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Subject: Gateway
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David,

I may have some disagreeable things to say here, about the Gateway Project and its inception, so I wanted to start out by saying that I personally think that you are the best planning department person that I have had the chance to work with, someone that I feel like I can ring up if I have a question or a problem with anything I am doing in the City. I think that the vision that is represented by the Gateway planning documents are a sincere view of where you and your department think the City needs to go to move into the future we see coming.

My apologies if my limited exposure to the details of the project cause me to make errors in my arguments. I plan to go to the open house next weekend, and I hope to have a better understanding. I did watch the interview on KEET last night with Leto Freitas.

I found for the weeks since I became aware of the plan that I have a level of discomfort with it that I could not precisely identify, at least until I watched the interview. At least from my perspective, this has been a top down experience for me. No one asked me, or anyone else in this neighborhood, or perhaps any neighborhood, what their vision for the future of Arcata was. Instead of trying to find out what the public's wishes were for the future of the town, you are trying to sell them what's already on the shelf in your store.

My guess is that, should you have asked, not one person would have come up with the idea of 5-8 story residential buildings, limited car parking, traffic pattern changes, that are represented here. You have not asked us what we want. What this approach represents is a top down vision for the future of Arcata, with a belated attempt at getting buy-in from the public. Is any feedback obtained at the open house going to be carried back for integration into the plan?

Although there may be a version of the plan that may make sense, we are not there yet. Let me ask you a few questions:

1. Why is it a given that Arcata needs to grow this much at all? It seems to me that that is a citizen and a political decision. HSU's expansion is an interesting and possibly beneficial aspect of all this, but their expansion is their problem. I assume they took the existing community into account when they made their decision.
2. Why is this issue being loaded onto the west side of town? I would maintain that 1/12 block and larger parcels with single homes on them represent as valuable a target for demolition and reconstruction into a more dense incarnation as the west side. I think I can answer that for you: no city council could face the blowback from the middle and upper-middle class citizens, and maybe their attorneys, standing in line to share their thoughts, shall we say, at a council meeting. I couldn't help but think of, several years ago, George Williamson being chewed up and spit out by the citizens of east Arcata when he tried to change the old church on Union St into offices for his own use and

apartments. Existing residential Arcata is to remain as a museum piece, for the better off and the lucky, who have no intention of living in a 1,500 sq. Ft condo ever. Or not having a car. Or a yard.

3. Cars. I am in favor of encouraging people to use cars less, but “encouraging” in this sense means providing not enough parking, so that people are essentially blocked from owning a car. Again, top down social engineering. You may encourage away, but you need to stop using that word when you mean denying people a choice.

4. Housing choice. My wife and I live on a large piece of property in the country, ten minutes from the plaza, outside the city limits. We know that our time here on this property is limited; it takes a lot of care, and we are considering buying a home in town at some point, after the Himalaya vines start creeping over the eaves and I can’t hack them back anymore. But is there going to be a home in the plan for me? At least an 1,800 square foot condominium, and even better, a place with a yard I could call my own. And at least one parking space. I say this because I have never been unique in my life; I bet I am not unique in this matter either. Housing needs to work across the economic spectrum.

5. Leto mentioned that Arcata has a constricted development situation due to available land. Ok; that has as much to do with policy as acreage. Valley West is an underutilized wasteland; farmland that hasn’t made a dime in decades is sanctified.

6. Where did this plan come from? Did it come from the planning department only, or have property owners or developers driven this in some way? I would like to know about significant communications with the public regarding the plan prior to its publication.

7. Grandfathered uses. I understand that people’s fears about not being able to sell their buildings when they retire may be unfounded, but only somewhat so. If the guys at the auto repair shop down the street retire and sell, they would have to sell only to individuals that intend to maintain it as a garage, right? You couldn’t buy it and divide it up into other uses, etc.? Am I wrong about this? If I am not, the spectrum of buyers has been dramatically reduced, which is going to affect the price, and therefore represents a taking of sorts. And what about an addition or remodeling? What if Tony and I needed to add office space? Would we be allowed to, as an existing nonconforming user?

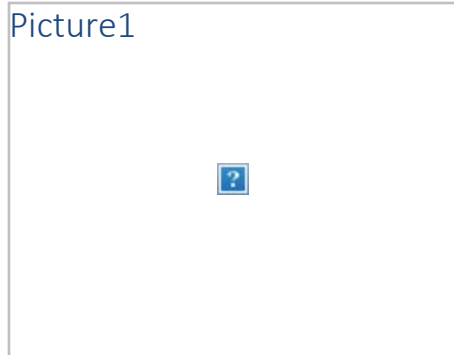
You may be able to get the votes of the council, as they represent a pretty narrow range of the political spectrum. But ultimately you will need the buy in of a larger group of community members for the development plan to work the way you envision it. They will “vote with their feet” or their pocketbooks, and just live elsewhere. This is not a conclusion I come to with any satisfaction; this is my town. It’s time to turn this around and find out what the people in this neighborhood and the rest of the town think about its future. Explain the problem you are trying to solve, and invite suggestions as to how to solve it in an equitable manner. It’s possible that what you hear may be similar to the

plan you have; I am not against denser housing, it's certainly a place we are headed, but this implementation needs work.

Sincerely,

Nick

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