

MORATORIUM HAS BAINBRIDGE PROJECTS AT A STANDSTILL

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Like many areas in the Pacific Northwest, Bainbridge Island is experiencing a dramatic increase in development. However, unlike some jurisdictions that continue to tread along under long-stated rules, the City Council of Bainbridge Island recently instituted an immediate six-month moratorium on development.



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What has ruffled feathers about this development moratorium is not only that it puts a halt on many large-scale projects in the works but that it was done without warning, zero community input and, as apparent to most, without any real plan for resolution.

Bold to say the least!

As one of the architects whose business is directly affected by this pause in development, I can clearly see both sides of

this issue. As I understand it, the main cause for this crisis is concern and protection for the water quality of our local aquifers. But admittedly this is a rather intangible motivation. I think we can all share concern over the quality of our water, but in actuality the root cause is an overabundance of impervious surfaces and indiscriminate clear cutting of land.

Even as an architect, dependent on construction to earn a livelihood, I get a sinking feeling in my gut whenever I see the next subdivision of property cut and scraped clean so that placeless houses can be planted wherever. It's hard to feel good about such disregard for our island where the land area is finite and precious. But indeed, and up to this point, the development codes on Bainbridge Island have allowed it. And this is perhaps the central purpose of the ban on development: to pause and reconsider the consequences of current planning codes. I get it and I genuinely support the intent.

What I don't get is how this will be done efficiently and effectively. It is concerning whenever

a government body pushes the limits of its authority and suddenly alters the severity of its policies without any input from its constituents and without any clear or thoughtful plan to manage its consequences.

This is no exception. There are already many who are challenging the legality of this ban and for good reason. From the outside it appears that the council took this bold step without any real plan in sight. While the goals behind it are commendable and understandable, its execution and resolution seem totally up in the air. Does this affect single-family houses? What parts of the code are being reviewed for changes? How will these changes be discussed and implemented? When will this happen? What if six months comes and goes and there is no resolution? What if...? The list of questions goes on and on.

When pressed for answers, city staff are as confused as we are — and I don't blame them. There are no answers.

Just last week there was a public meeting on the matter. Well over 100 people packed

the chamber and more than 30 people spoke out about this moratorium, some with passion.

From my perspective there was about an equal number of people on either side of the argument, but one thing was unfortunately clear: No one really understands it or how it will resolve within the next six months.

I cannot begin to assess the number of projects being held up by this ban, nor do I want to try to quantify the number of dollars being lost in its execution — but I can guess it is a lot. For any project of size to be halted mid-stream at such duration will have a very significant financial impact. Land loan carrying costs alone for six months can be massive.

Further, and for those of us in the development community, the lack of income and sudden stunt to our workflow has a ripple effect that may ultimately cost other local businesses as well.

This can't continue without a clear plan. The council should be applauded for the intent behind the moratorium but must act swiftly and decisively in concert

with local architects and developers as well as other concerned community members to adapt our planning codes to the new reality of our evolving consciousness.

Yes, we all want to preserve the character of our island but change is inevitable. What I like about reconsidering our development codes is that we can, as a community, now redefine that character and invent a future of our choosing. However, any new code modifications need to be representative of the realities of a growing population and maintaining the integrity of our local economic system.

If done with a clear-minded holistic approach, I truly believe we can all get on board with some changes while still meeting the long-term social, economic and environmental goals that underlie the uniqueness of our community.

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