

Who's in Charge?

You see a notice of application to develop a site near your house. You're appalled because you think it doesn't fit the neighborhood, will negatively affect your property value, or will congest local streets with too many cars.

So you storm over to City Hall and are stunned to find out that while your objections will be duly noted the project will be approved if it meets regulations no matter how many of your neighbors agree with you.

You're equally surprised to learn there won't be a public meeting on the proposal and the City Council has no say in deciding whether or not to approve the application.

You ask the city staff person helping you, "Who's in charge?"

If you want to have a say in how that vacant lot down the street develops it's too late if you wait until an application is submitted.

Title 14 of the Snohomish Municipal Code (SMC), the Land Use Development Code, establishes the rules for how development applications are reviewed and processed in the City as well as the standards all development projects must meet.

Title 14 provides for two decision-makers on all land use applications. Depending on the type of application, the decision-maker is either the City's Hearing Examiner or the City's Director of Planning & Development Services. Both are obligated to approve an application if it meets all of the requirements in Title 14 and elsewhere in the SMC.

That's why a project is approved even if it seems a majority of residents oppose it and nobody but the applicant supports it.

While it is the City Council's job to adopt the ordinances that create Title 14, that's where their role in the development review process ends.

Therefore, if you are concerned about how the City is developing and growing don't wait to oppose an application. Rather, put yourself in charge and find out what the code allows then lobby the City Council to change regulations if you think they are not in the best interests of the public's welfare.