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Growth: No Easy Answers

The changes we are experiencing in our city, county, and state due to explosive growth are resulting in many challenges to Murray and surrounding cities. One of the most divisive and often controversial issues that we deal with as a city is the development of new multifamily housing communities. This challenge is driven by a housing shortage as more individuals and families move into the area. Murray is a very desirable location for many reasons, not the least is the convenient location to freeways, light rail, shopping, and world-class health care.

In recent years, many of our commercial areas have been rezoned to a “mixed use” zone designation, which allows for housing units to be built in former commercial zones as long as new development includes a combination (or “mix”) of residential and commercial. This is not unique to Murray. All cities along the Wasatch front are facing similar challenges, particularly those along the TRAX and FrontRunner lines.

According to the Murray City General Plan, which was most recently adopted in 2017, the Mixed-Use (MU) zone “is intended for city center and transit station areas where a mixed-use neighborhood is desired and urban public services, including access to high-capacity transit, very frequent bus service, or BRT/Streetcar service are available or planned. This designation is intended to allow high-density multi-dwelling structures at an urban scale that include a mix of uses, usually in the same building and/or complex.”

Some lament that Murray is not the same as when they were growing up, and they are correct. Open spaces where I rode my bicycle with friends as a kid have been replaced by homes or commercial development. In recent years, high real estate values have enticed many property owners to sell to developers. Home builders are looking for any viable property to develop. In addition, the changing retail environment is causing the owners of big box retail stores to look at other uses for their property. The former K-Mart site at 4700 South 900 East is an example of transforming a big box retail store into a mixed-use development. Construction on that development will begin in the near future.

City leaders across the state are also feeling intense pressure from state lawmakers to allow for more high-density housing, and some lawmakers have even sponsored bills that have attempted to take some of the local control away from cities to make development easier. At the same time, we are hearing loud and clear from our constituents that we need to slow the developments and be judicious in where they are allowed. It is a delicate balance that your elected officials and planning commission members are seeking to achieve. The rights of individual property owners must also be considered. There are no easy answers.



Murray has historically done a fairly good job of striking a balance of housing stock. We have attractive single-family neighborhoods with a variety of home and lot sizes. We also have a mix of townhomes, condominiums, medium density housing units, and high-density apartments. Moving into the future, it will be important to carefully plan for additional housing units where appropriate. We will continue to see interest in developing high-density housing in zones near high-capacity transit (as indicated in the General Plan) as more people seek a place to call home.

I cannot over-emphasize the importance of planning ahead. As developers make applications for new housing units, it is the current land use and zoning that is applicable. The planning commission must make decisions on approval or disapproval based on the current ordinances in place and the ability of the applicant to meet the conditions.

I encourage all residents to become familiar with the Murray City General Plan. It can be found on the Murray City website at <https://www.murray.utah.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7570/Murray-City-General-Plan-2017-Full?bidId=> or by typing "General Plan" in the search bar on the home page.

Another resource to help residents become informed as to what is happening in the entire region regarding growth and transportation is the Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC) website. The WFRC is a Metropolitan Planning Organization that includes Salt Lake, Davis, and western Weber counties. WFRC has been instrumental in obtaining funding for Murray City for transportation projects and small area planning. Their website can be found at wfr.org.

The reality is that we cannot stop the growth occurring in Murray and along the Wasatch Front, but appropriate planning and careful implementation of our plan will help assure that we have quality projects where appropriate.

Ronald Reagan once said, "There are no easy answers, but there are simple answers." In addressing the future of Murray City and the certain growth, I hope we have the wisdom to know the difference.