

9 March 2016

TO: Boise City Council

ATTN: Todd Tucker, City Planner

RE: Planned Syringa Valley Subdivision

FROM: Prof. Emeritus Tom J. Cade
6484 Hollilynn Drive
Boise, -Idaho 83709

Dear City Council Members:

I wish to comment on a proposal to be submitted before you on 29 March to add the “Syringa Valley Specific Plan” to Chapter 11-013 of the Boise City Code, also to be consistent with the Southwest Boise Reserve Plan, which encompasses 16 “design goals,” none of which has much to do with the major public concerns about this or any other proposed subdivision in southwest Boise and adjacent parts of Ada County. Population growth has been rampant in the Treasure Valley for more than 20 years, with little political will to control it or to mitigate its environmental impacts, among which traffic congestion, air pollution, and water use are major concerns. The bottom line, in case you get bored with the entire statement, is that no land developments should be permitted without first being preceded by a thorough, science-based environmental assessment of the probable problems that the proposed development will cause accompanied by stipulated actions to mitigate them.

After first visiting lovely, quiet, friendly Boise, a river running through it, in 1951 when the City’s population was under 20,000 and living here now for 28 years, my unhappy conclusion is that, without such analysis, Boise and the Treasure Valley will soon become a second-rate approximation of the Los Angeles Basin. After having attended two preliminary meetings by the ACHD Commission and the City Planning and Zoning Commission leading up to the City Council meeting, and reading the posted development plan on the internet, I am convinced that the entire planning and approval procedure needs to be revised and modernized to pay less attention to how streets and sub-districts are laid out and named and more attention to long term environmental impacts of the proposed development. The City Council could begin such changes by sending the Syringa Valley Plan back to the developer with instructions and stipulations for a full revision of the plan with environmental issues and mitigations included for a resubmission of the overall plan. The City Council should reach out to other relevant governmental agencies and private sector organizations to identify problems and to seek their solution, e.g. the Ada County Highway District for traffic problems, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and the Ada County Air Quality Board for mitigating air pollution, and the State Department of Water Resources, U.S. Geological Survey, and the French-owned SUEZ Water Company for insuring long term sustainability of surface and under-round water resources.

Other concerned residents of south Boise and southwest Ada County will be expressing their concerns about existing traffic congestion on South Cole Road that could worsen as a result of the Syringa plan as currently presented, and the increased air pollution from the exhaust of the many vehicles associated with 3,000 closely spaced households. My main concern, however, is about the use of water and the long term sustainability of water resources in the Treasure Valley.

As we all know, water is the limiting resource for human distribution and density in the arid West. We must live either by rivers or on ground over accessible and replenishable aquifers. Aquifers that are discharged by human use at a rate greater than their natural recharge by incoming water decrease in volume, and over time they become exhausted, a process that is not unknown in southern Idaho. Shallow aquifers in particular have become dry since the 1980s.

The Syringa Valley application contains no mention of water, although it has been reported elsewhere that it will be provided by the French-owned SUEZ Company from its deep wells located southeast of Syringa in the vicinity of Pleasant Valley Road not far from the South Boise Prison Complex of seven institutions. The inmates and employees comprise a large, concentrated number of water consumers within the extended neighborhood of Syringa and no doubt get their water from the same aquifers that would supply the Syringa community. In addition, there are some 100-200 private residential and farming wells between Amity Road to the north and the Kuna-Mora Road to the south [west of Pleasant Valley and east of Maple Grove].

Questions that need to be answered about water before Syringa or any other proposed subdivision is permitted are: 1) How much water is SUEZ currently pumping on an annual basis from its wells serving south Boise and adjacent southwest Ada County? 2) Are the aquifers it draws from generally stable [no loss of volume over time, recharge equals discharge]? 3) How much water would 3,000 households at Syringa consume annually and what impact would that have on the aquifers from which that water is taken? 4) What impacts might the pumping of more water from the deep SUEZ wells have on the shallower private wells on Hollilynn Drive and other exurban locations? 5) To what extent do the shallow aquifers in the areas where SUEZ has wells connect to the deep aquifers? 6) Could depletion of the deep aquifers draw down water from the shallow ones causing private wells to go dry? 7) Does the City of Boise or Ada County have a contingency plan to rely upon if aquifers should fail on a community-wide scale? 8) As a result of continuing to promote population growth by creating more and more subdivisions, when will it become necessary to start thinking about construction of a giant pipeline and pumping station to move water from the Snake River to supply the needs of the Treasure Valley?

I believe that facts and figures to answer most of these questions already exist in the files, reports, and publications of the government agencies and private companies concerned with hydrological and geological issues in Idaho. It only requires a progressive impetus to lay it all out in a manner that the general public can understand and respond to.

Thank you for the opportunity to present these perspectives and recommendations for meaningful change.