

Did Woodridge board consider project's impact?

Last week, the Woodridge Board of Trustees voted to annex the property at the intersections of 63rd and Walnut streets and gave the Airhart Development Corp. permission to build 23 homes in what will someday be called Walnut Court.

The near unanimous decision, with only one opposing vote, was taken in the absence of any meaningful representation by the residents of Winston Hills, the neighborhood most directly affected by this action, and with no visible evidence the board had considered the impact of this project with regard to air pollution, noise pollution or even traffic density. The board seemed to be influenced by two motivating factors, which as I see it are irrelevant at the least, and troublesome and dubious at worst.

First, supporters of the annexation contend that by doing so, the board will guarantee Airhart will build quality homes in line with Woodridge's stringent standards. That may be true, but in the final analysis it is totally irrelevant. The property was unincorporated territory, and without annexation Airhart would have had to drill wells to provide water for the luxury homes it intends to build. It would be unlikely that prospective homeowners could be induced to spend upwards of \$300,000 to buy a home supplied with well water. What is troublesome about this affair is that knowing Airhart's seemingly limited room to maneuver, the board didn't press it to make more concessions.

One issue was the fate of the trees currently on the property. Those trees were dismissed by the board as scraggly, unattractive and a haven for insects. Apparently the people living on the other side of Willow Creek were unaware they'd been forced to put up with such an eyesore for all these years. Airhart intends to remove most of them, and replace them with trees it claims will be more scenic and provide greater seclusion

for the development's residents. The board provided pictures of trees Airhart has planted to shelter other developments in Woodridge. And, while the foliage is dense, it will take 10 years before that sort of growth will be evident. The board could have insisted that more of the original trees be saved, but was apparently not interested.

Second, the board seemed to be guided by the notion that this project, when completed, will result in higher property values for the people of Woodridge in general, and presumably Winston Hills in particular. If that proves to be true, it will be a *dubious distinction*. If, for example, housing values in Winston Hills should rise to, say, \$300,000, how long will it take a prospective home buyer to decide between spending that kind of money on a house that's over 30 years old and a home that's virtually new?

In taking its decision, the board has entered into a relationship with Airhart Development. But what kind of relationship? Is it one in which government and developer work to ensure the best for all the residents of Woodridge? Or is it like it played out on film, where a smooth talking lothario waltzes into town, eyes the temporary object of his affections, and after a whirlwind courtship wins the fortunes of her favor. And once having done so, kisses her on the cheek, slides out the door and promises to call her. Only time will tell.

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