Is the city cramming in more housing in guise of livability, affordability?

Jim Gorter speaks to the Multnomah Neighborhood Association while vice-chair Leslie Hammond listens.
(Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

MULTNOMAH NOTEBOOK

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

Longtime Burlingame resident and activist Jim Gorter was the keynote speaker at the Multnomah Neighborhood Association meeting on April 10.

Gorter said that due to demolitions (and the resulting building of "mcmansions" happening throughout the city), former Mayor Charlie Hales ordered a review of housing redevelopments and created the Residential Infill Project in 2016.

Gorter represented Southwest neighborhoods on the Residential Infill Project Stakeholder Advisory Committee which included city staff, neighborhood association representatives, developers, and architects.

Gorter is a retired educator and served most of his career as the director of outdoor environmental education for a local agency.

"In the last few years," Gorter said, "the project has morphed into cramming in more housing and people in the guise of livability and affordability."

He said the city wanted to focus on "little picture" issues such as the number of stairs a new development could have or setback distances.

"They weren't concerned about the bigger picture issues like displacement, affordability, or infrastructure," he said. "An affordable house is the one that is already there.

"Since its inception," Gorter said, "the RIP has gone through several renditions. I am planning to attend two upcoming hearings in May. Public comments are open until May 15."

According to Gorter, the RIPSAC committee was disbanded a year ago without even a thank you. Gorter is now working with United Neighbors for Reform which is focused on asbestos and lead paint abatement when demolishing older properties.

"Rules have been made for that," he said, "but there is some concern about the definition of demolition."

UNR supports the reduced scale of houses, setbacks, and a reduced height to 35 feet. There are incentives for affordable housing and historic properties being kept but there continues to be no required parking.

Accessory dwelling units up to 800 square feet are allowed. One audience member who is pro-ADU and pro-middle housing asked what if these units become short-term rentals like Air BnB.

"I thought this was about providing housing options to youth, seniors, or other low-income residents and families," he said.

"We're not against ADUs or middle housing," Chair Martie Sucec said. "Forty-five percent of Multnomah is made up of apartments and town houses. What we *are* opposed to is the overlay adding even more housing such as duplexes and triplexes."

Another member said she would like to see a restraint on these rental units, yet another member said this could cause antagonism to neighbors, as it is their right to have additional income.

"The neighborhood association has already provided the city with areas where density could work in Multnomah," Sucec said. "Additional housing could be phased in over time."

Someone asked if middle housing options would bring affordable options.

"No, it is a sham," Sucec said.

A motion was made to limit ADUs in the area but due to by-laws, the motion could not be accepted.

"We can't pass a motion because it needs to allow adequate discussion to debate it," Sucec said.

The motion was withdrawn. Sucec said she would hold a town hall meeting on short-term rentals in the future.

The city has set up drop-in hours at the Hillsdale Library on May 3 from 4:30 – 6:30 p.m. for those who would like to meet with staff to answer questions about the Residential Infill Project.

Hearings begin at 5 p.m. on both May 8 and 15 at 1900 SW Fourth Ave., Rm. 2500. The Portland City Council will hear testimony in the fall.

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