

Columbia County Land Development Services  
Attn: Jake Renney  
230 Strand Street  
St. Helens, OR 97051

Re: Notice of Public Hearing, File # CU 23-06

Dear Mr. Renney,

Our family owned the house neighboring Mr. Watson from July 2017 through July 2022. We were the closest neighbors of Mr. Watson for a total of 5 years. As such, we believe we have sufficient background and knowledge to provide some information on his current business enterprises.

To start, it's important to realize the concerns of the neighbors are not merely speculation or fear of change. Mr. Watson has operated a business on the premise in the past and the concerns being raised were reality during that enterprise and continued when he started Watson Automotive. Traffic from business related activities were inordinately high, as were speeds and reckless driving behavior. Employees of Mr. Watson came and went seemingly constantly, at all hours of the day and night, making it impossible to determine what was "personal" use of the road vs. business. Noise was loud in the form of business-related activities as well as music and interactions between employees. The road deteriorated extremely fast due to increased traffic and improperly designed drainage from Mr. Watson's driveway he had paved for his business. Through all this Mr. Watson displayed no consideration for his neighbors and refused to address issues that were raised. He has shown a clear record of not obeying laws, County ordinances, or common decency to those around him. That record has carried over to the start of this new enterprise by not gaining the proper permits to operate the business in question.

It's nearly impossible to run an automotive repair business in the confines of an existing building. Performing test drives of vehicles during and after repair is a necessity. In our time living as a neighbor, we witnessed Mr. Watson performing many test drives of vehicles on his property. Often driving repeatedly up and down a small, paved section immediately adjacent to the property boundary fence. This would cause excessive noise immediately adjacent to our house and bedroom windows. Often noxious car emissions and occasionally paint fumes would drift into our open windows as well, forcing us to close windows due to safety concerns for us and our children. If test drives were not performed on the premise, Mr. Watson would utilize the private roads to perform them. Taking this into account I believe the stated business use of the road (20 trips per week) is drastically underestimated.

Furthermore, in the submitted written comments there is reference that Berry Hill Dr. should be modified to accommodate 2-way vehicle traffic and possibly be paved. Berry Hill Dr. officially ends at the driveway to the residence of house address 32741. Past that point, the "road" only serves 2 houses. Per Columbia County Road Guidelines such a "road" is classified as a driveway and must adhere to the driveway specifications. Driveways are required to maintain a 12' wide driving surface and has no minimum right-of-way width. The current plat maps note a 20-foot road easement for the driveway portion of Berry Hill Dr., which would be 10' from centerline in each direction. Also, per Columbia County Road Standards, a private road must have a 20' driving surface with a 40' right-of-way width. The existing right-of-way is not sufficient to install a 2-way 20' driving surface without extending the easement on the neighboring parcels along the driveway, further encumbering those parcels.

The current neighbors also raise valid concerns on the lack of parking, vehicle turnaround space and property devaluation. Starting in the spring of 2022 we noticed a marked increase in the amount of vehicle traffic accessing Berry Hill Dr. Mr. Watson's gate was nearly always closed and vehicles would often drive behind our house to our shop thinking it was Watson Automotive. Numerous customers of Mr. Watson also parked in front of our garage and approached us asking if our residence was Watson Automotive. These actions lead the current owners of 32698 to install a gate and perimeter fencing. Additionally, vehicles would often park and idle in-front of Mr. Watson's gate and honk repeatedly for the gate to open. Communication between Mr. Watson and his customers seemed very poor as often Mr. Watson would not be home and the vehicles would utilize our driveway to turn around, only to return at a later time.

We can also speak directly to property devaluation. We listed our house for sale in March 2023 at a time when similar properties were going under contract in a matter of days and many over asking price. Initial interest in our property was high; however, our house was on the market for nearly two months before we were under contract. Our realtor mentioned multiple prospective buyers were concerned about the appearance and activities taking place on Mr. Watson's property as reasons we were not getting offers. Furthermore, we had to drop the price from our initial listing in order to sell. The real estate market and pricing structure is complicated to say the least. However, we can speak from firsthand experience and confirm an automotive repair business does impact house value in a rural residential setting.

The current neighbors have submitted plenty of evidence demonstrating how the proposed business conflicts with the Columbia County Zoning Ordinance for rural residential properties and we concur with every issue presented. Given Mr. Watson's history and the evidence provided, we believe it is clear Mr. Watson's residence is not suitable for the proposed business under rural residential county zoning.

Respectfully,

Eric and Carli Bergey

Received 3.21.2023  
Board of Commissioners Office  
File No. CU 23-06