, I cannot get behind this rezoning proposal, and hope that our city officials will not force it upon the present and future citizens of Grant Creek. Please vote No on the KJA rezoning request. Thank you. Kim Birck