

Council Communication

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Normal Avenue Neighborhood Plan Update

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SUMMARY

The City of Ashland has received a grant award from the State of Oregon's Transportation Growth Management Program to complete a land use and transportation plan for the 94 acre North Normal Avenue area. At the time a property owner requests annexation into the City of Ashland, the Normal Avenue Neighborhood Plan is intended to help guide changes to the area in a manner that creates a system of greenways, protects and integrates existing stream corridors and natural wetlands, accommodates future housing, and enhances overall mobility by planning for safe walking and bicycle routes while providing convenient access to future bus service. Neighborhood planning represents an opportunity to collectively think ahead, determine a vision, and instill a degree of confidence about being prepared for changes, rather than merely being put in a position to react to change.

BACKGROUND

In May of 2012, the City Council initiated the planning process to develop a Concept Plan for the Normal Avenue Neighborhood and accepted a Transportation Growth Management grant to undertake the planning effort. The overall objective of this project is to better integrate transportation and land use planning and develop new ways to manage the area's future growth in a manner that achieves compact pedestrian, bicycle, and transit friendly development. As the area is presently outside the City Limits, but within the Urban Growth Boundary, the future development of any properties within the area to urban densities will require annexation approval and development review.

Upon completion of this project, the adopted Normal Avenue Neighborhood Plan will provide the underlying framework for future area development through adoption of Land Use standards for the overlay area, a transportation circulation plan, and a redistribution of housing concentrations through amended Comprehensive Plan designations for the area. Although future development of this area is expected to occur in an incremental way, as individual parcels propose annexation for specific housing developments, with an adopted neighborhood plan in place each individual development proposal can coordinate the provision of streets, pedestrian connections, utilities, stormwater management, and open space. Such an approach can ultimately help reduce development costs through appropriate sizing of needed facilities, provision of easements, and secured street access. Additionally a significant benefit of an adopted plan is that there is a clear expectation and understanding regarding the level of development anticipated by both developers and neighboring residents. In this way the development and annexation process for all properties within the plan area is streamlined while ensuring the City can accommodate its future growth in a systematic and efficient manner.



THE PLAN

Throughout the last year planning and design work has been undertaken in recognition that the project area should be considered as a system where each development decision impacts each part of the whole. For example, the placement of streets throughout the site will ultimately have a direct impact on the function of the sites natural resources as well as the efficiency of the development pattern. Housing types and concentrations have been examined in an effort to meet overall city and regional housing goals while balancing the design needs of the site and need to protect sensitive natural areas.

The working Normal Avenue Neighborhood Plan is designed to provide a environment suitable for traditional neighborhood living, working, and recreation. The Normal Avenue Neighborhood Plan is a blueprint for providing broad flexibility in housing types allowed in each zoning designation to encourage variation in style and type while achieving the intended housing densities. The neighborhood will be served by a connected network of streets and lanes, paths and trails, with direct connection to the natural areas, wetlands, and streams that characterize the district. This network will also connect to the larger network of regional trails, paths, and streets beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood.

Project Guiding Principles and Objective

Throughout the process of developing the Normal Avenue Neighborhood Plan over the course of the last year the Planning Commission, Design Team, resident participants engaged in the process, and Staff have referenced the following objectives to help guide discussions about various plan elements:

- Increase efficiency in the use of land through concentration of housing in a centrally located area within the City UGB planned for future urban development;
- Achieve a development pattern that results in a balanced, multi-modal transportation system and that enhances opportunities for walking, bicycling or using transit in areas planned for transit service;
- Delineate housing, neighborhood serving commercial, open space, public space, and green infrastructure improvements, in a manner that provides for preservation and enhancement of creeks and wetlands;
- Develop new illustrative conceptual architectural and site plans for Project Area consistent with Transportation and Growth Management objectives. Concepts will meet City's and the property owners' development goals and standards.
- Design a local street grid for the Project Area including connections to existing and planned street, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities outside Project Area, to more fully integrate the Project Area into the City transportation system;
- Provide for pedestrian and bicycle routes and facility improvements within the Project Area that will provide safe access to local schools;
- Provide alternatives to, or delay the need for, expansion of the City UGB;
- Reduce emissions that contribute to climate change through changes to transportation or land use plans that reduce expected automobile vehicle miles traveled;
- Provide an implementation strategy that includes supporting Comprehensive Plan and updated TSP amendments, form based codes, and design standards; and
- Present the Plan and documentation necessary to support adoption to City's Planning Commission (PC) and City Council (Council).



The Planned Housing Types and Land Use Designations

The development standards for the Normal Avenue Neighborhood Development Plan will create its own neighborhood character by providing three different residential zones with different densities and development standards. The use regulations and development standards are intended to provide a significant degree of flexibility as to the form and character of individual developments. The Land Use designations NA-01 is intended to provide single family dwellings, accessory residential units, and clustered housing. The NA-02 designation provides housing opportunities for individual households through development of a mix of single-dwelling housing, duplexes, townhomes, accessory residential units, and clustered housing. Clustered housing, commonly referred to as “pocket neighborhoods”, are a new housing type envisioned for the plan area where multiple compact detached or attached dwellings occupy a single lot. These dwellings are grouped around common open space and are separated from one another by side yards to provide privacy and single family home-type scale and character. Through the consolidation of common open space and or parking cluster housing developments can often achieve a housing density comparable to attached row houses or low-rise apartments, yet with a lower profile and the appearance of traditional single-family homes. The NA-03 land use designation is intended to address Ashland’s housing needs through development of multi-dwelling housing as well as allow for limited neighborhood serving commercial uses such as a coffee shop. Lastly the NA-OS “open-space” land use designation is intended to protect environmentally sensitive water resource lands and provide open space recreational opportunities for individual households throughout the Normal Avenue Neighborhood Development Plan area.

Greenway and Open Space

The Plan’s approach to the greenway and open space framework is to maximize protection of the existing natural resource areas and provide usable, connected open space within the plan area. Natural areas, including streams, wetlands, and other environmentally sensitive features contribute significantly to the existing character of the Normal Avenue neighborhood study area and were most cited by neighborhood residents as needing preservation to retain the rural character of the area. The quality of the place is enhanced by these features and the wildlife that they attract. The objective for the open space and greenway component of the plan is to protect and enhance these existing natural areas while also providing connected open space throughout the plan area. Open space will help maintain the neighborhood’s distinctive character, promote environmental quality, and provide opportunities for both scenic enjoyment and active recreation.

Protected riparian corridors and wetlands will support native vegetation, provide habitat for wildlife, and promote environmental quality by absorbing, storing, and releasing stormwater. Streams and wetlands will be maintained as amenities with access to all area residents due to the carefully considered transportation network that ensures that these areas are not hidden in back yards. Accommodation of the pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile circulation along the edges of the riparian zones provides visual and physical access and increases the buffer zones between pockets of development enhancing the character of openness within the plan area.

Transportation

Walking and cycling, or “active transportation”, is fundamental to the Normal Avenue Neighborhood urban design plan. Designing the transportation network in consideration of the experience of a person walking through the neighborhood allows for development and block patterns in which residents more readily relate to their environment, feel safer, and are more comfortable on foot or bike. Despite the inherent boundary conditions that limit connectivity, such as Ashland Middle School and the Central



Oregon & Pacific rail line, building the transportation network on a foundation of interconnected streets and walkability makes all modes of travel more efficient and effective. Walkability is supported in the plan by small blocks, however there have been some variations from these block lengths in consideration of natural resource protection areas. Care has been taken to locate pedestrian and bicycle paths adjacent to, or across, these natural areas to enhance the user experience and increase access to these neighborhood amenities.

The Normal Avenue neighborhood's internal street network has largely been designed to keep travel speeds in the range of 20 mph by introducing elements such as a planted median, a traffic circle, and subtle changes in direction at block intersections. The Normal Avenue Neighborhood plan also introduces a new street type into the range of Ashland streets: the woonerf. A woonerf is a very low speed street where all of the functions of the transportation system coexist in the same space. There are no individual sidewalks separated from the street surface by curbs and planted medians. There are no bicycle lanes separated from the street by painted lines. The low volumes, low-speeds, and narrow cross-section make it possible for all to safely occupy the street surface by yielding to the slowest and most vulnerable present at a given moment.

The use of rear lane alleys helps to reduce the extent of paved areas, and will support a complete grid of finely-grained urban blocks. These alleys will provide the primary access to garages and backyards. Where cottage cluster housing occurs, alleys are critically important to their function. Elsewhere, as in those areas zoned NA-03, specific locations for the alley locations within the designated blocks is left to future development needs, subject to the maximum block length and parking access standards.

Transportation Impact Analysis Study

Staff is currently working with a traffic engineering firm to complete a future traffic analysis to evaluate the anticipated traffic volumes and impacts based on the plan's development projections and street layout. This Future Traffic Analysis will provide information to address questions raised at the previous Study Session as well as to determine if alternate design scenarios need to be explored or plan adjustments made before a final plan is presented to the Transportation Commission, Planning Commission and City Council for formal consideration.

PUBLIC MEETINGS AND OUTREACH

Early in the planning process property owners, and neighborhood residents were active in the design of the concept plan itself through participation in a two part public workshop, or 'design charrette' from October 23-25, 2012. Following the charrette the design team has been developing a more refined layout for the street networks in careful consideration of the natural features, topography, property lines, existing development within the area, and the short and long term phasing of the plan.

Over the last year the Planning Commission, Housing Commission, and Transportation Commission have each had the opportunity to review the plan during the course of its ongoing development. The Planning Commission specifically has held five study sessions to take public feedback and provide direction to Staff and the design team as versions of the plan have been further refined. To provide opportunities for that effected residents and stakeholders to become familiar with the plan, and make informed contributions to the community discussion regarding the area's future development, the City held two well attended neighborhood meetings, two open-houses, and conducted two site visits open to the public. Additionally City Staff solicited input from property owners within the plan area through a questionnaire, and has attended numerous stakeholder meetings with property owners, neighboring



residents, and Homeowner Associations to answer questions and hear concerns about the various drafts of the neighborhood plan.

Upcoming outreach activities will include Planning and Transportation Commission study sessions, an article regarding the project in the City Source newsletter, and the use of Open City Hall to solicit online feedback from the area residents and the broader community regarding the Final Plan's design.

NEXT STEPS

The final draft of the Normal Avenue Neighborhood Plan including a land use designation map, local transportation network map, and land use code provisions for the overlay area are scheduled for completion in September, and the adoption process scheduled to begin in October. The Planning Commission will hold a final study session in September to review a final draft before holding the first formal public hearing. The finished draft will then be taken through the formal public hearing process which involves a public hearing and recommendation by the Planning Commission and a public hearing and decision by the City Council.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

N/A

STAFF RECOMMENDATION AND REQUESTED ACTION:

This update of the Normal Avenue Neighborhood Plan project is intended to provide Council with a summary of key elements of the neighborhood plan, review the public participation and outreach conducted to date, and inform Council of the next steps in the neighborhood planning process.

SUGGESTED MOTION:

N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

- Charrette Concept Plan – Oct 2012
- 6/25/2013 Working Land Use Designation map
- 6/25/2013 Working Transportation Network map
- 6/25/2013 Working Street Classification map
- Wetlands and Streams map
- Density Illustrations
- Parks Vicinity map
- Aerial Vicinity map

