



CITY OF KIRKLAND

Planning and Community Development Department
123 Fifth Avenue, Kirkland, WA 98033 425.587.3225
www.ci.kirkland.wa.us

MEMORANDUM

To: David Ramsay, City Manager

From: Eric Shields, Planning Director

Date: September 6, 2007

Subject: LETTER FROM MELINDA BRONSDON

RECOMMENDATION

Authorize the mayor to sign the proposed letter to Melinda Bronsdon.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION

Ms. Bronsdon's letter to the Council expresses concern about the amount of new house construction in Kirkland and the size of new houses.

September 1, 2007

Mayor James L. Lauinger
David Ramsay, City Manager
City Council of Kirkland
Kirkland Planning Commission

Dear Sir:

I am sincerely concerned about the trend in Kirkland to build mega-mansions on mini lots. We value ample lots and yards where children can play. The area was platted to provide large yards with space for children, pets and gardens, and to preserve the trees for which Kirkland has been known. Although Kirkland is also known for its parks, they do not substitute for the privacy and safety of a home yard. The property at the northeast corner of 122nd Avenue NE and NE 64th Street is a good example of a perfectly good home on a generous lot now being proposed for development of 2 homes.

I live in the Bridle Trails area and frequently travel through the Rose Hill and Houghton neighborhoods. It becomes apparent that homeowners expect to sell their homes for the value in the land only so they allow the structures to deteriorate, often as a rental property, expecting to sell to a developer who will combine several large lots and subdivide to build multiple homes. The yard is no longer maintained and the neighborhood begins to look tacky. Smaller homes are dwarfed by these huge new houses. Single family homes that once covered only a small portion of each lot are forced out. The city is effectively destroying neighborhoods that once provided affordable housing for families and neighborhoods with diverse populations of various income and age levels.

The high density of these new homes makes it impossible to have much yard or to plant large trees. There is no longer shade or a green canopy from large trees. What space is left between the mega-mansions is paved over. Temperatures in the city increase 5 degrees or more from the lack of shade and heat absorption by the paving. Without trees, you increase the amount of storm water runoff the city must manage. There is no longer a tree cover to remove particulate matter from the air or to absorb carbon dioxide.

These new mega-mansions are not affordable housing. They are forcing the cost of living in Kirkland to spiral out of control. I have lived in Kirkland for 40 years and I would like to think I could afford to retire to a smaller house or housing here but I fear there will be no smaller houses or affordable homes left in the city. This will be a sad day when our neighborhoods are no longer diversified and no longer include all ages and types of families.

The mega-mansion neighborhoods have little off-street parking except in the garages of the owners. There is no parking for visitors on the lanes, places, courts,

drives, and other narrow access roads provided in these new high-density neighborhoods. In many places there is no parking on the adjacent arterials either. Note the developments along NE 70th Street.

How are citizens and public services like the fire and police departments going to find an address in the maze of little streets and alleys installed in these subdivided lots? No longer do you have a simple grid with streets and avenues. Now you have multiple little roads, courts, alleys, lanes, places and driveways within each square block. It is a nightmare to find an address and will ultimately slow down response times as well as confuse citizens trying to locate an address.

Expect increased demand for public services, use of roads, and school enrollment from the high-density living created by these new neighborhoods. Are we ready to provide these services? Can we afford it? What will happen to our taxes to support this? I will be taxed out of my neighborhood by these demands.

Can you give me any good reason why Kirkland is required to provide new homes by increasing housing density? Why can't development stop when all building lots are used? Who determines that we must replat to build more houses?

I urge you to stop and take stock of the mess you are creating in our beautiful city by these zoning practices which allow excessive subdivision and high-density housing on small lots. Stop supporting greedy contractors and real estate brokers and think of ordinary families and homeowners who want to enjoy a home with a yard and a healthy environment for growing children and clean living. It's time to stop this building frenzy and restore and preserve conventional homes with yards where children can play. It is good for their health. Please adjust your zoning practices to save our neighborhoods and quality of life in Kirkland.

A very concerned citizen,

Melinda Bronsdon
12229 NE 64th Street
Kirkland, WA 98033
425-827-5708

September 18, 2007

DRAFT

Melinda Bronsdon
12229 NE 64th Street
Kirkland, WA 98033

RE: Your letter of September 1, 2007

Dear Ms. Bronsdon:

Thank you for your letter expressing concerns about the amount of new home construction in Kirkland and the size of new homes. The City Council has heard similar concerns from many people. As summarized below, we expect the rate of housing growth to continue. However, the City has and will continue to address concerns about house size.

There are several factors that have contributed to the amount of new home construction in recent years. Most significantly, the Seattle area has benefited from a strong economy, adding many high paying jobs. This has fueled population growth, increased the demand for housing and raised property values. Because Kirkland is located close to large job centers in Bellevue and Redmond and is known for its exceptional neighborhoods, land in Kirkland may be particularly sought after for new housing. Most of the new homes in Kirkland are built either by tearing down smaller older homes or by dividing larger lots into smaller lots consistent with zoning patterns that have been in place for many years.

These factors are expected to continue into the foreseeable future, as the Puget Sound Regional Council has projected a population increase of 1.6 million people in the Seattle metropolitan area by 2040. That's the equivalent of nearly 50,000 people (about the size of the City of Kirkland) per year. Regional growth plans call for most new development to be located in existing cities to minimize the outward sprawl into rural areas. Each city is assigned a growth target and expected to accommodate a fair share of future growth. This means that Kirkland does not really have the choice to down-zone significant portions of the City without up-zoning other areas.

Although the City needs to accommodate housing growth, we do have considerable discretion in regulating the size of houses. Until recently, house size was primarily controlled by three regulations: maximum building height, required setbacks and maximum lot coverage. Beginning in the mid 1990s, the size of houses constructed in Kirkland began to significantly increase, often pushing the limits of height, setback and lot coverage regulations. Responding to concerns that new houses were out of scale with neighborhoods, the City adopted additional regulations in the late 1990s. The new regulations established a maximum floor area for houses based on lot area (FAR) and regulations for front porches and garages to moderate the appearance of houses from the street. In 2005, the City adopted more restrictive regulations on tree cutting.

Last year, the City again reviewed house size regulations and made several adjustments, including lowering the maximum FAR in certain instances, and reducing elements that are allowed to extend into side yards. During the review process we heard from citizens with diverse and strongly held opinions, many wanting greater limits on the size of houses and many opposing further restrictions.

Other efforts relating to housing are now in progress or scheduled in the near future, including:

- The Planning Commission is now in the process of recommending regulations to allow smaller “cottage” housing as an alternative to large single family houses.
- The Planning Commission is also reviewing the regulations governing the placement of garages on the front facades of houses.
- In 2008, we will again be reviewing tree cutting regulations.

Thank you again for expressing your concerns. The issues you raise are important to all Kirklanders. The City Council will continue to monitor these issues and periodically review and adjust our development regulations as appropriate. If you would like more information about City regulations, please contact Planning Director Eric Shields at eshields@ci.kirkland.wa.us or 425-587-3226.

Sincerely
KIRKLAND CITY COUNCIL

by: James Lauinger, Mayor

cc: Kirkland Planning Commission