

Subject: Recommendations for Waterford Project

As your advisor from Green Planning Consultants, I will provide advice and ideas on how the Joint Council for Regional Development might advise AKA Developers to modify their proposal in order to make it more consistent with the idea of smart growth and sustainable development. I will first discuss the negative impacts of the currently proposed Waterford project, and then provide ideas for how the development can be modified to better complement the county's natural systems, and improve community goals such as transportation accessibility and affordable housing. I will also provide recommended modifications regarding growth management to help the city achieve its smart growth objectives. These suggestions should help the council to collaborate with AKA developers in their planning process for a more sustainable project.

Impacts of Current Proposed Waterford Project

The Waterford project has the potential to increase the standard of living by introducing new industries which could lead to investment into new business sectors, thus creating high-level jobs, and opportunities for an increased tax revenue to improve the city. Such tax revenue can revitalize the declining city, offering it opportunities for a better future. However, the proposed project will also have negative impacts on King County's urban areas, farmland resources, availability of affordable housing, transportation systems, people's safety and the character of Salitos.

The Waterford Project site, west of the Yuka River, will extend the urban limits by rezoning current residential areas to accommodate commercial development. Instead of revitalizing the urban, city taxes will be allocated into the new area and provide support for the upscale region but not as much elsewhere. The proposed site does not comply with Salitos city council's plan to promote smart growth since its development exceeds the current ring of suburbs and invades the pristine forested lowlands.

Construction of a new residence outside of the inner-ring suburbs will trigger suburban sprawl and reduce the available amount of farmland resources. A decrease in produce may raise food prices in response to demand, which can lower that quality of life for the poorer population. The proposed site is

unsustainable and will not meet the people's needs. Also, the eastern half of King County is largely undeveloped, with forested lowlands that are flooded periodically by the Yuka River. The residential site will be prone to floods and since the destruction of forestlands will cause soil erosion, the magnitude of flooding could be higher. In addition, by replacing the declining inner-ring suburb with an expanded high-end residential neighborhood, the amount of affordable housings will decrease. The current residents will struggle in finding another home. The unequal distribution of food and housing will widen the gap between the privileged and the underprivileged.

The location of the proposed project is located in the south west corner of Salitos. The site is away from major transportation infrastructures, i.e. Route 46. Since the city has an inadequate public transportation system and crumbling infrastructure, congestion will become a major problem, especially in the downtown area. Its peripheral location promotes vehicle use which can lower air quality and make it harder for people without an automobile to travel.

All these factors will contribute negatively to the overall character of Salitos and King County as a whole. Replacing a declining residential area with an expanded upscale neighborhood can cause socio-economic segregation. Changing the environment does not eliminate the problem of a declining economy. The lower-class from that area will be without homes and will struggle economically and socially. Also, the introduction of franchise brands in the new upscale commercial area will compete with small local businesses the area will suffer from lower air quality due to traffic congestion due to its lack of transportation accessibility. Thus this proposed site should include an accessible transportation system, affordable housing, ecological restoration of river within project site, and the city should make efforts for city renovation and implement a smart growth boundary to prevent sprawl.

Recommendations for Community and Sustainable Development

Transportation

The Waterford Project site is located in a very inaccessible location. Due to Salitos' current inadequate public transportation system and crumbling infrastructure, a light rail system should be built to connect the Route 46 light rail to the Waterford site to reduce traffic congestion as well as provide a

system for users in the city, suburbs, and around the county to efficiently travel to this site, if needed (Figure 1). Also, a bus system and “Park and Ride” lots along Route 46 would encourage more people to take advantage of the transit system without having to worry about parking in the city; this is especially useful to those who live in rural areas.

In response to social equity and rising gasoline prices, the vehicle-independent transportation system will create corridors for all people of different socio-economic backgrounds to take advantage of the job opportunities this proposed project has to offer (Grengs, 2008). Without transportation infrastructure, there can be no exchange of economic goods and other resources and people. This light rail and “Park and Ride” system will allow people to reside where they currently are, and provide them access to the benefits Waterford project has to offer.

New development will increase travel demand, thus, the city and the developers must provide accessible transportation. The city can implement an impact fee on the development to pay for a portion of a light rail system and the construction of “Park and Ride” lots. The city should also apply for state funding in addition to increasing parking rates and implementing a congestion charging scheme in order to reduce city traffic and build revenue to maintain the city and county’s transportation system.

Affordable housing

The number of affordable housing will decrease if AKA developers plan to convert the declining suburban area into an upscale living environment. Thus, it is important for the city to impose a linkage fee onto the Waterford residential project to ensure equality among people of different socio-economic backgrounds and allow for some of the displaced residents to remain in the area. If the AKA refuses to set aside a percentage of affordable units for rental or home ownership, the linkage fees could be used toward rental assistance or renewing abandoned parcels of land near transit lines so the people can afford housing that does not exceed 30% of their income and still have access to schools, employment sources, and services for food, medical, and parks to maintain a proper quality of life (Hall, 2008).

Ecological Restoration and Green Roofs

AKA Developers should set a precedent for sustainability, and a good way would be to create parks along the river length that is within its project site. A greener waterfront is aesthetically pleasing, promotes walking which could fuel the retail industry and promote a community setting. The river parks would also filter air pollution and prevent soil erosion. Green roofs should also be installed on commercial and office buildings. Also, installed green roofs save energy and reduces heating and air conditioning requirements. Since green roofs have 60% less run off than gravel and asphalt tiles, it reduces the costs of drainage systems and improves the urban micro-climate (Roseland, pg. 49). Thus, green roofs offer financial incentives, helps with air quality, provides a common space for office employees, and gives the city an image of modernity and sustainability.

These are only a few of many recommendations of the proposed project AKA Developers and the city can adopt or modify to make their plan more consistent with sustainable development. The city and AKA should also look at other options to revitalize its urban core by practicing smart growth.

Recommendations for Growth Management

Smart Growth Boundary

AKA's proposed site exceeds the current ring of suburban towns. Since beyond the boundaries of this suburban ring is prime-agricultural farmland, it would be in the city's best interest to set a smart growth boundary to promote sprawl and prohibit AKA from developing beyond this boundary (as seen in Figure 1). This boundary also maintains an aesthetically please surroundings for Salitos. However, more importantly, the rural landscape offers protection against environmental degradation (pollution in all its forms), provides quality and availability of food products, and also provides various economic benefits of agriculture such as its beneficial impact on the economy , and the avoidance of the problems of land speculation and rising land prices (Cullingworth, pg. 162). Also, construction of residential sites further into the lowlands would put these residents into danger of periodical flooding.

Optimize land use through Mixed-Use Development

To best use the limited amount of land, AKA should undertake mixed-use development which should also be zoned accordingly by the Planning Commission. Developers should design the residential

neighborhood centers within walking distances to work and services provided by the mixed-use zoning. This zoning also encourages participation in the community since there is a lot of human interaction in a walking community. Thus, the residential area should not be limited to the east side of the Yuka River. Offices, retailers, restaurants and residence should co-exist on the proposed site (within the smart growth boundary) to optimize land productivity, which is possible through high density development (Roseland, pg. 142).

City Renovations

The expected success from the Waterford Project should generate tax revenue that could be used to go into revitalizing the urban core. However, this is the responsibility of the Salitos City Council to make sure that available funds go into restoring the declining areas and help the entire city redevelop as a whole. A chain of implemented impact fees and linkage fees should have a domino effect on the city and its surrounding to ensure a quality of life for all citizens. Buildings and ‘brownfield’ sites should be restored. Abandoned parcels of land can be redeveloped to provide housing and public infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, and libraries. The redevelopment of the economy and the infrastructure of the city can also be funded by Community Development Block Grants, other government-funded programs, and faith-based organizations.

Conclusion

AKA Developer’s proposed plans pose many negative impacts on the Salitos and the greater King County. However, if the Joint Council can advise AKA to modify their plan to address sustainability issues such as transportation, affordable housing and the environment, the citizens can have an opportunity to benefit from the Waterford plan. Also, setting a smart growth boundary can prevent sprawl and ascertain that taxes goes into revitalizing the declining city through mixed-use development and city renovations. Hopefully, the provided suggestions can help the AKA Developers in their planning process for a more sustainable development and bright future for the people of King County.

Figure 1

