

One View: Mt. Rose Highway — scenic corridor or concrete canyon?

Thomas G. Daly 5:24 p.m. PDT April 19, 2016



(Photo: Provided to the RGJ)

Mt. Rose Highway is, arguably, the only scenic corridor in Nevada, notwithstanding the Nevada Legislature designating the Las Vegas strip as “scenic.” (Please).

Despite Nevada’s 110,567 square miles, only this state route, about a 24 mile-long stretch starting at South Virginia Street and ending at Incline Village, warrants this designation.

So you might think that those federal, City of Reno and Washoe County entities, who control the zoning and development decisions along this highway, would carefully limit such plans to ensure they do not ruin for eternity this very small venue of spectacular views for those who transit this corridor.

Well, you might be wrong.



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['Hybrid' housing coming to former Summit Sierra land](#)

<http://www.rgj.com/story/money/reno-rebirth/2015/12/10/ex-summit-sierra-land-get-mixed-80-20-regular-affordable-housing-complex/77049288/>



A rendering of what the Summit Club Apartments could look like near the The Summit shopping center in Reno. The apartment will feature regular market rate combined with workforce or affordable housing to help address rent affordability. (Photo: Image provided by Sierra Summit, LLC)

The City of Reno has approved a massive apartment development on the easternmost end of Mt. Rose Highway opposite the Summit Mall. So much for the mayor and City Council’s commitment to scenic beauty. They value only the tax revenue. Enjoy your 30 pieces of silver, at least until the next election.

Now Washoe County has been asked to approve a high-density residential community (94 houses on 20 acres — 4.68 houses per acre — on reduced-size lots) called Colina Rose, on the south side of Mt. Rose Highway, west of Edmonton Drive.

The project's applicant, Towne Development of Sacramento, Inc., presented their plan on April 5, which was demonstratively rejected by local community residents, this commissioner and the entire county Planning Commission as not in keeping with the density (adjacent communities are 3 houses per acre) and visual impact appropriate for this scenic corridor. Further, traffic concerns, the impact on schools and fire issues were not adequately addressed in the applicant's plan.



In this file photo from March 2014, a car travels along a snowy Mt. Rose Highway near Reno. (Photo: Andy Barron/RGJ file)

Your Planning Commission has continued this matter to their May 3 meeting for further review.

This proposed high-density development would further overwhelm an already overtaxed Hunsberger Elementary School, now at 103 percent of capacity, without any offer by the developer to perhaps provide for one or more temporary classrooms, a Band-Aid solution but at least a fig leaf to the community.

Traffic safety issues, including a needed deceleration lane from eastbound Mt. Rose Highway to southbound Edmonton Drive and a limitation on exiting northbound Edmonton Drive to westbound Mt. Rose Highway, were not in the application as mandatory conditions of approval. Per NDOT, this intersection does not warrant a traffic signal.

The plan's westernmost homes, to be built on proposed dense skinny lots (lot setbacks reduced to 5 ft.) are adjacent to an untreated "high hazard" wildfire zone but show no clear space, as required by the county and TMFPD wildfire code. Further, on the plan the four new streets with cul-de-sacs show an island on each, limiting fire vehicle turnaround, in contradiction to fire code regulations.

Due to a quirk in the county's development code, this project is not subject to a special use permit, so your Planning Commission has only this one opportunity to impose conditions of approval.

I support residential development for these parcels, now zoned "neighborhood commercial," but the applicant's planned excessive density, lack of appreciation for the scenic corridor and unaddressed traffic, school and fire issues are unacceptable.

Not on my watch and not with my vote.

Thomas G. Daly is a member of the Washoe County Planning Commission.

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