

**From:** [Oliver Orjiako](#)  
**To:** [Rebecca Messinger](#)  
**Cc:** [Sonja Wisler](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Submittal for July 25 HOSAP  
**Date:** Monday, July 24, 2023 7:53:53 AM  
**Attachments:** [Public comment for July 25th, 2023.docx](#)

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Good morning Rebecca:

Please, for the council . Thank you.

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**From:** R N S Barca <ronnets@msn.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, July 24, 2023 7:18 AM  
**To:** Susan Ellinger <Susan.Ellinger@clark.wa.gov>; Oliver Orjiako <Oliver.Orjiako@clark.wa.gov>  
**Subject:** Submittal for July 25 HOSAP

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For the record concerning the Council meeting, to be held July 25th.

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Public Comments for County Council review of Housing Options Action Plan 7/25/2023

To: Council chair, Karen Bowerman ; Councilors: Gary Medvigy ; Sue Marshall, Michelle Belkot, Glen YungX

I am a former member of the Housing Options Project Advisory Group; at the time representing the Clark County Planning Commission. I have been involved in affordable housing for years as a founding member of one of the first land trusts in the county. I currently hold a board position with the Vancouver Affordable Housing Network which is engaged in helping people at the lowest levels of housing insecurity or without shelter. I am also employed at Wolf Industries in Battle Ground WA, where we make small modular homes. Our homes are placed on foundations throughout the west.

As you will see in this testimony, I am not advocating for dense masses of “hutches” to squeeze people into, lacking dignity or comfort. I am offering solutions to real problems that will indeed force us to discuss whether there are alternatives to the current situation. People in the economic strata that I discuss in the text below are Clark County’s workforce; our middle class, our real backbone that gives the county its energy through the creation of goods and services each day. My discussion leaves out far too many that I believe need subsidies to be successfully housed. There are many great recommendations in the action plan that would help a variety of people and I whole heartedly support those recommendations. The County Council has spoken at length about employment lands, both Industrial and Commercial needing to be adequate in their supply. We also need to house the people that work in those jobs. My text below is targeted at workforce housing that I think can be helped in significant ways and I think you can help them today.

It is clear that, housing options need to be put into the perspective of two distinct categories: **Affordability** based on median income and housing costs as one measure, and the other is to revive the goal of **home ownership** for those many individuals that make a good living wage but have been priced out of market. The excellent report created by ECO Northwest has already begun to show age in how rapidly the market has reacted to the economic improvements and inflationary pressures. Realtor.com (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MEDLISPRI53011>) states that June 2023 median house sale price was \$664,000. Rents are showing the same type of pressure.

The goal before you is extremely large and complex. To try and handle the potential levers of change and impacts in a single meeting seems overwhelming coming from a Project Advisory Group member that was involved in this topic for months. It is vital that the County Council set goals for any effort to be successful. For what gets measured, gets done. You will not have a clear understanding on your impact to the problem if you do not understand what moves the needle and what does not. Work force housing is an absolute necessity for any community to be able to grow and thrive.

What is “Affordable” is one measure that needs to be defined. Remember that the Area Median Income is \$87,900 for a family of four. Cost burden begins at \$2200 per month. Two wage earners making minimum wage \$15.00 per hour will gross approximately \$60,000 annually. Cost burden begins for these members of the workforce begins after \$1667 per month.

There are many steps that can be put into place that would increase density allowing more affordable housing to be created on a per acre basis. Why is this the right approach? Over the decades of being planned, using the Growth Management Act, the expansion of the Urban Growth Boundaries has been a standard goal for politicians and development interest alike. However repeatedly, the expansion is unable to cover the financing necessary for concurrency and capital facilities. What has never taken place is planning that increasing density as a fiscally responsible method of utilizing tax dollars to get a greater amount of roof tops and work force housing. Compact living in a form of increased density does not equate to causation of a degradation to slum living or the worst specter of being *CALIFORNIA*. We must choose the standards to go with the intention of restoring affordability.

Boldness and action are not normally descriptions that encompass land use planning. However, there is an opportunity to breakout of the status quo and offer real actionable steps towards tackling these difficult issues. My suggestions in this correspondence will in some cases go beyond the Project Advisory Group. I usually refrain from using the term “encourage”. We, are not in the encouragement phase of solving this problem.

There are many incremental steps that can be done to try and grow the inventory and density of affordable housing. Much of this housing will be in the form of multi-family dwellings although duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes and row housing will also contribute to the goal. But that can be only part of the equation. In the target area 73% of the housing stock is single family unattached currently and it takes up 59% of the available acreage. If 34% of the remaining acreage is not dedicated to residential that leaves a mere 7% for multi-family development. If you are wanting to make a real impact in solving the problem this has to be increased to be part of the solution to get more housing built. Recent county code updates have refined standards for ADUs and cottage housing (40.260.073 Cottage Housing), and townhouse development. Continued refinements to those standards and a revisit to (40.260.110 repealed) Residential Infill are necessary to expanding opportunities for duplexes, triplexes, and quadplexes could help increase the variety of housing opportunities. Minimum density in high density zoning is a disincentive to fully utilize the property. Surface parking needs

review and possibly a reduction in relationship to transit and in the Hazel Dell planning area there is great opportunity to remove building height limits. Additional floors could be added based on county performance goals. You do not have the limits of an airport for height restrictions. Look at the expansion of Bellevue WA. where building height and freeway access transformed a city. Jobs and housing go hand in hand.

To the discussion of home ownership, certain things are apparent. The law of supply and demand will control the market and there are many more people outside of the county willing to pay \$550,000 or more for a home in Clark County than the population of Clark County alone would provide. What is completely missing is an inventory of homes for sale that meet the need of Clark County's Average Median Income; which is \$87,900 for a family of four. We are talking about a ball park figure of a home costing \$350,000 or less. How does Clark County offer people opportunity in the future?

Again, if you just open up the land supply, then nothing will change. The county can't afford the infrastructure, and developers will maximize their margins based on market forces. What has to change are the expectations and the code to meet the new demand. If you have proportional targets, attached dwellings, such as townhouses could be first time homes for some. If you reduce lot sizes with a minimum size of 2,000 square feet or smaller throughout the medium and low-density zones; and, keep the foot print of the dwelling proportional to the smaller lot, you get scale, off street parking, small personal space and a product that would be desirable for downsizing and first-time home buyers alike. We can't solve this problem by utilizing the same methods. Lot sizes have been shrinking already, and prices have not. The opportunity is here to offer unattached dwellings on lots of 2000 sq. ft. or less. Keep the footprint of the dwelling proportional to the lot size. In other words, shrink the size of the dwelling and reduce the material and labor associated with the dwelling, there by driving down the cost of the project simply by it being less. Cottage developments show one style of this as if it was a tract of homes, but this proportionality also offers an individual the opportunity to have their own parcel of land. The primary idea is to increase density with an attractive product for home ownership and to recommit to the concept of a median wage earners again being able to buy a home. Owning a home remains one of the proven methods of accumulating wealth. Today, only the wealthy can afford to buy in the county. The building industry will tell you that there is no demand for small lot developments and they won't result in a desirable product. The real problems will more likely manifest in the form of bidding wars driving affordability out on a remaining scarce product or investment money buying up properties to become desirable rental properties. The best way to combat that is to focus the county resources and planning effort to make a significant portion of urban residential workforce housing as a goal.

Then checks need to be put in place to ensure that targeted housing is really being created by measuring the results with policies that will force course corrections if you are not serving the county's work force. The Growth Management Act requires a variety of housing choices and this product has the documentation to show that it is in very short supply. You do not have to balance future development with all forms of housing stock equally. You have documentation that single family detached homes of the past have taken the lion's share of development. As you have a desire to bring meaningful jobs to the county, you need to house the workforce with housing that inspires the aspirations of upward mobility and future potential.

Some ideas to get the dream rolling are:

- Revise lot coverage allowances as needed to accommodate structures on smaller lots.
- Give the option of a reduction of lot sizes in all single-family zoning.
- Revise minimum lot widths and depths to correspond with proposed lot sizes.
- Create a proportionality of size to the reduced lot sizes, thereby ensuring that there is room for off street parking and yard or storage.

The county did not get in this situation over night nor is this the only community in this predicament. The State of Washington is setting some guidelines and laws have been passed that you must be aware of. For all the need, my input here has been targeted and I acknowledge that. I do believe that the measures listed above will foster equity and revitalize a missing part of the home ownership market. As always, my email is available and I will answer any questions that may arise and get them into the public record.

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