

December 27, 2001

Alan Hanks
City Council President
1776 Hanks Dr.
Rapid City, SD 57701

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DEC 28 2001
Rapid City
Planning Department

Re: Lazy P-6 application

Dear Mr. Hanks:

I am writing you as a planning commissioner to request that you uphold the Planning Commission's decision denying the Lazy P-6 application for rezoning. The commission's decision came after a public hearing attended by approximately 80 citizens, the vast majority of whom opposed the proposed rezoning.

Among the factors that led the Commission to deny the request for rezoning is the fact that Rapid City currently has between 4 to 8 times more commercial land than the market requires. This finding comes from an outside consultant hired to advise in the future land use process. The implications of this commercial land glut can be disastrous if not properly addressed.

Rapid City is currently poised to unleash an explosion of sprawl. Fortunately, our Planning Commission is now concerning itself with the detriments of sprawl and is beginning to take containment measures. Education on sprawl issues is the commission's #1 goal after completing the Southeast Connector Future Land use Plan. The commission's vote on the Lazy P-6 property is a step in the direction of recognizing and mitigating sprawl.

The degree of commercial zoning advocated by the applicant benefits nobody, in reality, except the applicant. The applicant has framed the debate in terms of giving south Rapid City its own shopping district, but that is a thinly veiled pretext for profits by this landowner at the expense of the neighbors and city as a whole. There is an abundance of commercial or industrial land on Highways 16 and 79 that can be developed into grocery and shopping facilities. The degree of commercial land advocated by the applicant will place massive commercial development, and a forest of billboards, across the street from large tracts of single family residential zoning.

The applicants' self-serving suggestion that only his land can service shopping needs reminds me of Family Thrift Center's argument several years ago that only the west side soccer field could accommodate their need for expansion. The same arguments were made that the west side deserved another grocery store and that, unless Family Thrift could develop the soccer field, well, then there just would not be a store. This type of development propaganda preys upon our fear that we are inhibiting development, when, in reality, there are usually many solutions that serve

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the community equally well, or better, than the solutions that are easiest and cheapest and most lucrative for developers.

Rapid City's commercial land glut suppresses commercial land values, which means that commercial land is not generating the tax revenues it should. This, in turn, places a disproportionate tax burden upon residential property owners. In addition, encouraging more and greater commercial development taxes the city's infrastructure systems – more and larger roads, larger water & sewer systems, etc. The Planning Commission's vote denying the application is, in part, a recognition that placing the level of development conceived by the applicant at that site simply requires infrastructure that the city would not have to build if the development is concentrated instead along Highways 16 and 79.

Development is important to the community. As a planner, I am interested in seeing national retailers and restaurants locate to Rapid City. Planned development is critical to mitigating the effects of the development free-for-all that has plagued many cities across the nation. Sprawl containment policies are now the norm in cities across the nation that shot themselves in the foot in the 1960s – 1980s by not planning growth. Those cities are under the crush of sprawl and are now working vigorously to counteract it.

Rapid City is fortunate in that, while sprawl is currently encouraged by our present planning process, we are taking steps already to identify and address the problem before our city gets to the chaotic levels of sprawl from which other cities now suffer. As Rapid City competes with Spearfish for the population and industry that will come to the Black Hills in the wake of the Homestake lab, we must bear in mind that the people and the industry that will follow the lab are coming from progressive-minded states where information industries are currently located. The lab population will look to replicate their former homes and the quality of life they had there in their new locations. For people in the lab industry, home is often a city like Seattle or Portland or Boulder or Irvine where planned development makes a better living environment. Spearfish already has the geographic advantage of being only a 10 mile commute to the lab. If Spearfish markets itself as the progressive community, the lab demographic will locate there and Rapid City will lose. Spearfish, not Rapid City, will become the Boulder of the Black Hills.

Rapid City's 2012 program is critical to attracting the lab population and industries. Its airport should help in that regard as well. Sprawl mitigation will also assist. The Lazy P-6 application is sprawl that benefits only the applicant. As a planning commission we did advise the property owner that we would entertain a specific proposal for a grocery store should he need some additional acres to attract that store, but that we were unwilling to simply rezone the land carte blanche upon mere speculation. It is wiser planning to accommodate specific situations than to throw the process to the wolves.

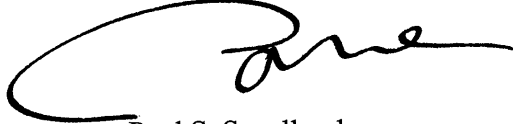
The Planning Commission is working very hard to make adjustments to our planning process that protect the city from sprawl. We are in the infancy of that process, and we will be

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holding public education functions and proposing policies that benefit the community, not just individuals. We will be compiling data that places the costs of sprawl in perspective. In the meantime, I would ask you to support us as we embark upon this critical process of studying sprawl before our city is blighted beyond our control by it. The Lazy P-6 proposal is sprawl in action – adding more commercial land to an already bloated inventory.

Many cities across the country are models for the detriment of sprawl, and others are models for the benefits of containment. The latter cities demonstrate that development and sprawl containment are compatible goals. Boulder, Colorado, is one of the most technologically industrial cities in the nation, yet it aggressively contains sprawl. Boulder has made many mistakes in its process, and Boulder-style planning is not the model for Rapid City *per se*, but Rapid City's continued growth is not contingent upon bestowing massive commercial zoning for the speculation of a single landowner. On behalf of the Planning Commission's vote to deny the applicant's request for rezoning, I ask you to support the commission. Thank you for your review of this request.

Sincerely,



Paul S. Swedlund

PSS/hrr

cc: Adam Altman
Marcia Elkins
Planning commissioners