

# Pro-development progressives in Boulder won't solve the housing crisis

BY JEN MCCALED

GUEST COMMENTARY

The Boulder progressives appear to believe that building denser housing and taller buildings will reduce the price of housing. Nothing could be further from the truth. That might happen elsewhere, but for Boulder in particular, more housing doesn't correlate with lower prices.

Building a lot more housing won't reduce prices because there's an unlimited supply of people nationwide who'll pay whatever it takes to live here. Boulder is a unique blend of access to culture and nature in a small city. There are plenty of people who want to move here and have the means to do so. \*

The pro-development view says the only solution to the price of housing is to "build, baby, build." That will change what keeps or brought many of us to Boulder in the first place. The city's height limit preserves views for all, not just those who can afford a penthouse. The "Blue Line" stops city water service to random development that destroys views of the foothills. Open space gives easy access for all to unparalleled recreation opportunities.

The pro-development progressive view would ~~change all that~~ by maximizing residential housing development with minimal guardrails. Single-family zoning has been eliminated in Boulder. The current progressive City Council majority just passed an ordinance allowing multi-unit developments on most single-family lots with no new requirements for affordability, off-street parking or owner occupancy in one of the units. This council is considering developing a huge area of undeveloped land north of 28th Street near Jay Road (Area III in the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan). If Area III is developed, along with the many current projects, the total number of new housing units would be approximately 21,600, representing a 46% increase in the number of units in Boulder, presently at 47,000.

Boulder continues to be on the radar of nationwide real estate investment trusts. With these changes, Boulder will become an even hotter market for developers to buy existing single-family homes to divide into apartments and condos and to build backyard houses for the rich or their students at CU.

That brings us to the crux of the matter. If we don't require development to pay for the impacts it generates, the existing residents of Boulder will pay.

Not only will the price of housing continue to increase, but there will be increased traffic on roads and trails, worsening air pollution, crowded services, along with higher taxes to pay for public infrastructure and services needed for the growth.

If increased supply won't lower housing prices, what will? One way to reduce housing costs is to balance jobs and housing by making growth pay its own way, thus mitigating the impacts it causes. Adequate development fees can supplement subsidized housing. Currently, development fees are so low that almost all developers opt out of including subsidized housing in their development and instead just pay the city a low fee. I don't think these fees provide anywhere near the funds needed for the city itself to build or repurpose enough subsidized housing to meet the demand or cover the costs of water, roads and other infrastructure.