

Commissioners share thoughts on major development

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

As they unanimously approved the Sisters Woodlands project at their December 1 hearing, Sisters Planning Commissioners each voiced their concerns, questions, support, and suggestions regarding the significant impact of developing a majority of the former U.S. Forest Service property bounded by Highway 20, Barclay Drive, and North Pine Street.

Besides the main concern of increased traffic from the development, it was obvious from their comments that each of the commissioners had spent time studying the impact of the Woodlands. (see related story on page 1).

Commissioner Scot Davidson said the community's strong opposition expressed at the previous hearing and in letters was hard to ignore. He pointed out that with increased growth in Sisters, it becomes a choice between increased density and an urban growth boundary expansion creating urban sprawl, both of which could impact the character and quality of life in Sisters.

Davidson said, "I believe in the developers' intent and

see how the development could possibly serve as a model for other areas experiencing growth like Sisters."

He placed the responsibility for positive managed growth on the desks of the Sisters City Council.

"The City Council has responsibility for growth... This kind of growth requires action by the City Council, looking at things like providing for non-motorized traffic and policies around affordable housing," he said.

Commissioner Tom Reis said he was "impressed with the number of trees being saved." He also liked the design concepts. He views the Woodlands as a "test case of higher density for the city." He is not in favor of urban sprawl. He had traffic access concerns, favoring a right in, right out only for the development to avoid traffic backups on Highway 20.

Reis also suggested that perhaps storage units for residents might be included in the planning, given the smaller sizes of the residences. He questioned how trash and recycling containers would be handled so they aren't all sitting beside buildings or on the street. He also favors designated bike

parking areas.

Commissioner Art Blumenkron stated that Sisters needs the housing the development provides. He also understands that current residents are not all in favor of growth that will impact their quality of life. However, he pointed out that the City must comply with state mandates regarding a 20-year supply of housing. He has concerns regarding the proposed crosswalk on Highway 20 causing traffic issues and would like to see better access for pedestrians and bicycles. He thinks a high-tech crosswalk for now is needed.

Commissioner Jack Nagel was most concerned with the impact on traffic, saying, "More houses mean more people mean more traffic." He believes that a bypass around Sisters is needed. For now, he would like to see a lower speed limit on Highway 20 between the Barclay roundabout and the downtown core.

"If they (the developers) live up to what they say, it might be alright." Nagel reluctantly favored the application, with conditions.

Vice chair Cris Converse shared many of the concerns of her fellow commissioners

— traffic impact, density of units, and provisions for crossing the highway. She also asked if the alternative of paying money into the City tree fund in lieu of planting trees could be eliminated — but that isn't possible with the provisions in the development code.

Chairperson Jeff Seymour told the hearing that the Woodlands Master Plan "is the most thorough and thoughtful I've seen in my time on the Planning Commission." He also lauded the staff review of the application as the most comprehensive he has seen. With 75 conditions of approval, the applicant has been held to a high standard compared to other builders. If the thoroughness of the master plan is any indication of how the project will be built out, Seymour said he is very optimistic

about the finished product.

Seymour visited another tourist town, Jackson Hole, Wyoming, recently and compared it to Sisters. He said they are ahead of Sisters in growth and development and provide a cautionary tale. Due to high home prices (\$2 million-plus), there is no workforce housing in town and service workers must commute from eastern Idaho over the Teton Pass to work. Restaurants and retail shops don't have enough employees to serve tourists.

"I would trade some density for what our service workers provide us," Seymour said. "I am excited about the Woodlands development."

At the conclusion of their deliberations, the commissioners voted 6-0 in favor of approving the Sisters Woodlands applications, with staff conditions.

TIME TO PUT ON
WINTER TIRES!

Call to make an appointment for
NO-WAIT SERVICE!

DAVIS TIRE

Serving Sisters Since 1962

541-549-1026

188 W. SISTERS PARK DR. IN SISTERS INDUSTRIAL PARK



BOUTIQUE STYLE DENTISTRY

“Dr. Gilmore is THE best! He and his staff take the time to have a genuine interest as you as a person and not just as a client. They are kind and attentive, asking questions to learn more about whatever the issue might be. They are quick to lend a hand or offer advice for the future success of your smile. They work quickly and offer a very professional office space. I couldn't recommend them highly enough!”

NO INSURANCE - NO PROBLEM
Healthy Mouth Membership - a plan for anyone!


GILMORE DENTAL



337 Google Reviews
