

Lakewood Organization Introduces Strategic Growth Initiative to Help Control New Residential Building Growth Rate and Strengthen Neglected Neighborhoods

LAKEWOOD – An organization designed to ensure the city’s neighborhood character is leading a petition effort that would place a one percent annual limit on residential growth, and in doing so, return decisions on large multi-family projects to City Council.

Lakewood Neighborhood Partnerships organized the proposal to place a density-limiting initiative on the November ballot in order to continue the city’s suburban appeal, said LNP Board member Cathy Kentner.

“We formed LNP in 2014 to help Lakewood neighbors and neighborhoods maneuver the red tape and, at times, difficulty involved in dealing with City Hall’s procedures,” Kentner said. “We are responding to calls from community members city-wide to remedy the unaddressed consequences of growth in the past dozen or more years.”

Between the turn of the century and 2014, the city’s residential growth added between 275 and 300 total residential units a year at most, according to U.S. Census figures compiled by LNP. Since 2015, more than 2,000 multi-family units entered the Lakewood marketplace, according to figures from the City’s website and industry sources. Figures for single-family units are not available.

The initiative, if approved, would require building permits for new residential units be issued by applying for an “allotment” for each proposed unit. The framework of the proposed ordinance is based on similar ordinances approved by voters in nearby communities, Kentner said.

“But the initiative is tailored to fit Lakewood’s unique needs and character,” she said.

“For instance,” she said, “one of our community’s predominant concerns is that our elected officials no longer make decisions about the location and consequences of land-use matters.”

Kentner’s fellow LNP board member Heather Wenger said the initiative also would involve City Council in land-use decision making by giving them a voice in the location of multifamily projects.

“This proposal would require City Council approval of applications seeking permits for projects of 40 units or more,” Wenger said. “And replacement or redevelopment of existing units and of blighted or distressed areas would not require a permit allocation.”

Although many advocates of suburban development claim density is the key to sustainable growth, “... Poorly located higher-density housing can also cause problems ... (including) lack of sunlight, insufficient public and private open space, and exposure to pollutants or intrusive noise,” According to Jennifer Kent, research fellow at the University of Sydney.

“These issues can lead to respiratory health problems, as well as isolation, fear of crime, and community dislocation. They can very quickly erode or prevent the development of the healthy aspects of higher-density living, including regular physical activity.”

“Expected increases in the pace of looming development could decimate any efforts to mitigate the effects of recent unbridled growth on our infrastructure, including such things as schools, traffic and flood control,” Kentner said. “Without this control, every open parcel will be developed before we have a chance to add to our parks and Open Space land.”

According to Kentner, a strategic plan is needed because “accommodating growth does not need to come at the expense of those who already live here.”

LNP volunteers already are circulating petitions, collecting signatures from the city’s registered voters. Nearly 6,000 signatures are needed to qualify the proposal for the ballot and the petitioners face an Aug. 8 deadline.

If the effort is successful, the proposal would be submitted to City Council, which can either vote to enact the ordinance or send it to a city-wide vote in the Nov. 7 election.

For more information, see www.LakewoodStrategicGrowth.org or email Cathy@LakewoodStrategicGrowth.org.