

Letter to the editor: Shari Malloy: Concerns about the Rivertown development annexation proposal

Shari Malloy, guest opinion
a day ago



St. Vrain Greenway construction behind Left Hand Brewing | Macie May

[Listen to this article](#)

00:05:27

The Longmont Leader accepts contributions, photos, and op-eds for publication from community members, business leaders and public officials on local topics. Publication will be at the discretion of the editor and published opinions do not represent the views of the Longmont Leader or its staff. To submit a contribution, email info@longmontleader.com.

Several facts about Rivertown, a 21-acre annexation/development proposal along our St. Vrain Corridor, should concern Longmont residents. Rivertown is immediately east of Rogers Grove and Fairgrounds Lake, extending along the Greenway to Sunset Street. The proposal is on city council's agenda for January 11.

Background: After our 2013 flood, Longmont adopted a 500-year-flood mitigation plan. Residents who saw the plan's potential impacts to wildlife and habitat started "Stand With Our St. Vrain Creek" (standwithourstrvraincreek.com) to protect this corridor from potentially damaging development. Many residents agree such action is needed: Longmont's latest Open Space Survey found 74% rated "Protecting nature areas from development" as "very important."

This flood mitigation plan meant that 800 acres of privately owned designated floodplain properties in the City reach of the St. Vrain not suited for development could potentially be developed after flood mitigation. Over \$400 million (and counting) in public funds has been spent on flood mitigation, and now these property owners/developers want to capitalize on our investment. We, the public, should get something we value in return for our massive tax dollars!

For properties like Rivertown, it is prudent to apply a standard concerned with protecting the common good. This standard should reflect good stewardship of our public investment while protecting our Greenway's riparian wildlife habitat (about 90% of wildlife depend on riparian areas for survival). Our St. Vrain jewel belongs to all of us and needs protection from selfish interests. Roger Jones donated the acreage for Rogers Grove so residents might "always have a place to connect with nature, learn and enjoy." Nothing in the Rivertown proposal suggests any respect or regard for the adjacent natural environment. Development proposals in this exceptional corridor should be exceptionally designed!

Rivertown's plan includes 320 residential units (mostly apartments). In the last 140 years, 12 floods have inundated the St. Vrain Corridor. Despite our best mitigation efforts, ever-more extreme weather conditions means it will very likely flood again. The Marshall Fire shows the huge tragedy that can occur when previously unlikely dangers are ignored. Is putting people and property in known harm's way morally and fiscally responsible?

Compliance with Code: Rivertown does not comply with the Longmont Development Code (LDC) zoning designation for this property, which is Mixed-Use Employment. This designation includes light industrial, flex work spaces, research and development--all to encourage employment. Rivertown plans only 10% of the property be used as commercial and 90% as residential, essentially proposing to circumvent the intent of the zoning designation.

Compatibility: LDC item 15.05.030(G)(11) states that development in natural areas must be compatible in terms of land use, site design, and building layout and design. Over half of Rivertown is bordered by natural areas, meaning the proposed "high-density" residential units are inappropriate. At a minimum, a multilayered buffer of native landscaping between the development along the Creek and Rogers Grove/Fairgrounds Lake is needed to screen from light intrusion, storm runoff, noise, and other human disturbance.

Wildlife Impacts: Rogers Grove/Fairgrounds Lake has one of the only nesting sites of Bank Swallows in Boulder County. Bank Swallows are a Boulder County Species of Special Concern and are a declining species nationwide. They migrate thousands of miles every spring to nest in the bank near the Fairgrounds Lake bridge. Current mitigation plans call for a split-channel flow option right where the Bank Swallows nest is, destroying this valuable habitat. A condition of the annexation agreement should require a conservation easement for placement of the split-channel flow on the Rivertown property in order for construction to avoid the Bank Swallow nesting area.

Of further concern is that the habitat/species assessment for Rivertown was conducted in winter, meaning little wildlife was seen during the survey. A thorough breeding-season survey should be conducted, especially to include the threatened Northern Leopard Frog. There should also be a plan to buffer the Red-Tail Hawk and Osprey nests near Rivertown during nesting season to prevent nest failure due to construction noise/activity.

Conclusion: Longmont City Council should require amendments to the Rivertown proposal that necessitate meeting the LDC, protecting people's homes from flood, and protecting and enhancing the two adjacent natural areas. If you are concerned by Rivertown's many problems, please contact Council members before the proposal's second reading on January 11.

Comments (1)

We welcome your feedback and encourage you to share your thoughts. We ask that you be respectful of others and their points of view, refrain from personal attacks and stay on topic. To learn about our commenting policies and how we moderate, please read our [Community Guidelines](#).

B [Busterbrown](#) a day ago

As Pete Seger so wisely wrote his song "Where Have All the Flowers Gone," When will we ever learn?....
