



Community Forum on Workforce Housing May 4, 2006

Sponsored By:
Save Our Schools
and Playgrounds
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Ashland Housing
Commission

At this event participants worked to collectively come to an understanding of how the lack of Housing available to Ashland's workforce is impacting our community. To examine this complex issue six questions were asked of all participants. The following represents the raw comments received by the participants on each of the questions.

Focus Group Question # 1:

How Big is the Problem?

- Any community that is as desirable as ours (Aspen, Sub River, etc) will face this problem
- Need housing in the form of apartments
- It's a big interconnected problem, less apartments...less diversity
- Won't be able to attract good people to jobs
- Is SOU Student housing a model, does SOU have a problem?
- What do people who rent do in retirement, they have no equity?
- Ashland's desirability means Ashland is for sale to the highest bidder
- Destroying community
- Jobs and housing are intertwined
- Young people have to move a lot to find affordable rentals
- We didn't get our chosen Planning Director.
- University was questioned on the definition of "workforce housing"
 - classified staff and others not making a living wage
- Service workers living way outside of Ashland
- Employers don't have their choice of workers
- If Ashland becomes elitist, other towns grow -not all bad.
- Problems on the rise include a change in community lifestyle
- Less diversity
- Without diversity of age and income in the community the less able the community is able to absorb change, its less resilient.
- Too reliant of outside incomes (SS, Retirements plans, investments) and the economic growth can't sustain the community
- Losing schools
- Declining enrollment in schools – families can't afford to live here, what do schools do?
- Two school closures in the past three years.
- When teachers are not able to live here, as well as police & firemen, they become detached from their constituency
- Professors at SOU: cant keep good [professors] if housing is too expensive, same is true for health care professionals

- Young families can't stay here
- Ripple effects: Spend more time commuting, social stress, lose wealth, kids go into social programs. Hospital will leave if it doesn't have constituency
- Losing pedestrian lifestyle (more commutes)
- Erosion of leadership, might be more involved in Medford
- Traffic will increase, so many people commuting
- We all [people who own homes] have to see what we can do to have young families here
- Stigma on "affordable" housing, and "HUD housing".
- Workforce housing is needed whenever one has a [any] source of income that is not enough to cover their housing costs.
- Long time residents cant afford to move
- People move out of Ashland and commute
- We need children to be able to live here
- Use the schools to promote housing for children
- Broaden definition of "workforce housing"
 - anybody that works
 - small businesses
 - home occupations
 - ALL INCLUSIVE
- Our college educated kids can't afford a home here
- Older people moved and re-moved to stay in Ashland , face increased rents and downsizing

Focus Group Question # 2:

What can the City do?

Listing of comments received:

- Rental Housing is ok, Denmark example
- Cost to build rentals is too high
- Limit lot size-reduced for smaller units
- City land available
 - parking lots
 - Utility yards
- *Invest in people and families directly , those that are invested in the community
 - reduce utility taxes for low income
 - direct subsidy to individuals as opposed to housing projects or land
- Land availability
 - expansion of UGP with provision of land for affordable housing
 - INCREASE supply of land
 - School district land
- City could reduce service charges
 - Electric tax
 - Infrastructure
 - address very low income
- Clear set set of Goals (council)
- Accountability for performance
- Improve city/employer relationship
- Tax credit initiatives
- Zoning to allow higher density or increased height in all zones
- Set a goal, ie 1% of total housing stock
- City manager MUST introduce programs to create workforce housing. (not deep subsidy)
 - Ashland have its OWN HOUSING AUTHORITY or non profit entrepreneurship
 - partner with HAJC
 - FUND a vehicle for Development
- City mandate certain employees live in the City of Ashland
 - employ locals for city positions
- City property tax credits for the subsidy of affordable housing – for reduced rents (a break)
 - [for example a reduction in the property taxes for a % of rent reductions]
- Limit house sizes (maximum city wide)
- START A HOUSING TRUST FUND
 - -property tax benefits for donations/estate planning
- Waive System Development Charge for affordable housing (see existing program)

- City coordination with other political bodies, or private property owners, to develop available land
- Living wage ordinance expanded
- City supplied (owned) housing
- Promote industrial development
- Tax incentives for local businesses that provide assistance to their employees
- Community Development Grants
 - City could seek private and government grants.
- City could put on forums for residents – ie ABCs of home-buying
- Goal – diversity of housing choice (when asked whether rental or ownership was preferred)
- Offer incentives for newly employed residents to become invested in the community
 - low cost rent and assistance for first time homebuyers
- Incentives – reduce property taxes to promote young families with children
 - diversity of Ages is healthy
- Family friendly amenities (a culture of improved schools and parks) – people will sacrifice to be here.
- All new housing development has to be rentals (no single family residential)
- Do not permit condo-conversions
- Limits on demolitions – housing be replaced at the same income levels
- Co-Housing opportunities
 - zoning permissibility and flexible zoning to promote smaller units
- Air-rights
- Requirements for commercial annexations to provide property (air-rights) for affordable residential development.
- Aggressive recruitment of employees from higher cost markets.
- Shared equity ownership
 - Private investment pool where Individuals could buy into a affordable unit and capitalize on their percent of ownership
 - Create a mutual fund for individual investing in housing
- City owned small apartments with shared amenities (green-space, laundry, workout facilities etc) –inexpensive with the idea that people can save for future housing – or an eventual ownership of the apartment.
- Attract federal funding with creative programs
- Issue with those on the edge being priced out with city costs
- Economic development grants (OSF) could instead go to non profits that develop housing.
- New fee on businesses or rental property managers that goes to affordable housing)

Focus Group Question # 3:
Where do we find the land? Or air?

City Land or Property

- The Grove – build up?
- City Hall – build up?
- RR District?
- Golf Course (74 acres): Lithia Park East?
- Clay St.
- Hersey St.

School District Land

Various Parcels at each school site:

- Lincoln “Triangle” near Beach St.
- Willow Wind
- Helman Playground
- Other playground edges or fringes near residential areas
- High School practice fields

SOU Land

- Science Works
- Ashland Street and Walker

Forest Service Land and Jackson County Land

Land Swaps with City???

Mountain Meadows

Medinger Property proposal on adjacent land

Development Issues and Housing Strategies

- Transportation
- Annexation: i.e. Normal Avenue area; East Main
- Density
- Infill
- Ordinances
- Incentives to Developers/Businesses
- Co-Housing
- Building Up
- Accessory Units
- Live/Work Units
- Business Incentives
- Smaller units
- Maintain Affordability

Focus Group Question # 4:

How can Ashland employers help their workers live in Ashland?

- Educate workforce on homebuying
- Subsidized loans , low interest loans
- Employers help with transportation
- High Density rental units downtown, employers would help provide
- Parking structure slightly out of the center of town – underground parking
- City Businesses should have to pay a fee to do business here, based on sales. Seed money for workforce housing
- Take hotel/motel tax and spend on workforce housing
- Free housing for a certain amount of time for volunteer activity.
- School property managed by land trust or JCHC. Each site should be required to put on one house. - Helman (ten acres), Walker, Bellview, Lincoln along street
- Sky research may be buying houses/working with developers
- SOU schools have land, City has land
- School District employees could live there with RVCDC building houses. Arrangement between school-board and landlords.
- Community wide program
- Moral Support
- Support workforce housing
- Ashland could give tax benefits to employers that provide housing for their employees.
- Loan guarantees
- Secure rental agreements
- \$150k to Shakespeare each year [City Grant] could go to workforce housing
- \$250k each year to Chamber could be lowered significantly and could go to workforce housing
- Basalt Co., has estimated costs to community of losing children
- Chamber of Commerce could advertise to recruit “young” families with children to come to Ashland and help them start businesses rather than retirees who want to live in McMansions.
- City tax credits to businesses that buy units etc.
- Consortiums of many businesses jointly create [programs/units]
- City Government could require its employees to live here and provide housing for them.
- Need radical approaches
- Annexations- Employer could have to provide housing fro its employees somewhere in Ashland
- State of Oregon should provide family housing
- Increase Density Bonuses
- Living wage ordinance tied to housing costs
- Shared Equity - Stanford University owns 20% of the houses for its employees,

Focus Group Question # 5:
Where do we find the Money?

- Use properties currently owned by SOU, schools, city, etc.
- Private investment rather than government funds, possibly on “break-even” basis.
- Issue bonds to promote economic development (use for something that will generate money.) Any new economic development would be required to provide workforce housing.
- CDG money into Trust Fund to leverage more money
- Make visible what it means to lose real community so people more willing to spend money
- Federal money
- Higher development fees earmarked for Housing Trust Fund
- Community Development Fee passed in 2000 with much going to planning department
- Money at state level – Make corporations pay fair share in OR with money for affordable housing. Rescind tax reduction
- 10) Before we ask where can we find money, define what money is needed for project, to define project
- A portion of lottery funds
- Leverage public funds
- Fund a development person to work with employers to fund Trust Fund. Figure out program. Make it easy, have package, make it fashionable.
- Encourage Public Employers Retirement System to invest in affordable housing. Retirement housing for state employees or turn into mortgage funds
- Tax incentives to property owners to build apartments etc. (or other form of incentives)
- Can we tax all businesses a tiny amount. When Alan DeBoer recommended a lodging tax and a person wrote to the paper, no tax car sales
- Increase SDC waiver/deferral
- Increase SDC and increase waiver
- Increase restaurant, hotel (and entertainment) tax
- Company owned town – what’s good about it
- Co-housing
- Moratorium on single family homes in toto or don’t allow in multi-family zone
- Real Estate Transfer Fee
- School districts provide workforce housing, working with private developers, corporations. Has land not being used.
- Unitary vision attracts money
- Private market incentives, minimize government
- IPA tax

- City pursue increasing assets to own it's own affordable housing. With older community, educate them to encourage estate planning, tax advantages to give to trust
- Look at root causes of skyrocketing costs, who benefits (owners of expensive homes, real estate agents, developers). Luxury tax on expensive home sales or transaction costs or progressive tax based on how much property owned in Ashland.
- More clarity on how City spends money now – efficiency
- Build on publicly owned property
- Automobile tax
- Gas tax
- Sliding SDC's
- Radically higher building permits, especially remodels on order of 100's of 1000's of dollars
- Bake sale
- Grants
- Private investors (as opposed to government)
- Sales tax
- Business fees – annual (small) % of gross so every business shares burden, not just meals or lodging tax
- Employer contributions
- Allow co-housing on existing properties using existing homes with large backyards. Change zoning if needed to add cottages in older neighborhoods. Create more housing without changing character of neighborhoods too much.
- Work to keep people who live here, here. Not just focusing on helping new people to move here.
- Toll to get in town
- Forest Service land
- Wants to know how big a problem is before know where money comes from
- Transfer tax 1) affect working wages? 2) Favor less transience?
- City sales tax
- Meals tax – pre-spend it
- Reprioritize city's use of its money/resources (i.e. outsources some services, don't buy new fleet of cars, etc.)
- Develop City land East of freeway to be moneymaker, like grow trees (tree farm). Maximize benefit from land east of freeway
- Higher systems charges. Sliding scales for big houses, big bathrooms, etc.
- Schools get rid of non-essential, non-playground/park areas (football practice field, etc.)
- Federal government stops spending so much money on war and more on workforce housing.
- State of Oregon sales ax

- Use Willow Wind front area as workforce housing development. Same with area by Science Works. School/city blend (?)
- Money available through OR Housing, if workforce housing developers had liaison with City (to waive permits and get site approval)
- Additional development fee
- Raise property taxes
- Entrepreneurial developers of housing, Ashland Housing Authority
- Reframe question into land acquisition, broader than money
- Postpone downtown plan
- But city meetings
- Make affordable housing the priority until solved, and define it.
- Increase population by 50% to 30,000

(Question 6 next page)

Focus Group Question # 6:
How can we build the political will?

- Where to start? Start with a project to show the City what can be done
- Will take some discomfort
- Use internet/technology
- Use the term “workforce housing” instead of “affordable housing.” The term “affordable housing” scares people.
- Call it family housing or co-housing -- gives hope to people -- people can get behind it.
- Define the term “workforce housing” better, more broadly.
- Bargain as unions for benefits -- use organized labor
- Expand Urban Growth Boundary
- Developers/Big \$ have a lot of influence over city government (this was questioned by someone else in another group who thought that Ashland is not as bad in that regard as Medford)
- Build a force to carry something forward
- Understand what your community needs/wants: first step is listening, second step is figuring out common points
- Community vision
- Neighborhood based issue management process -- issue-based community vision -- don't deal with problem in isolation -- what about the 98% of people who will never come to meetings? -- we need to get out into the neighborhoods so that we know what people really think so that when we go public we have support -- go network to network asking “Who else should we talk to?” (Kevin Preister, Discovery Process)
- Housing Trust Fund
- Letters-to-the-editor
- Need to enunciate what is at risk
- Elect politicians who care about workforce housing
- Letters to state representatives regarding inclusionary zoning
- Co-housing for all ages -- older people can do childcare (if they like) while parents are at work; opportunities for different generations to live together
- We need models of positive images regarding what we envision for Ashland -- diverse ages -- co-housing -- put on RVTV
- Chamber of Commerce in a town in CA funded signs on buses with pictures of firefighters, teachers, doctors, etc. -- awareness campaign
- “Faces of Ashland” marketing campaign with pictures of OSF actor, director, doctor, teacher, retiree, young family, SOU professor (unified culture of Ashland -- loyalty to Ashland)
- Awareness campaign can direct people to a housing trust fund where people can donate
- People can give their homes to a housing trust fund if they don't have heirs

- Retirees need to be educated about the effects of lack of workforce housing
- Businesses work with SOU to provide housing for workers -- symbiotic relationship
- Neighborhood focus groups -- what's okay and not okay for the neighborhood
- A lot of the same issues in Santa Fe, New Mexico
- Idea of workforce housing is abstract -- actual reality of doing a workforce housing development or expanding UGB will affect someone (NIMBY's will come out). Have goals and hold government accountable.
- Social capital -- get an idea of what people want
- How do the larger institutions help their employees? SOU? ACH? OSF?
- Brainstorm ideas -- give incentives to homeowners with apartments available
- Ultimately will be a negative financial impact on City -- taxes will need to increase
- Benefits of workforce housing need to be explained to people (for example, split lots would help but neighbors might not like)
- Get groups together to work together on this (City, Schools, etc.)
- Work in partnership with other groups
- School District overwhelmed with meetings and work but could work with other groups on the issue -- needs help, school district can't do it alone
- West Medford Community Coalition -- agencies came together to improve West Medford