

Lacey set for 'green' land uses Its recently approved ordinance allows grass streets and houses built on stilts - if developers are willing to bear the costs (Thurston County Edition) Lacey sets standards for 'green' land uses (Pierce, South King County Editions)

[Thurston County Edition]

The News Tribune - Tacoma, Wash.

Author: Karen Hucks
Date: Sep 11, 1999
Start Page: B.1
Section: Local/State
Text Word Count: 547

Document Text

Copyright Tacoma News, Inc. Sep 11, 1999

Article shorter in Pierce and South King County editions on page B3.

Lacey is the first city in the state to clear the way for salmon-saving developments with narrow, grass streets and houses built on stilts.

The 28,000-person city recently passed an ordinance that will allow developers exemptions to some city requirements if they prove their projects won't have an adverse impact on the environment.

For example, if a development will have so little impervious surface that all of the rainwater can seep back into the ground - as if there were no houses there at all - the developer wouldn't have to build required stormwater retention ponds.

"This is a big start," said engineer Tom Holz, who has been pushing such innovation in Lacey and elsewhere. "This is way past cool."

Holz, who works for SCA Engineering in Lacey, came to the city last fall with a proposal for the nation's first-ever grass street. The street could be grass, topped off with bridge planks for a driving surface.

Such streets could help salmon by reducing concrete and asphalt surfaces that send large volumes of stormwater into the watersheds. The rush of water scours spawning gravel and deposits silt, which make it impossible for fish to thrive, salmon experts say. Grass streets would absorb and retain rainwater.

City Council members liked the idea for the pasture-like avenues and parking lots but said they were too expensive and unproven to ask taxpayers to subsidize them. A developer would have to want to do it, council members said.

But Lacey, like many cities, doesn't have codes that allow that kind of development, much less encourage it. Roads have to be wide and have curbs.

The ordinance the city passed last week, good for five years, clears the way for developers who want to pursue new ideas.

"I think it's a really good thing, and I'm glad we did it," said Lacey Mayor Nancy Peterson. "But I have reservations about how many developers are going to take advantage of it."

Getting banks to take financial risks and back breakthrough ideas is often difficult, community development director Jerry Litt said. Not all developers would want those risks, either.

Earlier this year, Lacey developer Tri Vo had expressed interest in using some of Holz's ideas on a housing development he's doing on 45th Avenue and College Street Southeast. But city officials said that, in the end, the project was already too far along to change plans.

Another concern Peterson had was that in 10 to 15 years the people who live in the "zero impact" neighborhoods could cut down trees or rip up native vegetation in favor of lawns and the city wouldn't be able to do anything about it.

It would be part of neighborhood rules that residents would keep maintain the natural environment, "but we've seen developments where the covenants aren't lived up to," Peterson said.

Nevertheless, the developments are worth trying, city officials say.

"We all know we need less impervious surfaces," Peterson said. "And if there are people who want to live in these developments and developers who want to build them, then it's great."

* Staff writer Karen Hucks covers Thurston County. Reach her at 1-800-388-8742, Ext. 8660, or karen.hucks@mail.tribnet.com.

Credit: The News Tribune

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

Abstract (Document Summary)

Lacey is the first city in the state to clear the way for salmon-saving developments with narrow, grass streets and houses built on stilts.

The 28,000-person city recently passed an ordinance that will allow developers exemptions to some city requirements if they prove their projects won't have an adverse impact on the environment.

[Tom] Holz, who works for SCA Engineering in Lacey, came to the city last fall with a proposal for the nation's first-ever grass street. The street could be grass, topped off with bridge planks for a driving surface.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.