

Memo

TO: Ashland City Council
FROM: Normal Neighborhood Plan Working Group
DATE: December 2, 2014
RE: Normal Neighborhood Plan Recommendations

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 a diversity 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.



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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.
2. Obtain a review of the final plan by the Parks Department prior to adoption.

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.
3. Provide for a smooth transition between adjacent developments to promote neighborhood cohesiveness, provide open space in a coordinated manner, and secure an efficient circulation system.

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.

