

Chair Jim Sundberg requested that this document from February be included in the Council/PAB workshop packet No May 2010

**Potential Benefits of new Subdivision Ordinance**

February 4, 2010

Two weeks ago the City Council directed Larry Cort to solicit reactions from local builders and developers to the draft Subdivision Ordinance, with questions about whether the Ordinance supports the Comprehensive Plan goals. Unfortunately, the last question asked was whether the draft Ordinance would result in an “insurmountable financial burden on those who elect to develop property in Langley.”

This is certainly a valid question, but it is also important to note the many ways in which the new Ordinance could lower new development costs, make home ownership more affordable, and save significant amounts of money for the City of Langley and thus for all of its residents. *Since many of these savings would be realized by home buyers and city residents, rather than builders, they were largely overlooked in responses received to date.*

Here is a list of benefits (many of them financial) which this new Ordinance seeks to realize in implementing the land use and housing goals of the Langley Comprehensive Plan:

**I. Lowering the cost of development**

- a. The emphasis on multi-unit and clustered housing on larger subdivisions means less feet of utility connections, saving significantly large amounts of money up front.
- b. The requirement of minimal width internal roads saves money and reduces runoff. Also, alleyways need not be hard surfaced in many cases, depending upon traffic.
- c. Emphasizing on-site management of impervious surface runoff can also save money compared to buried storm drains, as well as improving overall ground water quality.
- d. Native landscaping need not cost any more than more traditional landscaping, and can complement item c. above, saving maintenance costs.

**II. Lowering the cost of home ownership**

- a. Even the critics recognize that attached housing units are cheaper to build and far more efficient to heat, so the requirement that the each subdivision “shall have multiple housing types” will provide a variety of moderate cost housing in addition to single-family homes..
- b. Lower utility bills means the cost of home ownership is lower, sometimes dramatically so. This allows both young families and older, single owners to be accommodated.
- c. The building cost of a unit of housing is only a fraction of the overall cost of home ownership, which also includes cost of financing, cost of land, utilities and taxes. Requiring the largest subdivisions (over 11-20 units) to cluster some of their housing and set aside 5000 sq ft for affordable housing need not impact the cost of the rest of the units.

**III. Lowering the public cost of development**

- a. Many parts of the ordinance are designed to lower the long range cost to the City of development: layout of roads to allow for future connectivity, on-site management of storm water, native landscaping which requires significantly less watering, and mixed uses.
- b. Even the siting of housing units with solar access and public safety in mind could benefit future Public Works and Police Department budgets.

**IV. Lowering the environmental impact of development**

- a. Higher densities and a variety of housing types in larger subdivisions with the resulting open space created provides numerous environmental benefits for both the occupants and the City of Langley. [see Section 16G, pages 25-27, ending with the section for allowance for “Variations from standards . . . where factual deterrent conditions prevail . . .”]
- b. Estimating the dollar values of long-range environmental benefits verses the upfront costs goes beyond our expertise, but items I – III above provide sufficient cost savings to justify the specific environmental requirements of the Subdivision Ordinance, many of which have insignificant costs in the first place.

I hope the City Council members find this summary of potential cost savings useful in their deliberations.