

Approve Spring Creek Village
Jeremy Rietmann
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Land use proposals are to be reviewed and judged by our elected leaders in relation to the proposal's ability to meet specific criteria laid out in the Town's land use regulations.

The Planning and Zoning Commission recommended that Town Council approve this project because they concluded that this application meets all eight land use criteria relevant to this plan.

Gypsum's long-term land use map offers 11 different land use designations to ensure that the Town has land available for many different types of uses - from industrial - to country residential.

Land use designations and zoning exist to protect the interests of all current and future residents. They do this by encouraging compatible development types that offer land uses that will transition logically into other more (or less) intensive uses well in advance of any specific proposal, so decision-making isn't arbitrary.

The Stratton Flats parcel is designated as "Urban Residential" on Gypsum's land use map. This is a higher-density residential land use designation used primarily in the core areas of town, close to major employment areas such as the commercial and industrial designations. This designation is intended to promote the development of more affordable housing by offering a mix of multifamily, townhomes and high-density single-family homes.

Residents in the existing Stratton Flats neighborhood have shared their frustrations that this proposal is different than what was approved under the original PUD. I can empathize with their perspective because we are all human and change can be difficult. But in this case, change is the only way forward and it is appropriate. Let me try to explain why:

Completing this project as a single family home neighborhood isn't financially possible. Other than a few sporadic builds, and Habitat's work on the site, the project has remained stuck.

Single family homes can't be built on the rest of the site because construction and labor costs, a tight housing supply and squeaking out a profit all add up to sale prices that are beyond the financial means of most of our residents. By the time SFH's get out of the ground, they are too expensive for most local families to buy.

Fortunately, Polar Star Properties has come along with a project plan that meets the underlying land use criteria and will complete the community while delivering real value towards several community needs.

First is housing. It's in short supply and the problem is hurting families, seniors, workers and employers. This has a real cost to businesses in terms of employee attraction and retention, and it hurts families trying to provide financial and social stability to their children.

Second, this proposal aligns with Gypsum's new Master Plan which was recently adopted after more than a year of community input. Gypsum residents have said repeatedly that they would like more walkable amenities, community gathering spaces and restaurant, retail and entertainment choices. Clustered, higher density residential is exactly the type of development that will eventually spur these sorts of commercial amenities.

Residents have also said that they would like to maintain (as much as possible) the rural, small town feel of Gypsum as the community inevitably grows. This is best accomplished by clustering higher intensity uses in the core areas of town to encourage more "downtown" commercial opportunities, as well as to limit new infrastructure needs and public service costs that often come with more sprawling, suburban-type development.

Directing a healthy share of future population growth to the core areas of town will make Gypsum more attractive to commercial ventures like restaurants, coffee shops and retail, while reducing the impact on our total land area by maintaining open space, expansive views, and the rural small-town feel we all love and appreciate here in Gypsum.

It's been said that the only thing people hate more than density, is sprawl, and the Master Plan is designed to manage these concerns as responsibly as possible as Gypsum absorbs future growth.

Next, I'd like to address the main arguments I've heard against this project, most of which are not relevant under the criteria under consideration:

Some have said there are not enough 'for-sale' units: That's a fair opinion to have, right up until the point that you are the person that has to find financing and prove to your lender that you can make money building the project. Economics dictates the unit types, and they are appropriate given the land use overlay in this area of town.

Some have said traffic will be terrible: The fact is, if the original project hadn't flopped, most of the additional traffic load would *already* be present in the town. This project will add traffic and the Town will address it with logical infrastructure improvements as has been done with all past growth.

Some have said that the rental rates of this project are still too high: This simply confirms the law of supply and demand. For those that are dismayed by the pricing offered at this project, please join the Vail Valley Partnership's affordable housing coalition and advocate for more housing developments like this. More supply will drive prices lower.

Some have implied that renters can somehow all be categorized as 'bad' people likely to drink, do drugs, commit crimes or otherwise be thought of as subhuman. That is a problem. Renters are people just like anyone else. They have dreams and jobs and families and contribute to society.

Like all people, they have intrinsic value. Only the structure of their payments is different. If their form of payment causes one to lose sight of their intrinsic value as people, then that says more about you than it does about them. It might be time to look inward and be a little bit more compassionate about the rest of humanity.

I was a renter for my entire adult life until about two years ago. I'm pretty sure that in becoming a homeowner, I didn't fundamentally change as a person, for better or for worse. Frankly, I just owe a bank a lot of money.

Finally, to all those that desire to live in a positive community environment:

You hold the keys to how your community develops in the future. And by develop, I don't mean buildings. I mean relationships and social outcomes in your neighborhood.

You could unfairly prejudge all your future neighbors as a beastly horde of renters that will lead to the ruin of your neighborhood, or, you could welcome them with open arms, establish positive relationships with new people, and you might meet your future best friend, your fishing buddy, or the person that will help you through some terrible tragedy in your own life.

You could teach your children that all the people coming to this neighborhood are bad and not to be associated with, or, your kids could benefit from having lots of other children nearby to play with and develop friendships with as they grow up.

Neighborhoods and communities are not buildings, and they're not defined by whether you rent or own your home. They are made up of people.

It's the character of the people within them that will define what type of community and experiences you will have in the future.