Over one hundred Garry Oaks in a Lakewood industrial park are to be cut down and replaced by a proposed distribution center.

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**Lakewood to examine retention of Garry Oaks**

Several Audubon Conservation Committee members raised concern with the loss of 114 Garry oak trees at an industrial building site in Lakewood. On June 23, the local activists were successful in placing an article in the News Tribune.

The challenge will be to determine if these oaks can be preserved in the middle of the building permitting process. Also, how any oaks at risk can be preserved as the city begins to develop other properties zoned industrial along the I-5 corridor.

Of concern to neighbors is an 8 acre site containing over 100 Garry oak trees. They are located in an area with access from apartments in Springbrook. These Garry oaks are the state’s only native oak tree. They are drought resistant and many are a hundred years old.

The prairies of Western Washington from Vancouver, WA to Vancouver in B.C. once were dominated by these oaks, which provide habitat for wildflowers and endangered pollinators. Their acorns are popular with wildlife.

"Only 3 percent of the original Garry oak population remains today," said Michele LaFontaine, a teacher at Pierce College, in a News Tribune story. "When development takes away Garry oaks that help clean the air and replaces them with asphalt and warehouses, it becomes an issue of environmental justice."

In Lakewood, the I-5 area slated for industrial expansion is also one of the poorest neighborhoods in the County with affordable apartment buildings and homes.

Research into Lakewood's City Code shows that street trees and forest canopy are protected with regulations providing limitations on tree removal and techniques to incorporate trees along many of Lakewood's tree-lined arterials. Unfortunately, there is no specific protection for Garry Oaks nor any protection for any trees inside the city's industrial zones.

A permit for a 135,400-square-foot warehouse and associated parking lot is planned for the Springbrook Area. And long-term plans show the city hopes to add other commercial buildings with access to Interstate 5.

The city recently announced a new Amazon warehouse with additional city occupation by other brands like Tesla and Aero Precision, who considered relocating to Lakewood.

According to the local newspaper the city has not yet released its environmental assessment for this Springbrook warehouse. Often in a case like this the city issues a Determination of Non Significance with no evaluation of loss of wildlife habitat on the property.

Although the city does have a permit appeal process, such an appeal in this industrial zone may be difficult -- since no city code provides protection for Garry Oaks in an industrial area.

There is a long term solution that the Audubon committee is considering. The city is updating their 2022 comp plan in July and August of this year.

This gives us an opportunity to revise city policy and write new city code to protect Garry oaks throughout the city. It would be a good way to provide protection for Garry Oaks in all our industrial zones.

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**Conservation Committee Meets**

At noon on September 18, 2021
Via Zoom
Tacoma's proposed zoning change will replace single-family homes with multi-story apartments, duplexes and row houses in 75% of the city's neighborhoods.

Tacoma's Affordable Housing Proposal

On July 13 the Tacoma City Council held hearings on the regional housing crisis and reviewed a proposal called Home In Tacoma. This proposal would upzone 75 percent of the city neighborhoods by allowing current single-family homes to be replaced with duplexes and multi-story apartment houses.

At the public hearings people testified, 90 seconds at a time, for several hours. They were confused by the zoning nomenclature which led to fear that high-rise apartments would invade their neighborhoods as they have in the Proctor District and on Sixth Avenue. Several people were concerned with lack of parking while others feared living in the shadow of tall buildings.

Tacoma has a rare opportunity to learn from the experience of upzoning in cities like Portland, Denver and Seattle. This is an opportunity put together a proposal that works for all Tacoma residents in single-family neighborhoods, and still please the realtors and developers who want to build more market-rate apartments.

Timing this upzoning in phases is the key. To do this the city needs to change the priority from providing market-priced new housing to preserving the affordable housing stock we already have in neighborhoods where low-wage workers now live. These neighborhoods must be maintained for the people living there, otherwise they will be displaced by gentrification.

Broad upzoning is the wrong tool to resolve the social and economic issue of affordable housing. More careful analysis of neighborhood demographics is needed. Forty percent of the city's population is low-income. Many will be displaced by gentrification if the Home In Tacoma zoning puts their neighborhood's housing and apartment buildings up for sale to developers. These workers are the most affected by the housing crisis, and these residents need to be able to continue to live in the city where they work.

This decision about affordable housing policy will determine the diversity of our residents and the type of community Tacoma will become. Gentrification will determine who can afford to live in Tacoma, whether our students can afford to remain here after high school graduation, whether people with low-wage jobs can not only work with us, but also live with us.

The city failed to provide an environmental assessment showing the impact of upzoning on city services. Without this analysis decision makers do not know the cost for new classrooms for additional children, the cost for MetroParks to expand parks, nor the increased cost for city services like police and road improvements along each arterial, or the impact upzoning will have on library services or sewer capacity.

Not every arterial is suitable for rows of apartments and town houses. Some arterials must be set aside as transportation corridors. With a proper analysis, the city's planners could cooperate with the school district, MetroParks Tacoma and Pierce Transit to determine a coordinated phasing program that would apply to just one arterial at a time.

In a comment letter the Washington Environmental Council reported that City of Tacoma North End Treatment Plant was discharging more flow than is legally allowed. An analysis of the sewer system's capacity is the first step in determining which neighborhoods can be easily upzoned and included in the initial phase.

A phased-in upzone program is not only politically wise to bring city residents into agreement, but also environmentally necessary. The Growth Management Act requires that city infrastructure and services be available within six years of construction.

Ultimately when a revised upzone is passed, it will determine the well-being of nearly every other civic interest: education, child development, public health, traffic congestion, open space and most importantly, environmental justice.

The City Council has the chance to solve the regional housing crisis in a way that benefits all the residents in the city. By implementing a phasing program, we can first protect the neighborhoods of affordable housing stock where low income people and people of color currently live.

In subsequent phases, the city council can ensure that the quality of public services improves as we build market-rate housing and potentially double the city's population.

We can re-zone the city to provide all the current residents a Home In Tacoma while still gentrifying some neighborhoods in a way that preserves their character and is fair to all.

Conservation Committee Meets
At noon on September 18, 2021
Contact kirkkirkland9@gmail.com for Zoom invitation to the meeting
Park Junction Owners Ask for Reconsideration

County Examiner revokes Park Junction Resort permit again.

On July 15 Stephen Causseaux, the county's Hearing Examiner, revoked the Park Junction resort permit after the owners asked for reconsideration of an earlier decision.

At Tahoma Audubon Society, we are pleased to find that the Hearing Examiner revoked their permit for a second time. We believe that the Hearing Examiner's latest decision will make the case for revocation stronger and make it more difficult for Park Junction Partners to appeal successfully to Superior Court.

After two decades of contentious public hearings the first decision to revoke the Park Junction Permit was decided on May 20, 2021. In the 46 page decision, Steven Causseaux found that the owners had not met the deadline for completing test wetlands. Bill Lynn, attorney for the Park Junction partners, then filed a request for reconsideration.

In his latest decision, the Examiner strengthened the case for revocation and offered additional findings. On the question of whether causing further delays in building the resort would cause harm to the people in the Nisqually Valley the examiner stated:

"The proposed resort affects business decisions for owners of restaurants, lodging, gift shops, etc. in the Upper Nisqually area. Delays may have impacted the Eatonville School District that must decide whether to close Columbia Crest Elementary due to lack of enrollment or to leave it open in anticipation of resort development."

"Finally, neighbors have waited many years to make plans for their parcels depending on resort development. Delays have impacted the entire Upper Nisqually area."

In addition, two neighbors who operate organic farms downstream from the resort testified at the hearing about their concerns about the resort’s potential use of pesticides on the proposed golf course.

The Examiner also held that a Pierce County ordinance allowing extensions of time due to COVID didn't apply because PJ Partners did not apply.

He said, "Not only did the applicant not file for an extension, it assured everyone that the project was ‘under construction’ in October and never advised that it could not complete the project by November 30, 2020."

On December 1, 2020, county staff visited the Park Junction Property and found that two holes were dug in the ground. Neither one was lined with a clay liner as required by the Wetland Permit. Testimony at the hearing revealed that the clay material necessary to qualify as a wetland was purchased and stored in a nearby warehouse.

PJ Partners argued that digging the holes and purchasing the clay liner was sufficient progress moving toward completing the permit milestone and that it should not be revoked.

The hearing examiner did not agree. In his March 2021 decision he stated that

"The property owners and managers have a history of "excuses and mismanagement that previously delayed the project." Of their testimony in the final February 2021 hearing, the examiner said they’d "shown the elements causing past delays to include inadequate supervision and organization remain. And those elements, he added "will likely prevent timely processing of the project to completion."

"Even though 20 years have passed since initial approval of the CUP (permit), years remain before the initial portions of the project will reach fruition. Therefore the Examiner must grant the petition to revoke the permit (CUP5-96)"

Park Junction Partners has scheduled on August 6, 2021 in Pierce County Superior Court to discuss milestones and the revocation of the Park Junction permit by the county Hearing Examiner.

Conservation Committee Meets
At noon on September 18, 2021
Via zoom