

Reader's Opinion

Gerry Armstrong: Boise info on planned communities is wrong

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Despite what some Boise city leaders will tell you, the sky is definitely not falling when it comes to planned communities proposed in Ada County; however, their inaccurate portrayal of the county's planned community ordinance is meant to scare residents into believing they will somehow increase the tax burden to city residents. That claim, made by Boise City Council Member Alan Shealy in a recent Idaho Statesman (March 25) guest opinion, is a mischaracterization meant to invoke fear and requires a response with the truth.

Ada County's planned community ordinance is far more restrictive than any current Boise subdivision ordinance. Shealy wants Boiseans to believe planned communities will increase taxes because they're not connected to city services. That is not true. A planned community developer is required to pay for every water, sewer and utility system that services the community. The developer must also pay for improvements to arterial roads, as well as provide all the community's streets and sidewalks. Additionally, Ada County makes the developer pay for law enforcement and ambulance services up front until the community's tax base covers the cost. Perhaps Shealy has Ada County's planned community ordinance confused with Boise's subdivision ordinance that makes Boise taxpayers pay for all those items.

According to Shealy, any new development outside Boise is a huge burden to taxpayers. His argument is that Treasure Valley residents clog Boise streets and stretch city services. His logic is flawed. Yes, Boise is the main destination for many people and Boise businesses wouldn't have it any other way. I suspect Shealy would never propose closing Boise's borders to "nomads" as he calls them, simply because of the additional pressures these cash-spending consumers place on city services. Perhaps he should read the two separate economic feasibility studies prepared on the Avimor project. If he did, he'd learn that two separate certified economists concluded Avimor will in no way negatively impact the area's economy or tax structure — but in fact, the studies indicate it will greatly enhance the economy from the very first day the development opens.

Regarding his claim that planned communities will adversely impact the valley's air quality — statistics show the average Boise subdivision generates 10 to 13 car trips a day as people go to and from work, school and other locations. A planned community, because of its commercial, recreational and service offerings, typically only generates three to five car trips a day. Again, Boise's claim that planned communities are bad for the environment is nothing but a scare tactic. Why doesn't Boise's subdivision ordinance require developers to set aside land for open space or trail systems? Why doesn't it require a developer to provide land for parks, schools or libraries? Ada County's planned community ordinance does.

The day Shealy's guest opinion ran in The Idaho Statesman, the front page headline read, "City set to create a new South Boise." In the article, Boise city officials surprisingly talked about their plan to locate a planned community south of the Boise Airport. What prompted their sudden change of heart? They say it's because services could be easily extended to this particular planned community. And who will pay for that urban infrastructure? If it were in Ada County, the developer would pay for it up front. But in this case, Boise officials are right — Boise taxpayers will pick up the tab.

It all boils down to control. Perhaps Boise leaders fear a well-designed planned community will incorporate into an entirely new city of its own. Additional cities would block Boise from growing and building its tax base. Whatever the reason, Ada County must stay focused on applying the standards outlined in its planned community ordinance. Denying a development when it meets all conditions, simply because another city doesn't like it, sends us down the very rocky road of infringing on private property rights — a journey I think many Idahoans aren't willing to take.

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