

ADVOCACY ALERT

Tomorrow night, City Council is set to vote on Ordinance No. 2022-02 which would allow Bethany Lutheran Church to build up to 23 units of affordable housing on its land. This is your last chance to voice your support for the ordinance with a letter or public comment.

A few of you have shared your letters with us since this process began last October. We were so impressed by their reason and passion and wanted to share a few excerpts. No doubt there were many other wonderful letters—we just didn't have the pleasure of reading them.

We hope you are as inspired as we are. Keep those letters coming.

[Note that writers refer to 21 and 23 units for the Bethany Lutheran project, as that number shifted during the city's deliberations. The final ordinance will allow a maximum of 23 units on the site.]

A 725% increase in density. Not so fast.

“A common talking point against the project is that it would mean a 725% increase in density. The problem with percentages is that without context, they are meaningless. A large percentage of a small number is still a small number. For example, on a property with just one housing unit, adding one more unit is a 100% increase, and 8 units is a 700% increase. As I understand it, under current R-0.4 zoning (without the additional density mandated under RCW 35.63.280) the Bethany property is allowed **4 homes**. Current zoning allows an additional **2 units** for affordable housing. Each unit may have an ADU so that is a total of **12 units allowed at current zoning**, without bonus or variance. The proposed project would allow 21 homes (or maybe 23—I keep seeing different numbers), which is a 75% increase. I'm not really sure where the 725% number comes from, which underscores the lack of clarity when dealing in percentages instead of actual numbers...

I hope the City Council will use actual numbers instead of percentages when talking about Bethany. These numbers are not so large that we need percentages to comprehend them. I believe the use of the percentage and its variations (“7-fold”) are simply rhetorical devices to build public opposition.”

- *Althea Paulson*

“Using this metric seems to me to be a not very subtle way of trying to scare people. The requested density on this project would be very compatible with the density across the street and would move density up only a couple steps on the density ladder...

Instead of obsessing about the percent increase, focus on what you need to permit in order for the property owner to have the opportunity for economic viability.”

- *Val Tollefson*

This matters to me.

“I urge the Planning Commission to **move forward with a draft ordinance to implement the state mandate for an increased density bonus**, allowing Bethany to use a portion of their property for affordable housing. Since moving to the Island in 1975 with two pre-school age kids, I’ve watched with dismay as our population has become less diverse, older and wealthier. Forty-seven years ago, our household was able to purchase a modest home (in need of several extensive renovations over the decades) on a public school teacher’s salary. Many of our friends were in the same boat: older homes, do-it-ourselves remodels, one car, borrowing tools, sharing transportation, hand-me-down clothing. Building community and creating resilience through committed relationships: solid community stuff.

- ***Julie Shryock***

“I am a neighbor living on Strawberry Lane and I support building 21 affordable homes on the Bethany church site.

My current home was part of a special affordable housing program twenty years ago. While it’s evolved to fair market in my neighborhood today, I’m certain I would not be living in this home had it not originally been part of that affordable housing program. Our home houses a hard working BHS teacher, a project manager at a Seattle non-profit, and two children who attend BISD public school.

BI needs more neighborhoods like mine and the neighborhood with 21 homes planned for the Bethany church site.”

- ***Katie Maggard***

“I write on behalf of the Chamber to formally demonstrate our support of the increased density requested by Bethany Lutheran to allow for 21 units on their property.

Any discussion with our community’s business owners will underline a core problem – that workers across a wide range of salaries simply cannot find housing on Bainbridge Island. This is a problem both of affordability and of supply, both of which this project addresses.

The housing problem is increasingly affecting the ability of our businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations to find new workers, but even more so in their struggles to actually keep workers in today’s uncertain times.”

- ***Stefan Goldby***

Let’s talk about the good and the just.

“We are rightfully attentive to protecting our natural environment, and to that end we have a tremendously active Land Trust with 1400 acres under its protective programs and more in the works, plus 1500 acres of Parks Department property, most of which is open space.

In addition to the formally preserved land, our zoning has resulted in a development pattern identified in the Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan: “Bainbridge Island’s housing stock is predominantly detached single family homes (80% of all units) in a **very low-density land use pattern** that occupies about 90% of the Island’s land area.” (emphasis added). We have done a great job of preventing density on the island.

But without an effort to improve housing justice on Bainbridge Island, we will exacerbate the ongoing regional problems of pervasive housing insecurity, racial injustice and homelessness.

Bainbridge is roughly 90% white, and our demographic is older and more affluent than surrounding communities. I don't know why, given the race equity efforts the City has worked toward, it still is not paying attention to Housing Justice. The historic racial oppression in housing, via redlining, discriminatory lending practices, and overuse of single family zoning with disproportionate impact on communities of color, is well known. Without a conscious intention to address the lack of housing opportunity and diversity on Bainbridge Island, we will be an increasingly exclusive and exclusionary community."

- ***Althea Paulson***

"I am not so concerned with maintaining the 'rural' feel of the island for the sole benefit of those who can afford it. As I've said, I would like to see affordable housing distributed among all residential zones on the island..."

There is a lot of NIMBYism outside of the Mixed-Use Town Center Area. I believe that making meaningful progress toward meeting the city's purported goals under the Housing Element of the Comp Plan should take priority over the preservation of luxurious and exclusive 2.5 acre zoning."

- ***Anonymous***

Let's do this already!

"With what I believe is approaching a year and a half of consideration, analysis and thought by the planning commission, city planning staff and council, it is time to put this resulting ordinance to a public hearing process and council vote.

The need for affordable housing in Bainbridge is transparently woven throughout the policies and goals of the city for all residents to see. The process of deliberation of the Bethany proposal has likewise been very transparent and well communicated.

There are perhaps many who wish that all the stars could be perfectly aligned with Bethany and a location for building this housing on a vacant parcel within the highest density zoned core. The chance of that is virtually nil."

- ***Chris Frey***

"I have been a member of the Bethany congregation since the mid-1970's and I know that our congregation's decision to host affordable housing has been under consideration for many years. Bethany's commitment to host affordable housing on its land now is not motivated by any possible monetary benefits. Rather, the congregation is motivated by the facts that: the availability of affordable housing on Bainbridge Island is exceedingly rare, the Bethany property can benefit from the special density bonus provisions created by the Washington State Legislature and the congregation's decision is that the land will be made available at no cost for development by a non-profit developer of affordable housing."

- ***Ed Kushner***

“Please, you must vote now to maintain the density bonus formula in place in the current ordinance version that allows for 21 units of affordable housing to be built on Bethany Lutheran’s 8-acre property.

There is no disputing that the housing crisis for a critical population here on Bainbridge is real. Reducing the density, by any amount, will significantly reduce the impact on the crisis. We cannot afford to waste this rare opportunity. Waiting will only increase the number of barriers put in place to restrict building such housing.”

- ***Jacqueline Clemens***



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