

Council Communication

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Normal Avenue Neighborhood Plan Update

FROM:

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SUMMARY

The draft plan for the Normal Avenue Neighborhood area is intended to establish an integrated land use and transportation framework for the future urbanization of the 94 acre area within Ashland's Urban Growth Boundary. The plan is tentatively scheduled to come before the Council in February.

BACKGROUND

On August 20th the City Council received a brief update on the elements addressed in the draft plan and was presented with a working version of the plan (dated 6/25/2013). In the Council packet is a revised draft plan (dated 9/24/2013) which has been discussed by the Transportation Commission and Planning Commission at their September, October, and November meetings.

Early in the planning process, property owners and neighborhood residents were active in the design of a conceptual plan for the area through participation in a multi-day "design charrette" (October 23-25, 2012). Area property owners and nearby residents have remained engaged over the last 12 months, providing relevant testimony to the Planning, Housing, and Transportation Commissions. A number of key elements of the plan have remained as areas of continued discussion including:

- The type and concentration of housing;
- Traffic volumes, street types and locations, and system capacity;
- Wetland and riparian protection areas;
- Plan flexibility to accommodate changing conditions;
- The cost of public infrastructure and how it is paid for.

The type and concentration of housing

The Normal Avenue Neighborhood Development Plan will create its own neighborhood character by providing three different residential zones with different densities, including: single family residential (NA-01 zone at 5 units per acre); low density multifamily (NA-02 zone at 10 units per acre); and medium density multifamily (NA-03 zone at 15 units per acre). The use regulations and development standards are intended to provide a significant degree of variation as to the form and character of individual developments. For example, in the proposed NA-02 zone a development could include a mix of housing types including single family dwellings, duplexes, townhomes, accessory residential units, cottage housing or low rise apartments. The NA-03 land use designation is intended to address



Ashland's housing needs through development of apartments as well as provide limited opportunities for neighborhood-serving businesses.

Neighborhood concern regarding these zoning designations has largely related to the proposed locations and potential scale of future developments. Properties within the plan area and vicinity have historically been developed as single family detached units on individual lots. Throughout the neighborhood meetings and various Commission study sessions, concern has been voiced that attached housing units and large scale apartment complexes adjacent to existing homes would be incompatible with the established neighborhood character. Care has been taken in the plan to concentrate future housing on buildable lands that are largely free of existing development and natural constraints, with the added consideration of locating comparable housing densities adjacent to established neighborhoods.

Traffic volumes, street types and locations, and system capacity

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 conditions that limit connectivity, such as Ashland Middle School, the Central Oregon & Pacific rail line, topography and existing creeks and wetlands, building the transportation network on a foundation of interconnected streets and multi-use paths makes all modes of travel more efficient and effective.

The central spine of the proposed transportation network is a neighborhood collector that would extend from the southern railroad crossing to East Main Street, meandering to the east to directly access the majority of developable property within the plan area. This proposed "New Normal Avenue" has been an area of significant discussion by the public, Transportation Commission and Planning Commission. The existing Transportation System Plan shows Normal Avenue as a straight line running north-south from the railroad crossing to East Main Street where the dirt road is presently. Early in the process it was determined that such a connection may not be feasible in the near term and further would encourage non-local "cut-through" traffic. The proposed re-routing of this north-south connection to the east would potentially reduce non-local cut-through traffic in addition to serving the areas planned for higher concentrations of housing.

The Transportation Commission discussed the plan's transportation framework and the issue of the New Normal Avenue at a special meeting held on November 14, 2013. Commissioners questioned whether New Normal Avenue should instead be designed in a manner that was receptive to non-neighborhood traffic and designed to better accommodate unimpeded traffic flow. The Transportation Commission ultimately recommended that the New Normal Avenue be the sole vehicular connection to East Main Street, thereby recommending elimination of two of the three intersections as proposed in the draft plan. The Transportation Commission also discussed the issue of needed facility improvements to East Main Street (i.e. curb, gutter, bike lanes, sidewalks) and voiced concern over the cost and timing of such improvements. East Main Street is presently improved to County standards and ultimately needs to be upgraded to meet the City's Avenue standard.

The City did have a [Future Traffic Analysis](#) completed as part of this project that specifically analyzed traffic impacts projected at full build-out of the area. The report found that all existing intersections in



vicinity of the project are expected to continue to function within acceptable operational standards in the year 2038. The report noted that East Main Street should be improved to comply with existing City standards at which point that the improved Avenue could accommodate vehicular, pedestrian and bike traffic, and that each of the proposed street intersections with East Main Street would function within acceptable levels.

Wetland and riparian protection areas

Natural areas, including streams, wetland, and other environmentally sensitive features contribute significantly to the existing character of the neighborhood and were most cited by residents as needing preservation to retain the rural character of the area. Although the creek locations and designated floodplains are readily identifiable, the precise extent of the existing wetlands in the area cannot be known without a wetland specialist conducting formal wetland delineations. However, as wetland boundaries change over time, and are typically only valid for about five years, a present delineation may no longer be relevant when an affected property eventually proposes annexation and development. Given this uncertainty, property owners and members of the public have alternatively contended that the extent of wetlands areas shown in the plan are either represented as too expansive or not expansive enough.

To remain responsive to changes in hydrology over time, the current planning approach would be to require a formal wetland delineation at the point of annexation, and to adjust the plan and street network accordingly to reflect the conditions on the ground at that time. Members of the Planning Commission have expressed an interest in exploring whether the open space areas associated with wetlands, as identified on the existing Local Wetland Inventory (2007), should instead be considered the minimum area of open space to be preserved even under the scenario that an actual delineated wetland area is less than is currently assumed. Additionally there has been public testimony regarding concern over potential flood hazards due to climate change, and questions whether precluding development in the 100 year FEMA flood plan, and designated Ashland Floodplain is sufficient, or alternatively whether limiting development within the 500 year FEMA floodplain should be considered as part of the neighborhood plan.

Plan flexibility

The Normal Avenue Neighborhood is expected to develop incrementally, potentially over the course of decades, therefore the plan has been intentionally structured to retain a high degree of flexibility to avoid prescribing a current fashion in neighborhood or housing design. This inherent flexibility is intended ensure the area does not develop in a homogeneous and standardized manner and thus provides for a mix of building types which address a full cross section of Ashland's future housing needs and can respond to changing market demands over time.

This issue of how to address deviations from the plan as proposed by future developments has been a continuing discussion item in reviewing the draft plan. Although there is certainly a benefit in providing a clear expectation and understanding regarding the street location and design, infrastructure financing, and precise delineation of the locations natural areas, such finality is not readily achievable in a general master plan as they are typically worked out in reviewing an actual development proposal. The implementing ordinance for the plan will by necessity contain provisions for both minor and major amendments to ensure that changes in the conceptual plan as proposed by applicants can be considered by the Planning Commission and City Council as part of future annexation proposals.



NEXT STEPS

The final draft of the Normal Avenue Neighborhood Plan is scheduled for a public hearing before the Planning Commission on Jan 14, 2014, and is tentatively scheduled to be presented to Council on February 18, 2014. At these upcoming hearings, the Commission and Council will be presented with the final plan, implementing ordinance, Comprehensive Plan and Transportation System Plan map amendments necessary to implement the Normal Avenue Neighborhood Plan.

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 in advance of the formal public hearing process.

SUGGESTED MOTION:

N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

- [Land Use Designations Map](#) (9/24/2013 Draft)
- [Street Classification Map](#) (9/24/2013 Draft)
- [Floodplains and Wetlands Map](#)

- Available online at www.ashland.or.us/normalplan are the following draft additional documents relating to the draft plan:
 - [Draft Final Plan Narrative](#)
 - [Draft Chapter 18 Code Amendments](#)
 - [Future Traffic Analysis \(final version dated 11/19/2013\)](#)
 - [Traffic Report Figures](#)
 - [Traffic Report Appendices](#)

