

Matt Martin

From: Constance Soja <csoja@colgate.edu>
Sent: Sunday, October 30, 2022 11:02 AM
To: Matt Martin
Subject: Ref File "MP 22-01/SUB 22-01/MNR 22-01"

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Email/letter about Sunset Meadows
Ref File "MP 22-01/SUB 22-01/MNR 22-01"

Sisters is special

Today, Sisters is a rare gem: a small community with thriving arts, educational and other opportunities with easy access to sites of natural beauty. People know each other, they care about each other, they watch out for each other, they support the local community by placing an emphasis on supporting local schools, downtown shops & restaurants, arts & music festivals, etc. As Sisters grows, all of that will change. The significant drawdown of water resources (especially during our years-long drought), serious traffic (which at various times of the year is already bumper-to-bumper thru the downtown sector) & parking issues, air-noise-etc. pollution, expansion of housing etc. into currently non-urban areas will all *increase* while a connection to community will *diminish*.

Economic growth should not come at such a significant cost; Sisters City governance should question the reality of the State's "order" that all communities "must grow" (an "order" made years ago before the impact of climate change was evident). Economically and environmentally, that makes no sense, when Redmond and Bend already have better infrastructure for managing continued growth; it also makes no sense now that climate change is upon us.

Will Sisters have the wisdom to pursue *sustainable* growth while embracing a serious, focused commitment to tackling the most pressing challenge of our time: climate change? It's a rhetorical question, because Sisters—like all other communities in the U.S. and around the world—*has no choice*. Climate change is already here, and all of us in Oregon have experienced for ourselves what that entails: diminishing water resources, excessive heat domes in summer, mega-fires, and debilitating smoke from wildfires statewide and from adjacent states. Sisters has to make all future decisions, including new housing developments, with that concern at the forefront.

Sisters in the future

First, Sisters governance has recently approved many new housing developments without explaining in detail what impact those will have on: traffic flow, parking, crime, pollution, adjacent non-urban areas, close sense of community, etc. **AND** climate change (diminishment of water resources, wildfires, etc.). "Bigger is better" seems to be the new mantra for our beautiful small town without looking at the "bigger picture." City officials have also not explained HOW it is pursuing *sustainable* growth during a time of climate warming: what the term "sustainability" entails, how it is assessed, what climate-valuable resources we have that should be protected, and how success will be measured. This is the single, most important task for the City (and every community, town, and city in the country) to undertake.

Second, the impact of climate change on the western US, including Oregon, is already evident. Every community needs to have a laser focus on what it can do to *reduce* greenhouse gas emissions and *enhance* carbon storage. Rather than expand the urban environment, Sisters should determine *the value of its trees and forests as absorbers of CO₂*, noting the specific economic value of trees, parks, and forests to the city as it weighs decisions, including those about additional economic growth.

Process going forward

Sisters should become a “climate smart community” (similar to the initiative underway in New York State: <https://climatesmart.ny.gov/>). Recent wildfires that endangered lives, property, and infrastructure near Sisters should prompt serious discussions about what Sisters can and *must* do to combat climate change. Live trees, especially *large, old* trees, absorb huge amounts of CO₂ as they undergo photosynthesis. Each and every large, old tree, (as well as dead trees lying on the forest floor—carbon continues to be stored in those trees for *decades* as they slowly degrade, returning nutrients to the soil) is Nature’s best carbon storage units, keeping out of the atmosphere the greenhouse gases that are accelerating global warming and leading to enhanced drought, to waning replenishment of ground-water aquifers, to an expanded wildfire season, to more intensive mega-fires, etc. Young trees planted to replace large, old trees cut down for housing projects do NOT sequester nearly the same amount of greenhouse gases. Saving our large, old trees should be a priority.

In sum, climate change needs to be the City’s top priority from now on into the future when making decisions, especially about economic growth and including the Sunset Meadows development. If more buildings/homes/apartments are approved, then more trees will be removed, worsening climate change, and all of the issues already mentioned. Unsustainable growth will put everyone in greater danger as growing demands will be placed on a diminishing water supply.

After careful thought and consideration, *sustainable* growth should go “up” rather than “out” to have the smallest ecologic and environmental footprint possible and to protect as many trees to offset carbon emissions. Those are the kinds of tough decisions that Sisters will need to made today and in each of the next 20+ years to protect future generations from ongoing drought, from lengthier fire seasons, from hotter, more intense mega-fires, etc. Until that “climate smart” roadmap is in place, please vote no on any future housing developments, including Sunset Meadows.

Constance M. Soja, retired geologist
721 Redwood Street
Sisters, OR 97759