

HB 2001 will ‘rip apart our neighborhoods’ in Eugene

by Paul Conte and Pam Wooddell

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Councilors Jennifer Yeh’s and Claire Syrett’s promotion of the city’s proposed zoning deregulation (Guest View, Jan. 23) would undoubtedly earn four Pinocchios from **The Washington Post’s** ‘Truth Squad’ because **The Post** awards four only for ‘whoppers’ — egregiously untruthful and misleading statements.

The councilors’ biggest ‘whopper’ is their claim that the proposed code amendments were ‘created by the community.’ The councilors tout a list of performative actions, but none of these involved citizen review of code amendments other than by a few insiders that planning staff included in their sham public process. The ultimate ‘tell’ on this deception: Despite repeated urgings, the city never mailed a single postcard of proposed code amendments to homeowners and tenants that would be impacted.

The fundamental deception in the councilors’ claims is that extreme deregulation of current zoning standards will produce more dwellings; and, by the economic principle of ‘supply-and-demand,’ this will lower housing costs. The truth is the proposed deregulation has no provisions for housing affordability and will leave all decisions about what to build, where and at what cost to profit-focused investors. We know from recent examples in Eugene the result of *market-based* development will be expensive, multiplex rentals. (We support regulatory changes that are strictly focused on affordable housing.)

It’s an established economic fact that, unlike the markets for gasoline and soybeans, housing markets have very low ‘cross category elasticity.’ In other words, building expensive housing has no significant impact on reducing the price of lower-cost housing; and housing-cost-burdened, lower-income households constitute the entire scope of the true ‘housing crisis.’

This deception by two of Eugene’s elected officials is even more egregious because the proposed deregulation they’re promoting goes far beyond HB 2001 requirements. If the full council were to fall for Yeh’s and Syrett’s propaganda, the extreme deregulation of residential zoning would create powerful financial incentives for investors to buy up lower-cost rental houses on large lots and redevelop the properties as expensive plex rentals. In many cases, this would mean demolishing low-cost rental houses, thus reducing the supply of affordable housing. More broadly, this investor-driven redevelopment would inevitably result in gentrification and increased rents in previously affordable areas.

The brazenness of the councilors’ ‘gas lighting’ on climate impacts is astounding. They expect citizens to believe that deregulating zoning and promoting distribution of relatively low-density triplexes and fourplexes across Eugene ‘supports the Eugene City Council’s climate recovery [and] active transportation ... goals.’ Efficient, public mass transit, such as EmX service, cannot be funded without adequate ridership. Dispersal of housing is the worst possible policy. Instead, the preponderance of future housing should be a mixture of market-rate and subsidized, low- to mid-rise apartments on permanent, high-frequency transit routes, such as along the West Sixth and Seventh avenues EmX corridor.

Despite repeated requests, city staff have provided no analysis of water and electricity supply, storm and waste sewer capacity, schools and emergency response. The planning commission’s recommended findings include no mention of such analyses, either. Without planning for public infrastructure and services, the distribution of relatively low-density housing across Eugene will create serious public health, safety and education problems.

Finally, one of the greatest deceptions is failing to inform Eugene citizens that the staff’s proposed code amendments are neither a simple implementation of HB 2001 nor anything resembling so-called ‘middle housing.’ The staff proposal would increase allowable density by five times and allow structures as high as a telephone pole (42 feet). The amendments would eviscerate protection of permeable surface by

increasing allowable lot coverage from 50% to 75%. What's missing makes the likely outcome even worse – no affordability requirements, no tree protections, no protection of the Willamette Greenway and many other omissions.

These two councilors act less like representatives of Eugene citizens and more like marionettes for development interests, so we shouldn't be surprised if their noses grow like Pinocchio's when they promise 'additional opportunities for public involvement ... to craft an ordinance that meets the needs of our community.' It defies credulity to believe that councilors Yeh and Syrett would pay any heed to public input that conflicts with their determination to rip apart our neighborhoods.

Renters, homeowners and housing justice advocates can learn more at [Housing-Facts.org](https://www.housing-facts.org) . You can also join hundreds of Eugene citizens who've signed the petition to Eugene City Council to support housing and climate justice with sensible code amendments and protections for lower-income households.

Paul Conte is an accredited Earth Advantage sustainable homes professional and ADU specialist. Pam Wooddell is a board member and former co-chair of the Friendly Area Neighbors.