

MINUTES FOR THE NORMAL NEIGHBORHOOD WORKING GROUP
Thursday, October 23, 2014
Siskiyou Room, 51 Winburn Way

Chair Pam Marsh called the meeting to order at 4:34 p.m. in the Siskiyou Room, 51 Winburn Way.

Mayor Stromberg, Michael Dawkins, Rich Kaplan, Mike Morris, Brandon Goldman, and Mike Faught were present.

1. Consent Agenda

Kaplan/Morris M/S to approve the minutes of October 9, 2014. Voice Vote; all ayes. Motion passes.

Marsh reviewed the process and discussions of the previous meetings. Believes we are starting the last phase of the meetings. Would like to start today by going back to the “big picture” and would like all the group members to review their thoughts on this plan, and where they want to go from here.

2. Discussion

Mike Morris

One issue has been, and will continue to be, affordable housing. Moving the higher density to the proposed new location might work against our affordable housing needs and requirements. He’s still not happy with the streets layout. He’s worried the group hasn’t planned well for 20 years from now. Remembers other projects where nearby neighbors were angry about the project, but those areas are now filled with happy residents.

Morris agrees that the plan has to be done, otherwise we’re stuck with County requirements defining roads and open space. There has to be a plan for the area or we’re planning to fail.

Rich Kaplan

Agrees with a lot of what Morris said. Group moved the higher density to the south when they had no constraints but dealing with both density and affordable housing might require re-thinking. This will be a 20 – 30 year process, so who knows what we’ll end up with, but a good plan helps define an orderly way to make appropriate long-term adjustments. Believes the amendment process to the plan is vital. This plan is probably as good as it can get.

Mayor Stromberg

Discussed working on previous planning process in Napa where it was defined by livability, walkability, and quality of life. Believes the original Normal Neighborhood plan didn’t speak to those values because of too many constraints and goals. Doesn’t think that land use planning style plans produce good quality of life.

Stromberg believes we need to do transit oriented planning and only have density surrounding transit areas. Moving the density south is a good thing because it gets people closer to transit.

Believes we should hit minimum density mid-way to E. Main Street to keep rural character of E. Main Street.

He believes the community's relationship to nature is evolving and being changed by nature. Wants the riparian corridors to be most important and valuable part of this plan. It's an opportunity to deal with urban wildlife in a creative way.

Michael Dawkins

Originally would have liked an agriculturally focused neighborhood, but understands that's not a viable reality. He agrees we need to have a plan in place. The discussions regarding why the Planning Commission/consultant created special zoning names was because they were trying to figure out way to have more flexibility than an average neighborhood. He's adamant that they must preserve the conservation easements. Sight corridors are very important and the conservation spaces will help that. All the property eventually will develop, maybe not for 50 years, but this plan keeps the property from being developed in unhealthy ways. He disagrees with Mayor Stromberg's desire to see East Main remain rural country road. He said East Main Street needs to be upgraded now.

Pam Marsh

We have an opportunity here to build a neighborhood that is a joyful opportunity for residents for years to come. Somehow we lost sight of this in all the boxes, density requirements, lines on paper. The neighborhood she'd like to see would retain the conservation areas determined by the Planning Commission, have cluster housing, and the greater density to the south to be nearer amenities and transportation options. She is not as attached as others to E. Main Street remaining rural, as it's currently unsafe and in need of upgrades. Believes that the improvements (E. Main Street and railroad crossing) can't be entirely funded by the developers, that the City will need to be a partner in those developments. She agrees that we need a plan because without one there will be separate development, lack of trails, reduced open space, septic tanks rather than sewer, etc., all things we don't want to see happen.

3. Group Discussion

Group discussed why the Planning Commission suggested E. Main Street be improved with half remaining rural and half upgraded to City standards This is partly related to who owns the street and partly related to the sorts of development on each side. Group agreed the improvements are necessary because of the increased traffic from those throughout the city using this street, not just because of future traffic from this neighborhood.

Marsh presented a draft set of recommendations to Council [see page 5, below]. Group reviewed the recommendations. They generally agree on the following, based on the attached draft recommendations:

Density

1. Yes, density from south to north. Also group discussed maybe having density go from east to west, with higher density to the east to more closely match the nearby neighborhoods.
2. Agree with #2, but note that they will keep 'NN' notation to allow the intent of extra

flexibility established by the Planning Commission, especially to keep open space reserves.
3. Agree with this as it helps to leave the option open for the future.

Open Space

1. The first sentence is okay. Goldman gave information to the group regarding the minor amendment process. Group agreed to remove the word, “without” in the second sentence.

Design Issues

1. Agreed with this sentence.
2. Group discussed current performance standards required and agreed to remove, “support the use of PUDs to” from the sentence.

Transportation

1. Agree with the first sentence regarding E. Main Street. Group discussed the pros and cons of a straight Normal Avenue intersecting with East Main Street. Generally agreed to leave the main neighborhood collector as not-straight, as shown in the updated plan, with the acknowledgement that any adjustments can be made through the major amendment process if necessary in the future.
2. Agreed to remove, “more of” from the sentence, as many of those east-west connections can’t or won’t happen in the near future.
3. Agreed with this statement.
4. Group discussed how this can be put together, financing options for implementation of E. Main Street and railroad improvements.

Group discussed the next steps in this process - how the Planning Commission and Council would be involved with the review and approval. Ultimately Council may want Planning Commission to review the plan again, but Council is not required to do so.

Group agreed that Goldman will draft a “vision statement” and final working group recommendations, which will be reviewed at the next meeting. This will go to Council for their review and direction on the next steps of the plan process.

4. Public Input

Jan Vidmar: Her home backs up on Cemetery Creek and she’s concerned with flood potential. According to the new FEMA flood map the Normal set-backs would be in her living room. She’s concerned that any development would not allow water to escape, causing flooding. Also, the cottonwood and willow trees on the property currently help control water. Lastly, the many wild animals in the area need to be taken into consideration.

Julie Matthews: Sees this as a jig-saw puzzle. Would like a series of overlays created, at the bottom is wildlife, overlaid with transportation, density, hydrology. Seeing how these issues effect each other might change the group’s “primary objective”. It could get them to be more creative in their plan. Thinks the group needs more time.

Nancy Boyer: Thinks overlays are a great idea. Regarding moving the density to the south, why doesn’t the bus route go on E. Main Street as a continual loop through town? If we want seniors

to live in the area, they can't possibly navigate the steep grade changes from the neighborhood to Ashland Street. Wonders why the group brought back the issue of Normal being straight.

Sue DiMarinis: Told group about wildlife she's seen recently in the area. Regarding the commercial area, there is a big difference between a mom & pop store and an assisted living facility. Those kinds of differences should be looked at. Major amendments should be required for all streets to keep everyone safe. When the city is doing analysis the whole city needs to hear it as there are costs and benefits to all of the city.

Gil Livney: The costs of E. Main Street improvements should not be an issue if safety is really important. Moved here largely for the wildlife but believes in property rights. He doesn't understand why the city wants to take his property for the sake of open space. If open space is very important to the city then the city should buy it from him. Thinks roads should be less defined.

Merry Hart: Is pleased with the information from today. Reminds the group that affordable housing near railroad tracks can't happen. Affordable housing is highly needed in Ashland. No one can use Federal funding with the railroad tracks nearby so moving density nearby means you've eliminated the possibility for affordable housing. Hearing that the group is considering this change is disheartening as they've eliminated much of what this city needs.

Goldman reminded the group that affordable housing is required to be dispersed throughout the development and of similar type to the rest of the development.

5. Next Meeting

November 20, starting at 4:30 p.m. and ending whenever the group is done with their recommendations to Council.

Meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Diana Shiplet
Executive Secretary

Normal Neighborhood Working Group:
Discussion Draft Recommendations to Council
Presented by Councilor Pam Marsh, Working Group Chair

Density:

1. Density gradation should move from south to north. This would place higher density development near the railroad tracks and within easy access to existing transit lines, parks and community facilities. This approach will also protect the existing viewshed.
2. Zoning designations within the Normal neighborhood area should be consistent with adjacent lands and use the same zoning labels as in the rest of the city.
3. Maintain option for neighborhood serving commercial development on East Main St.

Open Space:

1. Maintain the approach toward designation of open space and conservation areas proposed in the draft plan. Amend the plan to allow non-conservation open space to be relocated without requiring a minor amendment application.

Design issues:

1. Maintain maximum height at 35 feet.
2. Support the use of PUDS to encourage the development of clustered housing that integrates with open space and respects the viewshed.

Transportation:

1. The internal transportation system should incorporate multiple connections with East Main. Maintain the Normal collector as designated in the draft plan.
2. Internal streets should be aligned to provide more of a grid pattern, including clear east-west connections.
3. Pedestrian and bicycle pathways are critical, especially as a means to connect residents with the middle school and the existing bike path.
4. External transportation improvements, including the railroad crossing and improvements to East Main, are integral and should proceed in concert with development. However, we believe the city may need to play a role in the financing/implementation of these projects.

Accordingly, as a next step we recommend that the council direct city staff and/or an outside consultant to identify and quantify: 1) the need and possible means for public investment in the project, and 2) the overall costs and benefits of development to the city.