

**BOISE FOOTHILLS DEVELOPMENT**  
**Comments by Gary E. Richardson**  
**On Behalf of the Boise Front Coalition**  
**To the Boise City Planning and Zoning Commission**  
**Feb. 7, 1990**

My name is Gary Richardson. I live at 746 Santa Paula Ct.

I commend the commission and the staff for broadening your review of foothills development to include the "big picture" and for initiating this public process.

I am one of many Boiseans who have made a deliberate decision to live here. A dozen years ago, after living in a variety of communities across the U.S., I decided that Boise is my kind of town.

Four years ago, I bought a home in Aldape Heights, one of the first of the city's foothills developments. My house, built in 1959, is located on the edge of the Military Reserve, a 466-acre, undeveloped city park linking the foothills to the valley floor.

To the south and west of my home is a magnificent view of Boise, the Treasure Valley, and the Owyhee Mountains. Downtown is a 15-minute walk away. And, because of the reserve, the entire Boise Front is literally in my back yard.

I think I have the best of both worlds -- city and country. It would be two-faced of me to oppose foothills development, and I do not. I want others to enjoy the same kinds of opportunities to be "recreated by" the foothills. However, what I see developing in the foothills today troubles me.

Because of my concern about the foothills, I have become active in several groups.

Shortly after moving to my present residence, I joined Alice Dieter in forming the Friends of Military Reserve, a group I now chair. Alice will tell you our concerns about the effects of foothills development on the park and on Mountain Cove Rd, which traverses it.

Two years ago, I was involved in starting another group -- the Boise Front Coalition. I am representing the Coalition here this evening.

The Boise Front Coalition is a broad-based group. We are foothills residents and foothills users -- hikers, bikers (both motorized and non-motorized), equestrians, walkers, and gawkers. Many of our members work for state, federal, and local agencies with an interest in the foothills -- State Lands, Fish & Game, Soil Conservation, Parks & Recreation, BLM, Forest Service, Ada County -- to name a few. Unfortunately, no one from *city* government has been active in the Coalition.

Much of the coalition's initial work has been informational -- raising people's awareness of the foothills. For instance, many Boiseans think the Front is public land. Most of it, of

course, is not.

Last spring, the Coalition placed more than a hundred signs along the Front to alert drivers to the county prohibition of unauthorized motor vehicle use on private land. The common response was, "When did they make it private property?"

I'm sure most of you know of the Community Day of Tending the Foothills we sponsored last May. Nearly 300 volunteers picked up tons of trash and repaired erosion scars. Much of the work was done on private land, land that no doubt will someday be developed.

In a moment, John Barringer -- a founding member of the Boise Front Coalition -- will tell you a bit about our Use, Rehab, and Enforcement committees.

Before he does, I would like to address a major concern of the Coalition and make a few personal observations.

We in the Coalition see the Boise Front as an invaluable natural and recreational resource. As such, it is not unlike the Boise River. Undervalued for years and -- like the foothills -- repository for the city's waste, the importance of the river is now widely recognized.

There are problems with the Greenbelt, but few now doubt its value as a public resource. Some property owners and developers resist its completion while the more enlightened have worked the needs of the Greenbelt and the river into their plans. Their vision has enhanced both public and private values.

It is time for us to approach the foothills with similar vision. Other places like the Military Reserve must be preserved along the Front as public open spaces. Public access into these natural areas and open spaces should be required of future development.

Along the southeastern boundary of the Military Reserve, the bottom of my driveway is the last public access point for a mile. The Candleridge and Knights Drive developments were approved with no public access to the city park they back onto!

As the foothills are developed, a system of greenways should be planned where people can walk and bicycle without having to compete with cars. This system of trails should reach from the valley floor to the undeveloped lands above, and eventually to the forested Boise Ridge. Where these greenways already exist -- as in Hulls Gulch, for instance -- they should be preserved. Where they do not exist, they should be created as development occurs.

The Use Committee of the Boise Front Coalition is developing a map of current uses in the foothills. Included are pedestrian, equestrian, mountain bicycle, motorized trails, and roads.

A Master Plan for foothills development should take these uses into account. Individual foothills developments should be approved only if they incorporate such trails and access to

them.

It is not good enough to create open space and non-motorized access with private golf courses and private trails. Foothills developments should not become private fiefdoms excluding the public.

I recognize that the public -- most likely through the Boise Park System -- will have to pick up some of the responsibility for the public spaces we preserve and create in the foothills. But, please don't let this precious community resource become hill-to-hill buildings, roads, and yards.

The Boise Front Coalition and the agencies that are members have already begun a master planning process for the Front as a whole. Perhaps a city planning official should become a member of the interagency team developing the Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP) for the Boise Front. John Barringer will tell you more about the CRMP process in a moment.

#### Revisions to the Foothills Ordinances

By and large, the revisions to the foothills ordinances suggested by the staff should be adopted. I think the ordinances lay out some very good guidelines for development. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons I don't pretend to fully comprehend, the ordinances have not been followed in recent developments. Your recognition of that fact has brought us here tonight.

One hears a lot about the "market." "The market has changed," we are told. "The market demands 3-, 4-, 5,000 square-foot, single-family, flatland homes on half-acre pads."

If the market cannot deal with cluster development and the sorts of innovative approaches required by the foothills ordinances, then maybe the market is not ready for the foothills. I firmly believe that, with creativity and vision, we can have what we all want up there.

#### Specific staff recommendations:

Padding -- 9-19-4-c (old 11-2-20.4c) -- I agree with what I understand to be the intent of this change, but not with removing the language requiring minimization of the need for padding and/or terracing of sites. Bob Kresge makes a powerful argument in favor of having whatever padding and grading is needed done by the developer rather than leaving it to the whims of individual property owners.

But when he cites Quail Ridge as an example of how it should be done, I disagree. There is nothing minimal about that development. There was not a blade of grass, let alone a quail, on the ridge after it was padded and graded. Quail Ridge appears to me to be a violation of evaluative criteria B, C, F, G, and H of Foothills Ord 11-2-21.4.

25 percent slopes -- 9-19-8-D (old 11-2-20.8d) -- We have been studying the hillside building guidelines of a number of other western cities -- Scottsdale, Austin, Boulder, Sun Valley-Ketchum. Some prohibit development on slopes greater than 25 percent, others place strict limits, and most have special requirements on any development between 15 and 25 percent.

The idea of allowing development on slopes up to 50 percent before special engineering requirements kick in seems like a terrible idea to me. This section (D) should not be weakened.

Who Pays?? -- In his Feb. 1 comments meeting, Planning Director Gibbs suggests that "Perhaps the organized citizens groups that have a major interest in protecting the Boise foothills would be willing to help finance such a plan."

There is no doubt that most of would be willing to. However, while the spirit is willing, the flesh is wanting. It is about all many of our groups can do to get out a mailing to everyone who should be informed of meetings such as this. Over the past year, I personally have spent several hundred dollars just on getting out the word to try to keep people up-to-date on foothills issues. I know others who have done likewise.

Foothills development is not merely a pet issue of a few groups. It is a major issue facing the future growth of this city. It is everybody's issue whether they know it or not. But if any one group is singled out to pay the costs of planning for foothills development, it should be those who will benefit financially from it, developers.

This brings me to some final thoughts.

As I have expressed to some of you before, I am concerned that the government closest to the people -- local, city and county government -- does the worst job of informing and involving its publics.

In the last 20 years, largely because of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), federal agencies have come a long, long way in learning to communicate with and involve their publics. Some state agencies are also beginning to catch on.

I think that much of the problem that has brought us here tonight has been caused because we have failed to institutionalize the public involvement of 10-15 years ago when the first alarms about foothills development were being sounded. The citizens involved then got burned out. The politicians went on to other things.

When I used the term "institutional memory" recently, someone told me that it is an oxymoron -- a contradiction in terms. Perhaps that is the problem.

But I think it is both necessary and possible to develop an on-going public process to address foothills development planning and oversight. It should be a multi-agency, multi-interest process. The Boise Front Coalition offers a good model in many respects.

To borrow an expression of my friend, former BPA administrator Peter Johnson, people must be allowed to "get their hands all over" foothills development policy. A foothills planning and development task force should include developers, residents, users (maybe even a few abusers) of the foothills.

This meeting tonight is a good beginning, but it is only a beginning. Thank you for starting it.