

4 February 2016

TO: Boise City Planning and Zoning Commission

RE: Planned Syringa Valley Housing Development

From: Prof. Emeritus, Tom J. Cade
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Dear Commission:

I wish to comment on the proposals before you at a meeting scheduled for 8 February regarding recommendations to be made to the Boise City Council about a new housing development called Syringa Valley. Phase 1A is said to involve the construction of some 200 plus residences to start construction on land located northeast of the junction of Lake Hazel Road and Cole Road but eventually over the next 20 years to include a total of 2,000 homes plus schools and other community features.

Although I have a Boise address, I live outside the city limits in a residential community sometimes referred to as the "Holly Estates" on a presumed residential street, Hollilynn Drive. It is a narrow, winding street with sharp curves in its mid-section, and it connects the end of South Cole Road to Pleasant Valley Road at the east end. When I moved here in 1988 my driveway was at the eastern end of the street with only two-wheel tracks running to Pleasant Valley. When the paved extension to Pleasant Valley was put in, our quiet street soon became a thoroughway for commuter traffic, although it was never designed or modified in any way for such use, as Dr. William Murray, a neighbor, has explained in his detailed analysis of the road systems associated with South Cole Road. Also, our narrow road is posted to prohibit heavy trucks greater than 10,000 pounds gross weight from using the street, but we often see gravel loaded dump trucks driving on our street coming from the several gravel mining operations located on Pleasant Valley and headed to construction projects mostly to the West of South Cole.

I give these background details to emphasize one of my two main points about the proposed Syringa Valley development. Unless some very careful thought based on studies of existing traffic patterns, compared with equally careful predictions of future traffic movements that will result from increased population pressures by the Syringa residents, traffic congestion during the commuter hours will only worsen. Such studies could easily take a year or more to complete.

A solution that many residents of Hollilynn Drive think might work, if the City Council should approve Syringa would be first to put in the Lake Hazel extension through to Orchard and Pleasant Valley, constructing it as a substantial thoroughfare capable of handling commuter traffic both ways from Cole to work locations in the City of Boise and also the heavy duty trucks that would be delivering materials to the construction sites. If this road could be built before 1A construction starts, we believe such action would greatly reduce traffic congestion in the entire South Cole Road neighborhoods.

My second concern has to do with water. Ever since John Wesley Powell carried out his herculean geological and hydrological surveys in the arid West, following the Civil War, humanity has known that water is the limiting resource on population growth, density, and on human activities related to

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living on arid western lands. It is likely that we have already exceeded a human population density in the Treasure Valley that can be sustained over the long haul on the water and other resources dependent on water.

The Boise City Council and the State of Idaho need to consider the pros and cons about promoting additional human settlement in our region of the State. Since I moved here in 1988 most of the shallow aquifers that existed then are now dry. The deeper aquifers, which are now being used at a rate that exceeds the recharge rate, have diminishing volumes. The idea expressed in the Statesman editorial this week that we can somehow take water from the Snake River to recharge the subterranean aquifers is technologically unlikely and in any case is simply robbing Peter to pay Paul. No, decreased consumption is the only tenable answer. That requires hard sacrifices and/or reduced population pressure.

Before the Syringa proposal is approved and allowed to move forward, the City of Boise and the Idaho State government should assemble a special study group of experts drawn from the State Department Water Resources, the U.S. Geological Survey, and any other agencies or institutions with professional hydrologists, to provide an assessment of the aquifers that provide water to the "United EWater" company's wells that are slated to serve Syringa, and to make an informed assessment of how much water is available from our local aquifers and what our long-term consumption rates should be to maintain sufficient recharge to keep life going in our valley.