

Dear Councilperson Vasecka,

I'm writing to urge you to once again deny the rezoning application for 2920 Expo Parkway. Since their 2020 rezone application was denied by the Consolidated Planning Board, the Land Use and Planning Committee, and the City Council, the developer is applying for the same rezoning without making any significant, legally binding changes that would satisfy the sound reasoning provided for all three denials. Most recently, 2920 Expo Pkwy developer's rezone application was again denied by the Consolidated Planning Board.

When does "no" mean "no", especially when the ask really has not changed and the reasons given for each denial have not been (or cannot be) addressed? The existing zoning went through public process and was agreed upon with community input. How can trust in the city's planning process be maintained when that work is negated because a developer wants to make more money? This issue is about zoning planning, policy and public process. There are three other undeveloped sites on Expo Pkwy currently zoned for commercial use. Potentially all three lots could be hotels adding 200-300 more rooms, unless, of course, the developers of these lots ask for a rezone to increase building sizes, heights and use. What precedence would be set if this rezone was approved?

When the current zoning was developed, approved and put into place, those involved had the benefit of time and were not pressured by an unpredictable housing cycle and extreme market fluctuation. They understood the capacity of the location and they set the zoning considering the existing conditions in and around the old gravel pit at 2920 Expo Pkwy. Those conditions still exist today.

The direct impact of increased traffic from not only the subject property but also from development of future commercial sites and seasonal tourism cannot be adequately remediated because of the geographical constraints at the mouth of the Grant Creek canyon. The transportation infrastructure capacity simply cannot be expanded to handle the additional vehicle loads. Additionally, Grant Creek Rd. itself has no shoulder nor room for any; it winds tightly between the creek and hillside; and regularly vegetation falls and blocks the road.

The recent improvements in the transportation infrastructure at Grant Creek Rd. and I-90 – more than two decades in the waiting – helped alleviate traffic congestion for the current population of Grant Creek before any construction took place at 2920 Expo Pkwy. With the significant volume increase, these recent improvements will be rendered inadequate. Not only does the developer's traffic study fall short of the City of Missoula's requirements, it also ignores the fact that there is potential future development that comes with even more traffic.

The wildfire risk and lack of an evacuation plan both remain a major concern of all neighborhood residents and businesses in the valley. Other cities that lie within areas of potential extreme weather or natural disasters have an established evacuation plan and perform regular evacuation drills. Tsunamis are not regular occurrences along the Washington and Oregon coast, yet all their beach cities have evacuation plans. In recent years, wildfires have become more unpredictable and frequent in our area. Potentially tripling a neighborhood's population at the bottleneck of the only ingress/egress in a wildfire prone area puts many more residents and visitors at risk. It is your responsibility to do everything in your power to keep your constituents, friends, neighbors and visitors safe.

It is abundantly clear that Missoula – along with many other cities in the US – is experiencing an affordable housing shortage. And it has been made clear that every neighborhood in Missoula should be doing their part to help alleviate this burden. The neighborhood of Grant Creek is doing its part with the existing zoning that allows for over 500 residential units – almost doubling the existing population without the proper infrastructure and services in place or even plans for it.

While Grant Creek is doing their part, the developer of 2920 Expo Parkway is not. To be affordable or attainable for Missoula's population, a few things need to happen:

1. Affordable/Attainable – the 2920 Expo Parkway apartments are market-rate with no plans to be affordable. As a matter of fact, the lease rates have increased for these apartments since the original rezone application.
2. Public Transportation – to live at 2920 Expo Pkwy, residents must own a vehicle and afford the registration, insurance and fuel. There is no public transportation; there is no safe form of multi-modal transportation south of I-90; and the most recent Long Range Transportation Plan shows no plan to expand bus service nor a safe non-motorized connection into Grant Creek. There is also a missed opportunity to extend the Grant Creek Trail to keep trail users off busy streets and away from busy intersections.
3. Essential Services that are easily accessible are an important quality-of-life factor for the residents living in affordable housing. Other than a convenience store, all other essential needs are reached via private vehicle from the Grant Creek neighborhood.

Approving a drastic increase in residential development before providing adequate, necessary transportation infrastructure and/or accessible essential services has an adverse impact on current and future residents.

Please acknowledge that Grant Creek – one of your city's neighborhoods – is doing their part to address a need for housing by adding over 500 residential units that effectively double its population without proper infrastructure or services. And please consider the wider picture that thousands of residential units are currently being built throughout Missoula and have been planned to address its increasing population. Additionally, developments like 2920 Expo Pkwy of only multi-plex apartments and no mixed housing do not meet the missing middle of Missoula's housing needs.

Please recognize that the current zoning with its increase in population is still putting your residents, neighbors and friends at great risk and potential harm without a proper natural disaster plan in place. Increasing a neighborhood's population at its bottleneck with a rezone would be irresponsible.

Please respect that the previous city representatives were thoughtful when they zoned this area that has basically gone unchanged since – no public transportation; no safe, nonmotorized transportation; no accessible essential services; and only one egress-ingress in a wildfire risk area – and vote to deny the rezone application for 2920 Expo Pkwy.

Sincere thanks for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Karen Sippy