

The property at 704 Irwin Drive, currently zoned residential/agricultural (RA), consists of 54 acres, of which approximately three-fourths lies within the Hillside and Ridgetop Protection Area. The developer has requested that the entire 54 acres be rezoned from RA to Planned Residential (PR), a designation that would allow dwelling units (du) to be clustered on the buildable portion of the property (approximately 14 acres) with no lot size restriction. They have further requested to be allowed to build 3.5 du/acre, or up to 189 units on the property (3.5 units x 54 acres).

The MPC Planning Staff has recommended that the zoning variance be approved, but with a limit of 1 du/acre, which would allow 54 dwelling units to be clustered, without lot-size restrictions, on the property. The applicant is asking the MPC to overrule the Planning Staff recommendation and grant both the variance and permission to build up to 189 units (see Applicant Correspondence attachment in Public Comment section), citing the need for more housing in Knox County.

Not every piece of property is suitable for building a subdivision. This one certainly is not, given the drainage problems already posed by the sloping terrain, which would be worsened by clearing and grading; the impacts to creeks that flow through the property; the shallow depth to bedrock, which makes the property prone to erosion and difficult-to-impossible to install water and sewer lines; the restricted line-of-sight of the only road frontage for entrance/exit from the property; and the increased traffic burden on Irwin Drive, with its blind hills, curves, hidden driveways and termination on a congested section of Central Avenue Pike at the infamous "Powell Can Opener" railroad bridge.

The applicant may not be fully aware of the construction difficulties or impact to the community the proposed subdivision would have. Comparing it to Grizzly Creek, which is much smaller and has none of the problems listed above, is misleading to MPC members, most of whom have not visited the properties. If developing properties like this one is being offered as a solution to Knox County's housing shortage, we have worse problems than a housing shortage.

In this case, using the property's acres in the Hillside and Ridgetop Protection Area to inflate the number of dwelling units that could be built on the rest of the property would be a misuse of planning tools. It would cause adverse impacts for neighboring residential properties, violate the existing character of the neighborhood, and pose hazards for drivers and school children using the nearby roads. If the variance is granted, even if this builder's project does not go forward once he investigates the line-of-sight, drainage, bedrock and erosion problems, the zoning change would remain with the property going forward, as ownership and development plans change. Rezoning should be based on the entire range of uses allowed within a zone to ensure that any development brought forth at a future time would be compatible with the surrounding community.

For these reasons, I oppose the rezoning of the 54 acre property to PR. If the MPC should grant the rezoning, I urge MPC members to restrict rezoning to that portion of the property that lies outside the Hillside and Ridgetop Protection Area and adopt the 1 du/acre recommended by the Planning Staff.