

One View: Steve Wolgast 10/21/17

I retired to the South Reno area from an engineering career in Silicon Valley last year. Seeing the poorly planned development near me, I'm afraid the area will become like San Jose with bad traffic, high prices, poor air, and the stress of a city. The development boom we're seeing is producing a lot of bad developments that harm the existing neighborhoods, poorly serve the new residents, and detract from the appeal of the Great Basin. From Lemmon Valley to Somerset and the Geiger Grade, we are seeing bad development allowed by the Planning Commission and supported by the County Commissioners. We need development that meets higher standards and enhances existing neighborhoods, not crummy development plans that are more profitable. When the developers are done and the problems are evident, it's the taxpayers who pay to fix it. The county has many policies, goals and codes indicating "best practices" for new developments, but the Commission routinely ignores these and approves non-compliant plans. The public input is consistently ignored as well as the Citizens Advisory Board conclusions. The Planning Commissioners are appointed by the County Commissioners who have close, lucrative relations with the developers. I spoke to each of the County Commissioners individually to enlist their help opposing the Ascenté development in the Steamboat Hills. Commissioner Lucey said he was elected on a platform to support any development that was safe and sustainable. He doesn't mean "sustainable" in an ecological sense. The Commission isn't adamant about the safety either. He told me that my neighbors would just have to get used to the high traffic and hazards. Commissioner Berkgigler said that we needed to keep growing and needed a lot more housing. She is close to the developers and realtors who fund her campaigns. I asked her how Reno avoids becoming like Vegas with unlimited sprawl. She had no answer. Commissioner Hartung is satisfied with indiscriminate development. He was excited to tell me that someday my lot could be subdivided and the area could become high density as if that were desirable. Commissioner Jung explained that we needed a lot more housing and that our area had to take our share of it. She accepts that development is bad for the existing neighborhoods. She had no plan to prevent indiscriminate sprawl other than to make good choices through the Planning Commission (not likely). Commissioner Herman sounded sympathetic, but said she was outnumbered by the others. She voted with the others to deny our appeal. As voters and taxpayers, we need to unite across the county to elect commissioners who will get us better plans from the developers. These are available, but they are less profitable. The commissioners are the creatures of the developers and can never defend our interests.