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Ellensburg, WA 98926

July 27, 2006

Community Development Services
411 N. Ruby St, Suite 2
Ellensburg, WA 98926

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Kittitas County
CDS

RE: The Grove PUD
Attn: Kittitas County Planning Commission

Dear Members of the Planning Commission:

Thank you for extending the written public comment period on The Grove PUD application, following your July 25 meeting. There were several points that arose during that meeting that we wish to address. In particular, there are several assumptions in the Traffic Impact Analysis for The Grove that are highly questionable, leading to an understatement of transportation impacts from the complex.

The Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) performed by Sunburst Engineering includes several dubious or misinformed assumptions, leading to a significant understatement of the likely transportation impacts from Grove residents.

- The TIA makes use of p.m. peak hour traffic counts, and uses these numbers to determine the likely level of service at the 18th/Walnut and 14th/"D" Street intersections with the project. This is extremely misleading, as students don't travel during the evening peak hour. There are presently regular traffic delays stemming from student traffic at 8 a.m., 9 a.m., 10 a.m., and noon; rarely are there delays at 5 p.m.
- Students have highly punctuated travel patterns. They predominately drive 10-15 minutes prior to classes, and return 10-15 minutes following their final class of the day. Examination of average trip data is therefore deceiving; for the purposes of determining traffic delays and density, a disproportionate share of traffic occurs over the span of very short, regularly spaced intervals. Along these same lines, trip generation data from apartment complexes does not correspond to trip generation data from student dormitories.
- On page 3 of the TIA it is stated that "Airport Road links The Grove to *the center of CWU* approximately one half mile south of The Grove," emphasis added. By our measurements, it is almost precisely 0.50 miles from the SW corner of the Wolfe property to the corner of 18th Street and Airport Road. The distance from The Grove driveway on Airport Road is further. More importantly, by our measurements it is 0.80 miles from the SW corner of the Wolfe property to the corner of Walnut Street and Dean Nicholson Road – the site of the closest academic buildings on the main CWU campus.
- Continuing the above point, if one assumes that pedestrians average twenty-minute miles, it is a sixteen minute walk from the SW corner of The Grove – not the site of the driveway – to the nearest academic facility. It is significantly further to other academic buildings.
- Pedestrian/bicycle traffic is assumed to be the preferred method of transportation for residents of The Grove, especially for trips to/from CWU. This is, unfortunately, a very misguided assumption, despite the fact that it is often faster to walk/bicycle than to drive. In the winter, in particular, a minority of students travel by non-vehicular means to campus. While this study is far from scientific, I (Charles) surveyed students from the course I am teaching at CWU, inquiring as to their driving habits. Of the 13 respondents who are full-time CWU students and who live near campus, one almost exclusively used non-vehicular means to travel to CWU,

while two others walked ‘sometimes.’ Two students indicated that they drove to CWU from distances of less than 0.5 miles.

- The TIA assumes that, after driving south to the intersection of “D” Street and 14th Street, a “nearly identical” number of vehicles continued west on 14th St. and south on “D” Street. This is a deeply flawed assumption; a preponderance of the traffic continues south along “D” Street.
- The TIA does not address the Airport Rd./Helena Rd. intersection. Turning left from Helena onto Airport is presently a dangerous proposition, at times, and will only become more dangerous with increased traffic on Airport Rd. Note that many students coming from Water St. back to The Grove will be turning left at this intersection.
- Perhaps most significantly, the TIA disregards the impact that increased pedestrian and bicycle traffic will have on traffic flows. Bicycles will need to turn left from The Grove onto Airport Rd; they also slow down vehicles turning right from southbound Airport Rd. onto 18th St. Shortly before and after class time – the same time many students will be driving – pedestrians greatly slow traffic flow at the 18th/Airport intersection, and to a lesser degree at the 14th and “D” intersection. The Grove will presumably increase the volume of southbound student pedestrian/bicycle traffic along Airport Rd., and therefore these pedestrian delays will be greater than at present.

Second, The Grove is to be a “192-unit *student housing complex*,” emphasis added. That is, it is a private dormitory. The applicant further states that their proposal “is compatible with other student housing in the area.” There is, however, no dedicated student housing in the vicinity. Multi-family apartment complexes to the south of the property are not restricted to students and, in fact, contain a large number of predominately low-income non-student residents. Moreover, it is unlikely that dedicated student housing will be constructed in the vicinity, as nearby sites are not consistent with the CWU Master Plan. Among other things, CWU prides itself on being a compact residential campus, easily traversed by pedestrians and bicyclists. To maintain this condition, CWU has a “10-minute-rule” for siting of academic facilities, based on the time to walk from one building to another.¹ There are no buildings within a 10-minute walk of the proposed site. Consider the following description of the ‘Campus North’ Zone from the Master Plan – essentially the area between 14th and 18th Streets.

This zone includes significant undeveloped land. Therefore, this zone can be used in the short term for light uses, maintaining open space in the form of a land bank. The long term uses of these areas will vary according to distance from the campus core and future needs, recognizing that much of the zone is consistently outside of the “10-minute rule” core area.²

Granted, Campus Crest Development is a private entity, and not subject to CWU’s Master Plan, but you should question the merits of placing a college dormitory on the proposed site.

Third, the applicant states that the project will not alter or obstruct any views in the immediate vicinity. This is, frankly, absurd. While you are not in the business of ensuring that a few residents maintain their quality of life, consider the following. We reside immediately to the NNE of the proposed site. From our house, which is set back a considerable ways from the SW corner of our property, given the proposed building sites on the Wolfe property, any building exceeding 33 feet in height will completely obscure Manastash Ridge and the surrounding hills. From the SW corner of our lot, of course, significantly shorter buildings would obscure this viewshed.

¹ CWU Master Plan 2005, p. 13.

² Ibid., p. 59.

One of the required findings for a rezone is that “the proposed amendment will not be materially detrimental to the use of properties in the immediate vicinity of the subject property.” In addressing this point on the rezone application, the applicant states that: “The immediate properties on the south and east are currently owned by Central Washington University. Immediately south and east of those properties are multi-family, housing complexes.” The “immediate vicinity” apparently doesn’t include adjacent properties to the north or west (or, for that matter, properties across the field to the east), all of which are single family residences. If “materially detrimental” is confined to physical, rather than qualitative or monetary damage, then we concur that our property will most likely be unaffected. Adjacent property values will most likely decline, however, or at least appreciate much more slowly; quality of life for adjacent residents will almost certainly decline.

Finally, we urge you to verify that the proposed building density is consistent with the zoning recommended by the City of Ellensburg (i.e., Residential High for 250 deep from Airport Rd., with the balance Residential Low). Based on our calculations, which could very well be incorrect, 192 dwelling units exceeds the permitted density under the above zoning scheme unless PUD bonus density is permitted. This bonus density is in the City of Ellensburg municipal code, however, and presumably can only be granted through the City of Ellensburg.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter, and thank you again for the opportunity to comment!

Sincerely,



Charles S. Wassell, Jr.



Rebecca D.G. Wassell