

MINUTES FOR THE NORMAL NEIGHBORHOOD WORKING GROUP
Thursday, September 18, 2014
Siskiyou Room, 51 Winburn Way

Chair Pam Marsh called the meeting to order at 4:33 p.m. in the Siskiyou Room, 51 Winburn Way.

Mayor Stromberg, Michael Dawkins, Rich Kaplan, Mike Morris, and Brandon Goldman were present. Community panel members present included: Sue DeMarinis, Bryce Anderson, Tom Giardino, Randy Jones, and Alan Harper.

Marsh gave a recap of meetings to date and explained the purpose of the panel which has been convened today. She also explained that each panelist will have 10 minutes to talk, then the working group will ask questions, and we will have a 10 minute public forum at the end of the meeting.

1. Panel Members

Sue DeMarinis

She explained whom she is representing, and gave an overview of the things they like in the plan and the things they don't like. (Please see attachment for full comments.)

Things they like about the plan(s) or which have been discussed by the working group:

- Open spaces
- Density gradation (though question the need for higher densities)
- Transportation connections including not having Normal Avenue be a straight shot to E. Main Street
- Alteration of zoning labels to more closely reflect nearby neighborhood zoning labels

Things they don't like about the plan(s) or which have been discussed by the working group:

- Any straight north-south streets connecting to E. Main Street
- Multiple east-west paved connectors
- Density bonuses allowed adjacent to open spaces
- Infrastructure costs being born by anyone outside of the plan limits

Bryce Anderson

He explained whom he is representing. The things his group are like or are concerned with include:

- They like the idea that the Baptist church property might be developed as it's currently a fire hazard
- Like that overall density has been reduced. The end result should be a plan no more dense than Meadowbrook
- Like the connector path to Creek Drive and believe the shared street is important especially as it's currently very difficult to connect to the bike path from that neighborhood.
- They are concerned that there is no clear idea in the plan for dealing with increased traffic on E. Main

- Want 4-way stops on E. Main to get in and out of neighborhood
- Want a center turn lane on E. Main
- Concerned about density bonuses
- Want to have cluster or cottage housing, and fear this could not occur with density bonuses as they would require higher density rates.
- Is concerned that there never will be any public transportation in the area
- Concerned that the public improvements will either be cost prohibitive to developers or the costs will have to be born too heavily by residents
- Not in favor of any commercial development as there is too much traffic as-is.

Randy Jones

Showed a map of the properties they believe are interested in development. It totals about 40 acres. He left out properties currently occupied. He agrees that there should be no commercial development. Also agrees there should be no density bonuses allowed in the plan.

Jones gave numbers including, what the improvements might cost, how many homes could be built, etc. His group believes it could be built and homes sold at reasonable prices. Unfortunately, he thinks the affordable housing requirements would be cost prohibitive, especially with the higher densities near the railroad, which would eliminate them from lots of Federal Funding possibilities.

Tom Giardino

Gave an overview of his background with planning and community projects. He is very against urban sprawl, there are lots of negatives when development goes outside of a city's UGB. Normal Avenue Plan area is very large and may be the last area of this size left to be planned in Ashland. His role today was to look at the community in general and he believes that the staff and the consultants did a good job in coming up with this plan. He believes, unlike some of the other commenters, that there should actually be an increase in density in the plan, not a decrease. Large lots or areas with low density won't bring diversity into this community and that has always seemed to be a high community goal. He reminded the group that previous action from the planning department and Council to allow for 2nd units really helped increase development and hopes that we'll use that higher density approach here.

Giordano stated he's glad the plan recognizes the wetlands and open space. It is important details like this in a plan which make them successful. He recognizes that transportation issues will need to be worked through. Believes that East Main needs to be improved now, regardless of the plan.

Giordano believes that we need to think about the general health of the community and that involves a diversity of housing types and densities. Likes the concept of commercial activities being allowed in the plan, but doesn't know for sure if it fits in with the current view. It might, however, fit in sometime in the future so we shouldn't lose that possibility.

Alan Harper

Gave overview of his background as an attorney, and his work with Land Use Codes. Stated every community struggles with the exact same balances this group is struggling with. Reminded the group this is an opportunity for setting a vision for the community. People don't always

recognize what's been planned years ago and that the vision of Ashland 50 years ago is very different than it is now. We need to plan for the future and not just the present. He encouraged the group to err on the side of flexibility and willingness to innovate. It's far better if they give staff, developers, and future Councils the tools and ability to do something great.

While the commercial option available in N. Mountain area hasn't worked yet, that doesn't mean it couldn't – the time just isn't right yet. He reminded the group about the fight over keeping the current Rogue Valley Roasters on E. Main Street. At the end of the day, that community gathering space is important to the neighborhood and the community at-large. It's better to find a way to leave open the option for that style of commercial building. If you zone it entirely residential those opportunities will never be available.

Harper believes family-friendly communities can be created even with higher density. Part of what people love about traveling to other parts of the world is the higher density – lots of communities do it well with lots of parks and increased opportunities for livability outside of the home.

Ultimately, the best this group can do is make clear rules. Without clear rules, lawyers get to highlight all the negatives. The clearer the plan the easier it will be for developers and community to get the vision.

2. Working Group Questions

Group discussed affordable housing requirements. Goldman reminded the group that the mix of affordable housing styles must be consistent with surrounding homes. CDBG funds put lots of money into building affordable housing so long as the location of those homes are not in a “negative” area. Noise from the railroad being so close could be considered a big enough negative to make the area ineligible for CDBG funds. Jones stated without Federal assistance the 25% affordable housing requirement would be a non-starter for any development. Goldman and Jones will sit down together to do better informed calculations to bring back to the group at an upcoming meeting.

Group discussed if there were higher density, if that would make development more possible. Jones noted this would be the case only if assistance for funding the affordable housing units were available.

Group discussed the challenges of the required improvements and some of the funding options. Also discussed PUDs and that they may allow for a more creative way to maximize flexibility. Goldman reminded the group that PUDs are allowed under the original plan.

Group talked about having a plan without the streets framework but determined that without a solid framework development likely would lack the connections needed.

3. Public Forum

Julie Mathews: had always understood that PUDs mean higher densities. The group has been talking about density for three years – why is this discussion just occurring. Wondered if there was a current need for development in this economy.

Debbie Miller: Is upset that the discussions have gone from “if” to “when” in regards development. People in the area haven’t been able to talk until today when Sue was part of the panel. Feels like discussions of higher densities is a real compromise. People in this community do care and want the group to consider that any increase in services to this community will require more money be spent in the community as a whole. We’ve never talked about whether Ashland is a “town” or a “city with high density and multi-story units”.

4. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on October 9th at 2:30 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Diana Shiplet
Executive Secretary