

OPINION

PORTLAND LIVING

Residential density around parks should be increased

ELI SPEVAK
IN MY OPINION

Portlanders love their parks. Why do we let so few people live next to them?

When Portland makes major public investments in transit corridors, we update zoning to allow more people to live nearby. With neighborhood parks? Apparently not.

Portland's Comprehensive Plan update gives us a rare chance to consider boosting allowable residential densities along our park perimeters. This could be achieved through a simple bump-up from single-dwelling zones to low-density multidwelling zones. Logical exceptions could be made for very small parks, situations where park fences block direct access from adjoining parcels, and sensitive natural areas. In addition to letting more people live next to parks, this change could increase park safety by having more people's eyes on them. It could help meet equity goals by creating

the opportunity for smaller and less expensive homes near parks. And parks offer adjoining property owners supplemental open space and visual expanse, even if personal yards are modest in size.

When parks and residential developments are designed concurrently, increasing residential densities along their edges is common practice. McCoy Park at the heart of New Columbia in North Portland is one local example. There, higher density multifamily buildings surround the park, dropping down to less dense, detached homes one-half to a full block from the park edge.

But with older parks the story is quite different. Using the recently released Comprehensive Plan's map app, I did a quick review of zoning along the perimeters of all 24 parks with playgrounds in Northeast Portland and found that the average park in this group is a little over 70 percent surrounded by sin-

gle dwelling zoning. Half of these parks are entirely surrounded by single-dwelling zones (including Grant, King School, Knott, Merrifield, Rose City, Wellington and Wilshire). Three quarters are at least 70 percent sur-

rounded (including Alberta, Argay, Fernhill, Irving and Woodlawn). Just four parks are entirely surrounded by non-single-dwelling zoning (Buckman Field, Mallory Meadows, Montavilla and Oregon). And when brand-new parks are created (such as Khumamokwst Park in Cully, now under construction), abutting properties are rarely rezoned.

All of this seems like a missed opportunity to increase the public value of our park system.

This idea hasn't (yet) made its way into the Comprehensive Plan map, despite being suggested by the Residential Development and Compatibility Policy Expert Group well over a year ago and studied in-house by bureau planners. Since citywide reviews of zoning maps

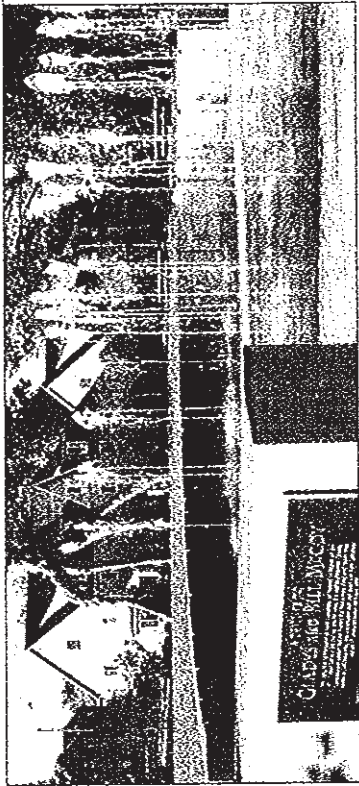
are exceedingly rare, the only practical chance to address this issue for the next couple of decades is probably through the comprehensive planning process now underway.

Draft Comprehensive Plan Goal 8.H calls for "All Portlanders (to) have safe, convenient, and equitable access to high quality parks, natural areas, trails, and recreational opportunities in their daily lives." Two complementary ways of achieving this goal:

- Create and maintain a wonderful system of parks and natural areas.
- Create opportunities for people to live near them.

We already do a pretty good job at the first. Now let's work on the second.

Eli Spevak founded Orange Spirot LLC, a housing development company and general contractor with a mission to pioneer new models of community-oriented, affordable, green housing in Portland.



McCoy Park in North Portland is surrounded by multifamily buildings.

THE OREGONIAN

Father

Continued from E1

the slopes from the lodge. All of us there knew something bad was going to happen.

The horror unfolded slowly.

On the second day, two from the hiking party showed up at the lodge. They had

