

Mayor's Report for March, 2015

The City of The Dalles is not just an area within the city limits. It also sits within the Scenic Gorge Area, within Wasco County, with a so-called Urban Growth "Area" which lies between the city limits and the Urban Growth "Boundary." Further, state land use laws say we have to identify twenty (20) years of buildable land which might require expanding the Urban Growth "Boundary."

There appear to be several problems with that idea. First, the Gorge Commission hasn't decided its own boundaries or how to define an expansion. Second, the city began annexing pockets of land into the city limits some time ago, without an agreement with the county as to who would take care of roads within the annexed areas. Third, the people living within the Urban Growth "Area" ended up with no voice because the County turned over land use enforcement to the city. Annexed citizens have found themselves in a sort of no-man's land.

For the past two years, city council has been asking the planning commission to address development issues which may have stymied residential construction in the Urban Growth "Area." This resulted from a practice of requiring high development fees to be paid up front whenever a landowner wanted to build or divide his or her property. If the land owner did not have the funds, they would be required to sign a "non-remonstrance agreement", which meant they could not object if a local improvement district was initiated by other land owners or the city. The purpose of such a practice was to give the city the ability to force development fees on all property owners within a local improvement district so the city could put in new roads, water, sewer, storm water, curbs and sidewalks at the owners expense. Sometimes the estimated costs were so high, there was no equity value left for the land owner.

In 2007, a task force of citizens recommended that non-remonstrance agreements be stopped and done away with. Not until 2015 was this accomplished. In the meantime, the planning commission and the planning department have proposed "delayed development agreements.", "delayed improvement agreements" and the latest, a "delayed sidewalk agreement" and a "consent to annexation." These agreements are presented to the landowner who wants to make improvements to his or her property under certain situations. In other words, the message is, the planning department will not grant the improvement unless one or the other of these agreements is signed. The land owner finds his or herself over a barrel.

The current City Council has delayed revision of the current annexation policy which currently states the city will annex property within the Urban Growth “Area,” *as soon as possible*. The question being asked now, however, is when should annexation occur? What is a good policy?

It is the same question for system development fees. When is it right to impose system development fees when such fees and forced agreements result in stopping residential construction? These are tough questions and the city needs your input. Please let your city council or myself know what you think. You may contact me by writing to city hall, email at SeLawrence1963@yahoo.com or call me at 503-807-0724.