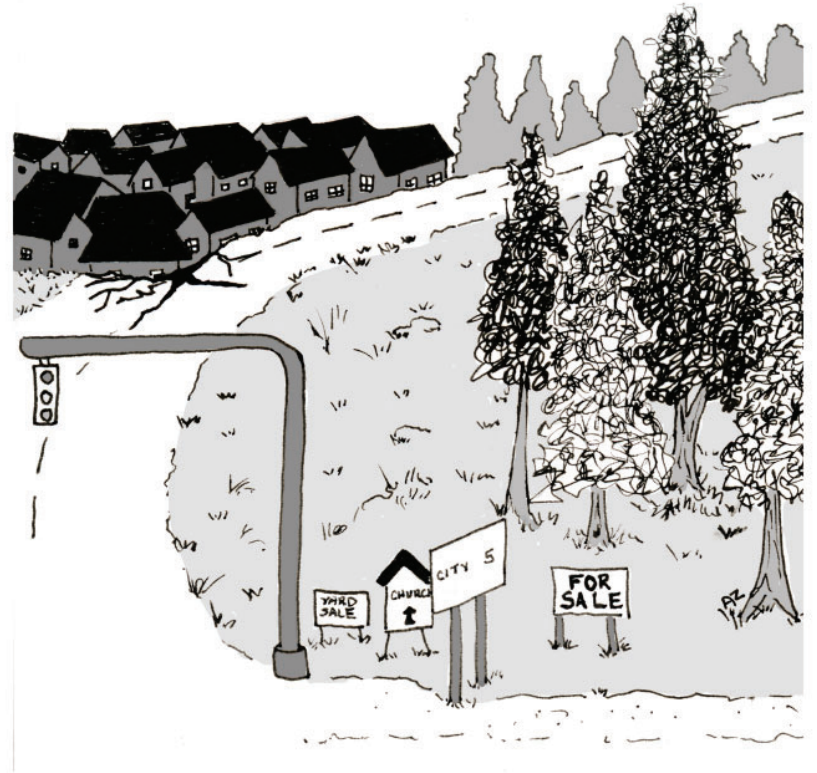


Why did we let it
get like this?



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Why Did We Let It Get Like This?



a story about a corner lot

by Anni Zimmerman

There's a little lot at a busy intersection near my house. A triangle—piece of land with trees and a bunch of signs, right where the subdivision meets the highway.

It's not much. Just a sloped patch of grass, too steep to be useful, too loud to be peaceful. But the trees gave it something. They blurred the mess of signs and urgent church invitations.

Then one day, the For Sale sign came down.

And for the first time, I wondered if something good might be coming.

The trees are gone.
The road is still crumbling.
The sign pretends it means something.

I keep thinking about that corner.



Not what it is now,
but what it was.
Something rooted.
Something quiet.
Something real.

I can't plant trees there
now.
Not anymore.
But maybe somewhere else.

Before the next sign goes in.

No one asked what the neighborhood needed.

No one asked what the trees were worth.

They just built the sign.

It doesn't say anything useful.

It's just a place for flickering ads, same as the old signs, only louder.

I felt ridiculous for ever thinking it might be something that would make that small corner lot better.

I thought they were going to fix the road. The slope was eroding. There's a deep rut where the asphalt's giving way, and every time I drove over it, I worried I'd slide off the edge and tumble down the hill into the neighborhood below.

It made sense. The trees came down. Heavy equipment rolled in. It looked like the beginning of something useful. Something for all of us. Safer turns. Wider lanes. A shoulder to pull off on. I started watching the intersection like a kid waiting for a present.



After a while, when nothing happened,
I gave up on the road being fixed.
The equipment left. The pothole stayed.
But then I started to wonder—maybe
they were going to build something
small.

The lot wasn't big enough for a house.
But it could hold a little coffee stand.
It wasn't what the road needed, but it
was something I could look forward
to.



It wasn't a coffee shop.
I drove past a few days later,
ready to see what had gone up. There
was no small window with a smiling
barista holding out a steaming cup
of coffee.



It was ugly.
Built exactly where the trees had
stood.
The pothole was still there. The slope
still crumbling. But now, there was
a giant sign to distract us from it.