



Growth, Development & Vacant Land

By Linda Browning

Vacant land does not require expensive infrastructure, services, or road maintenance. Vacant land is a tax contributing, no complaints neighbor.

Yet some people view an undeveloped piece of land as wasteful and unproductive – “anything is better than leaving land undeveloped!” This low assessment of the value of undeveloped land rests on several questionable assumptions:

--Undeveloped land is a net drain on the community, like a lazy loafer. The truth is actual data points at the exact opposite. Farmland and other natural spaces actually contribute far more in taxes than they require in expenses for services. The ratio of revenue to expenses is generally 2-to-1 which is significantly higher on undeveloped land than for any other use of the land.

--Vacant land produces nothing. In truth, most natural land produces some tax revenue while generating a benefit for the community. The peace and quiet provided is the number one reason people say they have moved to Clear Creek County. Natural land helps absorb rainfall back into the earth where it recharges the earth and supplies wells with pure water, and helps manage storm water by absorbing more of it rather than letting it just run off into drainage systems. Economic and development studies show vacant open space lands actually raises the value of surrounding properties, benefitting both the residents and the county through higher property taxes.

--Land would generate more overall benefits to the community if it were developed. Actuality the opposite is true most of the time. It is frequently stated that if a house or a store is built on vacant land it will certainly produce tax revenues. However, an abundance of research shows that it will also require county services and infrastructure that generally exceeds the tax revenues collected – yielding a net economic loss to the County.

Undeveloped land has another value that is similar to having a savings account that you never use. You don't have to spend it to appreciate that it is there if you ever need it. Once land is developed, it is hardly ever available again for any other use. Renewing outdated developed land is less costly than developing virgin land, and yields better net economic value to the County.

A community that does not keep its open natural land has severely limited its options for the future, as well as almost certainly making its cost of living more expensive. Vacant land provides a perpetual stream of values to a community. It is attractive, environmentally productive, and economically useful. Natural lands are some of Clear Creek County's great irreplaceable treasures.

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