

HIS VIEW: Who should be Moscow's business greeter?

By Henry D. Johnston

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Johnston

In exactly one week the voters of Moscow will have the chance to make a monumental change to our city's leadership by electing a mayor who is concerned about the growth our city experiences so as not to disrupt the unique quality of life our town offers.

Many letters to the editor have suggested that incumbent Mayor Nancy Chaney is the woman for the job.

I disagree.

I remember the exact moment I realized Chaney was opposed to any new development in Moscow.

It was during a City Council meeting on a warm June evening in 2007 and the council was considering an appeal from the Board of Adjustment regarding a conditional use permit. At the time, John Dickinson was still missing and Bob Stout was absent from the meeting. This left John Weber, Bill Lambert, Aaron Ament and Linda Pall to consider the appeal.

The application was to allow a Dutch Brothers Coffee stand on the corner of Sixth and Jackson streets, in the vacant lot next to the Latah Eagle. It is important to note that this

lot is just one block from Main Street and also is part of the corridor that connects downtown the University of Idaho.

Substantial time and money from the developer had already gone into securing the franchise, property and designing the lot. The only thing that remained was getting the permit to allow the drive-up windows since the business was to be located in the central business district, not motor business.

It is important to note that the Board of Adjustment reviewed the development twice and reached the same conclusion both times. That was, to allow the development to proceed.

At issue of the appeal was whether or not it was appropriate to have a drive-thru coffee stand on the lot and if the Board of Adjustment did their job properly.

The appellants were a small band of Moscow's typical pony-tailed, Birkenstock wearing, anti-growth academics. Their reasons for reversing the board's decision were plentiful, the least of which was that this development was "not dense enough" for the lot and that a building larger than the measly coffee stand proposed should be constructed.

The developer answered every concern that the appellants had, right down to how warning signs would be put in place to protect Moscow's sacred pedestrians and bikers. There were also a number of parking spaces made part of the development that would be considered "open parking" for the Sixth Street corridor. In other words, every concern of the appellants was addressed and special considerations were made to appease people who really didn't need to be in the first place.

But that was not good enough for the mayor.

On a tie vote of the council, Chaney voted to reverse the decision, thus killing the conditional use permit, the approximate \$360,000 worth of improvements that were to be made and the dream of this young couple to own their own business.

To this day that lot remains vacant, unable to find a business willing to locate within its boundaries.

But why?

Could it be that during Chaney's time in office there has been no new commercial development in Moscow that wasn't already allowed "by right" for zoning of the property? Or maybe it is that the number of businesses that have closed and buildings that have been torn down outweigh the number of new businesses opening or buildings being built?

If that doesn't say "anti-business," I don't know what does.

Being mayor is likened to being a greeter to new development. Wouldn't you prefer to have a mayor who greets businesses with open arms saying "What can we do for you?" instead of handing them a stack of regulations and saying "This is the way we do things here. If you don't like it, move on."

Given her past performance, it is important to ask ourselves the following: Is Nancy Chaney who we want greeting guests at Moscow's front door?

Henry D. Johnston is general manager of an area retail store.