

I would like to post a comment on Item 15 Benjamin C. Mullins O/B/O Hilton Capital Group regarding the rezoning of the property on 2400 and 2600 Merchant Drive. First, I am encouraged to see the implementation of Hillside Protection on the property. For both the protection from erosion and increased stormwater runoff and the preservation of the “viewshed” Pleasant Ridge provides to NW Knoxville, it is important to leave the slopes of the ridge undisturbed.

For the development of the lower portion of the property, I oppose the rezoning or would encourage hesitation without further consideration in regard to the following:

1. Increase traffic at the intersection of Wilkerson and Merchant Rd. The alignment of Wilkerson Rd is already subject to traffic backing up due to the difficult left turn (particularly because of the angle and narrowness of Wilkerson Rd.)
2. Preservation of the woodlands on the subject property. It is understood that there is no guarantee of tree protection with the current zone and the Hillside Protection overlay may be the only future protection, at least of certain trees on the property, however, NW Knoxville lacks canopy cover and needs more forested landscapes for both wildlife, carbon storage, and water quality improvements (thru more natural landscapes in the watershed and less impervious surface). Typical development drastically increases impervious areas, by roof tops, driveways, and clear-cutting trees.
3. Finding other uses for the property, such as use as a park, would better increase the property values of the surrounding community. This property is owned by the Girl Scouts, who above many others, should understand and appreciate the protection of natural spaces. There are few unmanicured parks in North Knoxville and the area could use more. The pandemic has made it abundantly clear that people need and want outdoor recreational spaces. This is a perfect location to increase those opportunities and serve as an attraction to the NW Knoxville area.
4. School Capacity. Does Norwood Elementary and NW Middle have the capacity for the proposed housing density? To refer back to the third bullet item, our kids needs more wild spaces for their health, not cookie cutter subdivisions. There are countless benefits (lower stress, better air quality, decreased obesity, etc..) to having kids outside, exploring and playing. They need more undeveloped spaces that they can either explore directly or that enhance the aesthetic and appeal of the existing infrastructure.

I do not mean pure anti-development sentiment, but rather that long term and wholistic thought be applied to this unique property. If this property was donated to the Scouts, I would think it was in the spirit that it would be better used than to create a cookie-cutter, quarter acre, “maintenance free” lot housing development that is not inviting for kids to be outside. There are rock outcrops to climb, trees to sit under, a massive hill to summit and much more benefit not only the existing community, but to the potential dozen or so families that would end up moving in there.

Thank you.