Boone Planning Board member Jeff Templeton says in an open letter that the Affordable Housing Task Force has missed the target in their recommendations. After the quarterly hearing Monday night, he sent a letter outlining his concerns. That letter, in its entirety, follows: If you didn't make the quarterly public hearing on Monday night before the Boone Planning Board and Town Council, then you missed an interesting discussion on the future of Multi-family Developments (aka apartments) in the town of Boone. The Town of Boone Affordable Housing Task Force, represented by Chairman Lynwood Brown and task force member Pam Williamson, presented their vision for Multi-family housing in Boone. Unfortunately that vision did not include ASU students or the very group the task force was charged to help, those needing affordable housing. What Mrs. Williamson presented was a text amendment to the town's development ordinance for ALL new multi-family housing that included provisions targeting the development of student housing and provided nothing to encourage the creation of new affordable housing. Provisions like; parking limited to a maximum of two spaces per unit, limits on the number of bathrooms per unit, and a restriction on occupancy of no more than two unrelated persons per unit, were clearly designed to prevent the occupancy of ASU students in any future apartment developments in the Boone planning jurisdiction.

So, who would this benefit if passed? The answer is no one. Obviously the students would lose out as the new regulations would put a halt to any new student apartments in Boone, thus creating a housing shortage for the anticipated 1000-4000 additional students expected to attend ASU in the coming years. The law of supply & demand would dictate that ASU students would only see rental prices increase in the future as a result. Those needing affordable housing would lose out. The teachers, firemen, and hospital workers seeking affordable housing would be no better off as the regulations do nothing to encourage the development of any new affordable housing or the renovation of existing properties for affordable housing. What about those of us who are tired of the "Mega Apartment Complexes" around town? Well, you would lose out too. The shortage of student housing would only increase the demand for single family homes in the neighborhoods in and around Boone. Additionally, these large complexes would continue to be built outside of Boone, resulting in increased traffic and congestion.

So what is the answer? Cooperation for one thing. The Town of Boone could work with developers to provide land for affordable housing projects. This Public/Private partnership is commonly used to create affordable housing in other communities. Another common approach would be incentives such as higher density allowances for developments that include affordable housing units. And thirdly, the Town of Boone could remove some of the barriers to affordable housing projects by waiving the expensive non-refundable deposit for water allocations and application fees for qualified projects.

The problem of affordable housing is real and the need is great, but so is the need for additional student housing. The long and the short of it is Boone and ASU are forever destined to coexist in this valley in the mountains. There is room for all of us, if we can just find ways to work together.

Jeff Templeton
Boone Planning Board Member (ETJ)

Photo--Jeff Templeton