

MINUTES FOR THE NORMAL NEIGHBORHOOD WORKING GROUP
Thursday, November 20, 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, Brandon Goldman, and Bill Molnar were present.

Marsh gave an overview of the process thus-far including how the group was formed, the original plan challenges, and the discussions to-date. She informed the group that this is planned to be on the December 2nd City Council meeting agenda.

1. Consent Agenda

**Kaplan/Dawkins M/S to approve the minutes of October 23, 2014. Voice Vote; all ayes.
Motion passes.**

2. Public Forum

As this is the final meeting, the group determined that the public forum should be at the start of the meeting so that concerns could be dealt with by the end of the meeting.

Bryce Anderson – 2092 Creek Drive. His home faces the Baptists Church. He feels the plan meets most concerns. The area he thinks is still vague is transportation, particularly the E. Main Street improvements. His group really wants to see full improvements on the south side of E. Main, including sidewalks and gutter, etc., before or concurrent with any plans being approved.

Debbie Miller – 160 Normal Avenue. Believes there is a dilemma in that the area is not needed because there is still lots of developable land in the city but those who do want to develop would be held to County standards without a plan in place and those are not good standards. Discussed a meeting held the night before regarding food sustainability and how she would like large parcels of this land available for lease for agricultural use. The County has a program matching young farmers with lands available for lease.

Howdy Miller – 160 Normal Avenue. Discussed last night's Rogue Valley Food Sustainability Network meeting and how this area has excellent soil for agriculture. Is still concerned that the map shows roads going through their barn. Had a city employee who told him they don't want houses built on that land either.

Nancy Boyer – 425 Normal Avenue. Doesn't feel that the plan is ready to be presented to the City Council yet. There are too many issues left to resolve. The city residents as a whole still need to know how much this plan will cost them.

Sue DiMarinus – 145 Normal Avenue. She appreciates that the group is working to cohesiveness but they need to include the whole city. Financing for E. Main Street improvements has to come from other areas and she wonders where that money will come from. The conservation areas are

important and need to have a wide variety including recreation areas, open space, food growing space. She is concerned that if developers can use only a minor amendment to shrink those areas the feeling of a neighborhood will be lost. She is also concerned that all the East – West roads cross through wetlands, which would disturb them. She would prefer cul-du-sacs for safety and to keep the areas family-friendly.

Jan Vidmar – 320 Meadow Drive. Would like to note a correction to the minutes of last meeting, she is not against development of the site but is instead hoping that the design will allow flow-through for water since too many homes have been built too close to riparian areas already. She likes the plan as it has like-for-like development with the surrounding areas. Is concerned with where affordable housing/higher density housing will go with Federal challenges of being near the railroad.

Mark Prescott – 1652 Ross Lane. Is glad to be here. He is concerned that this appears to be a high density plan. Reminded the group that they are responsible for what Ashland will become. 500 homes equals 1,000 cars. After all the water concerns this year believes that 500 new households would mean we don't have enough water. Discussed sewer issues which occurred in his previous home city due to too rapid growth. Believes the plan should have lower density and that all the recent developments have had too high density. Is sorry that he won't be able to attend the City Council meeting.

Marsh reminded the group that anyone is free to submit written testimony, if they are unable to attend any meeting or don't wish to speak.

Julie Matthews – 2090 Creek Drive. Questions whether or not December 2nd is a good meeting date due to the holidays. Would like the date after the holidays. Recommends that a study be done regarding wildlife paths and corridors. Understands that you can't track all animals – particularly birds. She questions whether we have a solution to all the hydrology issues in the area. Building houses in the area doesn't change the hydrology. She described challenges her current home is facing due to underground water. Believes that building and selling with those challenges in the area would be disingenuous. Reminded the group not to over look affordable housing.

Marsh explained that having this on the December 2nd Council agenda is not going to change due to holidays – if the Council were to not meet near holidays they would never get any work done.

3. Group Discussion

Vision Statement (attached to these minutes for reference)

The group reviewed the Vision Statement which they had tasked Goldman with drafting.

The first paragraph was approved by the group.

The group discussed the second paragraph and how it reflects their desire to preserve open space. Marsh wants a development which integrates the open space, rather than isolates it. Stromberg would like the area considered as a whole rather than by parcel. Morris is concerned that the open space lacks clear identification as to usage. He wants to avoid creating areas which

someone then has to mow but no one uses. Dawkins reminded the group that the Planning Commission was less concerned with whether they were State defined wetlands but were concerned that they follow the natural drainage areas. He doesn't want to see any of them removed from the plan. Kaplan is uncomfortable with the open space being solely delineated by current wetland riparian determinations and would like to make sure there is the ability to move them based on the best science at the time areas are developed. He does think the total amount of open space is appropriate.

The group discussed how the typical neighborhood plan requires 5-7% of open space but this plan calls for 25%. The group agreed that they want to keep this larger requirement to keep the natural characteristics of the area in place as much as possible.

Goldman described how changes to the locations of wetlands can be done with minor amendments.

Group discussed the annexation process and how it would be at that point that they would get into the “nitty-gritty” of open space locations.

Group discussed the possibility of having the Parks Commission review the plan to determine if they have any interest in working with developers or property owners to incorporate areas into their parks inventory. Group was reminded that there is a legal standing for not being able to take too much land from owners/developers for public use during an annexation.

Group approved paragraph two as written.

Group discussed paragraph three. There was concern that, “...available to full cross-section...” might mean exclusively affordable housing at the exclusion of market-rate homes. It's impossible to be all things to all people and it's impossible to include all housing types for all housing needs in one plan. Group agreed to alter the sentence to read, “The neighborhood should provide for a range of housing choices available to a diversity of Ashland’s population.”

Group discussed whether they have the ability to direct development of a specific preference of housing types (cluster housing, for example). Molnar stated that they group can establish design standards for the area which could limit housing size, number of attached units, etc. He reminded the group that establishing those preferences now helps developers create plans which are more likely to be approved. Developers appreciate certainty rather than having worked on a plan for years only to have it fail.

Group discussed ways to have continuity of neighborhood character, particularly as so much of this area won't be developed in the near future. Molnar suggested they add development transition requirements, much like is already in place in the Railroad District in order to achieve cohesion.

The third paragraph was approved with the previously agreed alteration to the first sentence.

The group approved paragraph four as written.

Recommendations (attached to these minutes for reference)

Marsh reminded the group that these recommendations are basically a re-statement of decisions made at previous meetings.

The group discussed whether the proposed density is too high. they determined that it is far lower than many areas and very compatible with similar cluster-housing developments.

Group would like to add a recommendation of development transitions/compatible housing requirements to the Design Issues section.

The group discussed the proposed map. They agree it reflects most of what they have discussed in the previous meetings. Morris is still unhappy with Normal Avenue not going straight, but understands that this layout follows the parcels most likely to develop in the near future and recognizes that keeping it straight is feasible at the moment. That isn't to say it can't ever happen in the future. He appreciates that future East – West connections have been included.

4. Next Steps

The group agreed that they like the Vision Statement and Recommendations as presented. They particularly want the additional information regarding transportation approved, which should then go to the Planning Commission for a complete review.

Group discussed the process of review and approval between Council and Planning Commission. They would also like to add a request that at some point in the process the Parks Commission review the plan or participate in the Planning Commission review. They requested that having parks review the plan be added to the recommendations.

Morris/Dawkins M/S to forward the Vision Statement and Recommendations of this group to the Council with changes recommended in this meeting. Voice Vote; all ayes. Motion passes.

Meeting adjourned at 6:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Diana Shiplet
Executive Secretary

Draft Vision Statement

Neighborhood planning is the process by which the City works with Ashland's residents to envision the future of the neighborhood. The eventual incorporation of the Normal Neighborhood Plan area into the City depends on careful consideration of the neighborhood's unique identity and character and a holistic planning approach. The Normal Neighborhood Working Group envisions a neighborhood that is notable for the natural beauty of the area's wetlands and creeks, mountain views, diversity of households, and as an area which accommodates bicycling and walking as a reliable and convenient way to move throughout the area.

Local streams, wetlands, and scenic vistas contribute significantly to define the character of the Normal Neighborhood. The quality of the place is enhanced by these features and the wildlife that they attract. Connected and contiguous open spaces should remain as central features of the area's future development as they help reflect the community of Ashland's commitment to promote environmental quality, provide recreational opportunities, and function to incorporate nature into the daily lives of the area's residents.

The neighborhood should provide for a range of housing choices available to the full cross section of Ashland's population. The neighborhood can accommodate a blend of housing types including individual residences, townhomes, apartments, moderately sized cottages, pedestrian oriented cluster housing, and mixed-use neighborhood serving businesses. Future developments should be designed to relate to, and complement, adjacent properties. Incorporating unifying elements between adjacent developments will serve to promote neighborhood cohesiveness, provide open space in a coordinated manner, and secure an efficient circulation system. Given the immediate proximity to existing schools, parks, and local business areas the neighborhood is recognized as place where children can readily walk and bike to schools through a safe, desirable family-based neighborhood.

The Normal Neighborhood Plan Working Group believes a neighborhood plan is necessary to address long-term community goals, unify expectations, and integrate the project area into the fabric of the City. The implementation standards for the neighborhood plan should be strong enough to maintain the vision for the area, yet flexible enough to respond to changing conditions and adapt over time.

Draft Recommendations

Land Use and Housing Density:

1. Housing Density gradation should move from south to north. This would place higher density development near the railroad tracks and within a relatively short distance to transit lines, parks and community facilities. This approach will also protect the existing viewshed.
2. Zoning designations applied within the Normal neighborhood area should be consistent with the zoning of adjacent land within the City Limits, and use zoning labels that are comparable to those used in the rest of the city while recognizing the Normal Neighborhood (NN) district.
3. Maintain option for neighborhood serving businesses and services close to East Main St near the northeast corner of the plan area.

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 requiring a minor amendment application.

Design issues:

1. Maintain a maximum building height of 35 feet.
2. Encourage the development of clustered housing that integrates with open space and respects the viewshed.

Transportation:

1. The internal transportation system's local street network should incorporate multiple connections with East Main St as shown, and maintain the Normal Collector as designated in the draft plan. Additional connections to East Main Street or Clay Street, which are not shown in the proposed Street Framework, should require a major amendment to the Plan.
2. Internal local streets should be aligned to provide 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 St., 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:
 - a. the need and possible means for public investment in the project, and
 - b. the overall costs and benefits that these facilities present to the entire city.