

Letter sent by Fred Kray to the Alachua County Board of the County Commission

RE: The Lanata Cottage Development
Alachua County Code: Chapter 407.152 et. seq.

Ladies and gentlemen:

This letter is meant to memorialize a telephonic meeting the between Commissioner Cornell and Eric Rose, an Idylwild resident, Mary Alford, and two people from Growth Development on August 4, 2022. The call was meant to register the Idylwild residents' objections to the application of the "Cottage Development" ordinance, Chapter 407.152, as it was applied to allow student housing to be built in their residential neighborhood at Williston and 20th.

The Futile DRC July 21, 2022 Hearing

The County reviewed the Lanata Cottage development plans and advised those with objections should attend a meeting before the Development Review Committee. *The attached Power Point was presented to the Committee.* The neighborhood, a loose association of citizens living in the area led by the undersigned, hired a traffic engineering expert to testify that traffic at the intersection of Williston and 20th Avenue would be adversely affected and the development should contain an additional right turn lane. *A copy of the expert report and engineering drawing presented to the committee is attached.*

It was never made clear to the residents that the DRC could make no changes to the developers plan once it had decided it had met the code. Despite one of the members of the Committee interest in the proposed change, the County attorney advised that no changes could be made and the developer's plan was approved.

This procedure was one of the major complaints to Commissioner Cornell. If no changes can be allowed by the DRC once the County approves the plan, what is the point of the hearing? From the citizens' point of view, it was nothing but a way for the County to make it appear to hear resident input, without ever intending to act upon it. People missed work and money was paid to experts when it was clear from the county perspective, that the DRC had no power to do anything.

Either the County attorney has a very narrow view of the power of the DRC, or the DRC review procedure itself is flawed. There was nothing presented by the citizens of Idylwild that violated the code. The experts presented their interpretation of what would make the intersection involved safer within the bounds of existing traffic engineering standards.

The "Cottage" Ordinance Eliminates Single Family Zoning for any lot in excess of over one acre

Legislative History

The cottage ordinance was an attempt by the Board of County Commissioners to create affordable housing and prevent urban sprawl. The Board instructed the County staff to write an ordinance to accomplish these goals and the Cottage Ordinance was born. In essence, any lot over an acre can, without any zoning hearing, eliminate single family zoning for that parcel and add “cottages” that greatly exceed that of the original single family zoned lot.

A review of the presentation and discussion of the cottage ordinance proposal, attached, shows that even the county officials that wrote it did not believe the ordinance would necessarily mean the ordinance would create affordable homes. It was an experiment by the county led by cited examples from Washington and Oregon. The county apparently hoped that the wording in the ordinance that such developments “maximize resident and pedestrian outdoor spaces while minimizing the impact of automobile traffic and parking” would be enough to rein in unsuitable projects. *See Ordinance 407.152 attached*. It did not.

The Lanata Cottage Development Violates the Spirit of the Ordinance

There was no evidence provided that showed that the Cottage ordinance would address its two main goals: affordable housing and avoidance of urban sprawl. The Lanata cottage development that was just approved by the county also meets none of these goals. First, it is student housing, clear and simple. Second, it creates a traffic hazard at Williston and 20th. Third, there is nothing in walking distance of the project, nor is there even bus service to the location. The Cottage ordinance allowed the circumvention of the single-family zoning in the Idylwild neighborhood, and there was nothing the residents could do about it. It was an automatic process based on the overbreadth of the ordinance. And the worst is yet to come. There are three other lots in the neighborhood over one acre, and one is already being advertised for cottage development. Nothing in the ordinance limits the number of such developments, nor their location other than “within the urban cluster” a clearly overbroad definition.

The Current Debate on the Elimination of Single-Family Zoning

The City of Gainesville has proposed the elimination of single-family zoning. The public is uniformly against it. In a concurrent City-County meeting, one proponent of elimination said that it was sometimes necessary to vote against their own constituents. The City seems poised to do so. The county board was against the city’s elimination of single-family zoning, and yet, the county had already done the same for lots over one acre with the cottage ordinance.

Conclusion-Moratorium

The residents of Idylwild are hereby requesting a moratorium of further cottage developments in the county, based on the fact that three more could be built in their neighborhood. We are asking the County Board to revisit whether there is a genuine need for this type of housing, based on the testimony of Kim Tanzer at the City hearing that there is no evidence that eliminating single family zoning meets the goals of making housing more affordable or eliminating urban sprawl. The DRC should be given more power to change or deny a cottage proposal based on the nature of the neighborhood, and its proximity to supermarkets, bus service and other amenities that would reduce the need for traffic. A limitation

on the number of such developments within a neighborhood should be clear within the ordinance itself. Allowing such developments “within the urban cluster” is insufficient to ensure that developments make sense for the neighborhoods chosen for cottage development.

We appreciate your consideration of our request, and look forward to action on this matter.