Monday, November 16, 2026

Dear City of Hermiston Planning Commission and City Council,

I respectfully submit the recommendations below and request your reconsideration of the proposed changes to the R-2 zoning regulations that would restrict R-2 property owners from developing residential housing larger than duplexes.

First, thank you for doing the hard and often thankless work of keeping our planning code compliant and up to date with evolving state regulations while balancing the needs of all stakeholders. I would also like to extend a special thank you to the two Commissioners who voted against, or abstained from recommending, the adoption of these changes at the Planning Commission meeting on November 12, 2026.

I attended the meeting expecting to hear how the new code would make it easier to develop more affordable middle housing, such as triplexes and fourplexes, on R-2 properties under recently adopted Oregon laws. Instead, I came away understanding that those provisions are not yet being adopted by Hermiston. Rather, Hermiston is proposing to further restrict multifamily development in R-2 zones by eliminating conditional uses without adding any new outright allowances for triplexes, fourplexes, or cottage clusters.

I also sympathize with the concerns expressed by another citizen, Randy Randall, during the meeting. He noted that existing multifamily properties in R-2 zones may become more difficult to finance if they are considered nonconforming uses. Financing availability has a significant impact on property values, and the financial burden of this change could fall on many small local investors.

I understand and appreciate that state law is forcing our hand in some areas, including the treatment of conditional uses. However, I believe there are solutions that would not limit investors' ability to build middle housing on R-2 land and would not create financial hardship for those who purchased or developed properties in compliance with previous regulations.

I would like to suggest the following solutions:

1. Allow triplexes and fourplexes as outright permitted uses in R-2 zones.

a. These housing types have traditionally been considered appropriate for R-2 zoning and would typically have been approved through the conditional use process.

b. Allowing them outright would streamline development and encourage the construction of middle housing in areas where it is appropriate while still preserving the character of R-1 neighborhoods.

c. This change would not permit large apartment complexes in R-2 zones, a concern raised during the meeting.

2. Allow multi-unit structures on R-2 land when the property already contains multi-unit structures that were approved under previous regulations.

a. This would allow owners of existing multi-unit properties in R-2 zones to demonstrate conformity for financing purposes or future reconstruction.

b. This would still preclude the development of additional large multifamily structures where they were not previously approved.

My wife, Christy, and I have lived in the Hermiston area since 1999 and have chosen to invest here because we love this community and its people. We want our local codes to preserve and improve the community's livability while also encouraging the development of middle housing for those who cannot yet afford, or simply do not wish to own, a home. Small local investors like ourselves contribute to the community by building one property at a time through infill development and by providing quality rental housing.

Given that the initial public information regarding these code changes suggested that development opportunities on R-2 land would be streamlined to include triplexes, fourplexes, and cottage clusters, I believe many R-2 property owners may not realize that the proposed changes move in the opposite direction. They may only discover the impact when they attempt to develop their property.

Thank you for your consideration. I hope you will find that these recommendations serve the interests of our community, including both residents seeking housing opportunities and the local investors who help provide them.

Sincerely,

Jason and Christy Gefre

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