

From: [Emily Dawson](#)
To: [planning](#)
Subject: Heron Commons SAP District Draft 5 Public Comment
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Thank you to the City Council, staff, and everyone involved in revising the Heron Commons Specific Area Plan. I live in the townhomes along East Thurman Mill Street, immediately adjacent to the proposed district, and I appreciate the opportunity residents have had to provide feedback as this plan has developed.

I especially want to thank the City for the changes made regarding the connection between Adams Street and the Waterfront District neighborhood. One of my primary concerns with the earlier draft was the possibility of creating a new vehicle through-route between Heron Commons and the local Adams Street within the Waterfront District.

Draft 5 addresses that concern in a meaningful way by prohibiting a motor-vehicle connection between the two segments of Adams Street unless Ada County Highway District requires one. I also appreciate the additional requirements that, if such a connection ultimately becomes necessary, it be designed to discourage non-local traffic, incorporate traffic-calming measures, and generally operate at 15 mph or less. These changes feel responsive to the concerns of the surrounding neighborhood while still allowing for bicycle, pedestrian, and emergency connectivity.

My remaining concern is the transition between Heron Commons and the existing residential neighborhood along Thurman Mill.

I support additional housing and increased density on this site. I also understand that a successful mixed-use district will likely include buildings considerably taller than the homes that currently surround it. My concern is not the existence of six-story buildings within Heron Commons. It is the possibility of buildings of that scale being placed immediately adjacent to existing two- and three-story homes.

Draft 5 establishes a base maximum of six stories and 72 feet, but the minimum setbacks along the outside boundary of the SAP are only five feet for a rear setback and three feet for a side setback. The draft acknowledges that increased setbacks may be necessary based on the height and intensity of development and its impact on neighboring properties, and the stated intent of the plan specifically calls for transitions in height and scale that are compatible with adjacent residential neighborhoods.

I appreciate that intent, but I do not believe the current minimum standards guarantee that outcome.

Behind the existing homes along Thurman Mill there is an alley separating our neighborhood from portions of the proposed district. Under the current language, it appears possible for a building approaching six stories and 72 feet in height to be located very close to that boundary. Even with an alley providing some separation, that could create an abrupt wall of development towering over the existing neighborhood.

We have examples nearby of what happens when large-scale development transitions too abruptly into an established residential area. I would like to avoid repeating that pattern here,

not by preventing taller development, but by designing a more thoughtful transition between the two scales.

I would therefore encourage the City to establish a **meaningful residential transition zone** along portions of the Heron Commons boundary that directly abut existing residential neighborhoods.

For example, the ordinance could limit buildings within a defined distance of an existing residential boundary to two or three stories, while allowing additional stories through progressively larger upper-story setbacks. Another approach could establish a height-to-setback relationship in which each story above a certain height requires an additional horizontal setback from the residential boundary.

I would also encourage the City to make that residential transition zone address the **interface between new development and existing homes**, not only building height. Service functions such as refuse collection, loading areas, major mechanical equipment, parking garage entrances, and similar back-of-house uses can have a significant impact on adjacent residents if they are placed directly along the residential edge. Where these functions are located near existing homes, the ordinance should require appropriate orientation, screening, buffering, and separation so that the edge of Heron Commons functions as a genuine transition rather than simply the back side of a larger development.

The draft already uses a similar concept along the Boise River Greenbelt, where additional building height is permitted as upper stories are stepped farther away from the Greenbelt. Applying a comparable principle along existing residential boundaries would allow Heron Commons to retain substantial density and building height while creating a much more gradual and livable transition to the homes that are already here.

I would encourage the City to make this transition measurable rather than relying primarily on discretionary review. Language stating that larger setbacks *may* be necessary provides some protection, but a defined residential transition standard would provide greater certainty both for existing residents and for future developers.

I believe this could be accomplished without materially reducing the amount of housing that can ultimately be built within Heron Commons. Taller buildings and more intensive uses could remain concentrated toward the interior of the district, while the perimeter facing existing homes could step down in scale and limit the most disruptive service functions.

Overall, I appreciate the direction Draft 5 has taken, particularly the changes to Adams Street. I hope the City will take the same approach to the residential edge of the district and establish a clear, enforceable transition in building height, massing, and site design between new development and the existing homes along Thurman Mill.

Thank you for considering these comments.

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