

**From:** Ralph McKee <[rmckee2258@gmail.com](mailto:rmckee2258@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 20, 2021 11:40 PM  
**To:** Crawford, Tom <[TCrawford@a2gov.org](mailto:TCrawford@a2gov.org)>; Lenart, Brett <[BLenart@a2gov.org](mailto:BLenart@a2gov.org)>  
**Subject:** Fwd: Follow-up re 4/19 meeting

I forgot to cc you two when I sent the email below.

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Ralph McKee <[rmckee2258@gmail.com](mailto:rmckee2258@gmail.com)>  
**Subject:** Follow-up re 4/19 meeting  
**Date:** April 20, 2021 at 11:38:15 PM EDT  
**To:** [CTaylor@a2gov.org](mailto:CTaylor@a2gov.org), Ali Ramlawi <[ARamlawi@a2gov.org](mailto:ARamlawi@a2gov.org)>, "Briggs, Erica" <[ebriggs@a2gov.org](mailto:ebriggs@a2gov.org)>, [ENelson@a2gov.org](mailto:ENelson@a2gov.org), [jeyer@a2gov.org](mailto:jeyer@a2gov.org), [JGrand@a2gov.org](mailto:JGrand@a2gov.org), [JHayner@a2gov.org](mailto:JHayner@a2gov.org), [lsong@a2gov.org](mailto:lsong@a2gov.org), "Disch, Lisa" <[ldisch@a2gov.org](mailto:ldisch@a2gov.org)>, "Griswold, Kathy" <[KGriswold@a2gov.org](mailto:KGriswold@a2gov.org)>, "Radina, Travis" <[tradina@a2gov.org](mailto:tradina@a2gov.org)>

I am writing as a followup to last night's exhausting and bizarre council meeting. Since I wrote you yesterday and spoke at the end of the meeting last night on DC-5, I will not address DC-5 again other than to stress that it's very disappointing that you swiftly punish one CM for bad behavior while completely failing to even address or investigate behavior by others (political allies) which is also repulsive. The lack of consistency and intellectual honesty is appalling.

As pointed out adroitly by CM Nelson, your lack of consistency and intellectual honesty was also on display during the ADU discussion. The insinuation that ADUs will somehow magically help our affordable housing crisis is totally inconsistent with the argument that since they are so expensive to build, investors will not be interested in buying up modest houses, building a 2d house on the lot, and renting both. Those of you who tout your advanced degrees, and particularly CM Disch, who has been presented with numerous detailed analyses of ADU pros and cons, should engage your vaunted critical thinking skills a bit more often.

Next, I guess CM Grand either didn't read my Sunday email or failed to think carefully before saying, essentially, that if problems like investor buy-ups occur, we can fix that later. As I noted in my Sunday email, that's a lame argument, because every ADU built by investors after this ordinance "revision" will be a legal non-conforming use and cannot be forced back into being owner-occupied.

Statements by CM Briggs and others suggesting that we shouldn't concern ourselves with conversion of modestly priced owner-occupied homes into rentals is troubling, particularly given the common insinuation by the same CMs and supporters that those who are concerned about such conversion are tacitly supporting racism, or are "anti-renter". I seem to recall in my reading of Ta-Nehisi Coates that one of the biggest historical racial injustices was denying POC the ability to build equity via home ownership. I plan on attending the webinar on The Color of Law (haven't read that one yet); I'm betting that point is in that book too. But, hey, I guess you think it's ok to replace modest owner housing stock with rentals of \$2000+/mo. plus utilities, because they increase "housing choice", or "housing diversity", or some other feel-good talking point. And I don't think it's going to be that difficult for investors to rent brand-new small houses for well over \$2000/mo.; that's about the same rent as a small 1-BR apartment at Morningside.

Further, if we used some millage \$ for a downpayment assistance program, and given the current low interest rates, a first-time buyer buying that modestly priced house wouldn't spend much more per month than renting. Council has thus far rejected the concept of using some of the millage \$ that way. Well, maybe you think that all POC want to rent. Perhaps you could talk about that to a few of the middle-class POC who grew up and still live here, like Tony Brown. The bottom line is that trying to preserve the small number of modestly priced owner-occupied homes in town is NOT racist, NOT "anti-renter", and NOT anti-sustainability, because unless those homes are preserved as owner-occupied, buyers in that price range will buy or build 15 minutes out of town where land is cheaper, causing sprawl and commutes, the opposite of what is desired. You apparently are willing to gamble homes away in order to get some expensive rental ADUs; I am not.

CM Disch stumbled into another logical conundrum. First she says, essentially: banks often won't finance ADUs, so there won't be that many. So, if true, only the cash-rich (owners and investors) will build them. That supports my position above. But during CPC meetings, conversations with 2 local bankers were described indicating banks would finance these. So either CM Disch is wrong on the facts or undermining her own position.

Next, CM Disch used (both at CPC and at council) the isolated data point that in Vancouver, a significant percentage of ADUs are rented by low-income folks. Does that provide any support for the same result here? No. Building costs have skyrocketed recently so new ADUs will cost at least \$200k. So to make a profit, the builder/landlord has to charge \$2000+/mo. plus utilities. Do you know developer/builders who will charge less than what it costs to build and manage? I don't. Is \$2000+/mo. "affordable"? No. Vancouver has tons of ADUs. Likely many were built a long time ago, when it was way cheaper to build. Or maybe the low-income folks there are paying 50%+ of their income for housing, as is common on the west coast. Who knows? The point is that given current land and building costs here in A2, Vancouver's 2018 ADU rent statistics have no relevance to our situation.

Let's move on to Valhalla. This project is another paradigm example of what is wrong with our zoning and planning process, as well as illustrating some more inconsistencies. The current council majority often lauds staff, defends staff against criticism, and says we should stop micro-managing. Witness CM Briggs at a previous meeting defending Mr. Steglitz' badly flawed Gelman update, and, last night, saying our traffic engineers can handle the Valhalla traffic problems. Yet when planning staff recommend lower density, saying the project at issue is inconsistent with the master land use plan, CPC and council often just ride roughshod over that inconvenient recommendation. Valhalla is just the latest giant project in which this occurred. A similar scenario occurred re the giant Morningside development in Lowertown; there the original staff recommendation was denial because, among other reasons, the project was inconsistent with the master plan. Later, Mr. Lenart was somehow convinced to change the recommendation, without providing any reasoning. This time, as he candidly said last night, CPC (and you, at first reading) simply overrode the staff recommendation, without even considering the criteria applicable under zoning law, primarily due to the electrification of the project, which of course has nothing to do with the master plan inconsistency, and, per CM Eyer, everything to do with the tax \$ involved. So much for respecting staff. The same thing is happening with TC-1, where staff first recommended focusing on the State and Eisenhower area, then was forced by CPC into expanding the concept into 3 additional corridors, and is now being asked to rework the concept into being applied, essentially, city-wide.

The common thread here is that the process is backward. Re-zonings (and initial zonings like Valhalla) are supposed to be preceded by master plan revisions, which, though slower, involve more significant public input. No wonder developers and their friends don't think the master plan process is necessary. What I find truly ironic (comical, really, if it wasn't so sad) is that CMs like CM Song express such enthusiasm for spending \$800k on a new master plan, which, by the time it happens, will be totally useless, because virtually all remaining major land use decisions will have already been made. Further, if we continue our current practice, every project that CPC and council like will get approved whether it's consistent with the master plan or not. Why waste the \$??

How will the Valhalla project affect the surrounding area? Well, first let's assume it's built, and the traffic problem "isn't so bad". There are already lots being aggregated nearby, in SFZ zoned areas. Those owner/developers will petition for a re-zoning, and if denied, will sue, saying "we're just like Valhalla". Now, maybe the traffic problem will be really bad, but denying the project on traffic grounds has recently been shown to be a loser argument in court (the Trinitas case). And when you hear planning staff and city attorney say "there's no precedent being set", ask yourself when was the last time the city actually had the guts and smarts to fight - and win - a major fight re denial of development approval. I'm not aware of any; please let me know if you are.

Finally, just as I wrote to CPC recently, I have now pretty much given up trying to persuade this body to adopt policy positions on most issues, since the current majority typically trot out talking points and buzzwords in support of a fixed agenda and virtually always vote as a block, rather than making real critical analyses of the arguments presented. So at this point, I view my role, and that of other residents who have different points of view, to focus on calling out obvious flaws in those talking points in the interest of intellectual honesty. I would say thanks for listening if I thought you actually did. I realize I am burning any remaining bridge here, but that bridge was just an illusion anyway.

Ralph McKee