

# Memo

## Housing and Human Services Commission 3/27/2014

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TO: Ashland Housing and Human Services Commission

FROM: Brandon Goldman, Senior Planner  
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RE: Normal Neighborhood Plan Update

### Summary

The City of Ashland is in the process of completing a neighborhood plan for the 94 acre north Normal Avenue area. This neighborhood planning project was funded by the Oregon Transportation Growth Management Program to help guide future changes to the area to ensure the City can accommodate future housing demand, integrate existing stream corridors and natural wetlands, and enhance overall mobility by planning for safe walking, bicycle, and automobile routes.

The area is presently outside the City Limits, but within the Urban Growth Boundary, therefore the future development of any properties within the area to urban densities will require development review and annexation approval.

The proposed Normal Neighborhood Plan provides the underlying framework for the area's future development through the following legislative acts:

- Adoption of Land Use standards and zones for the neighborhood district;
- Amending the Transportation System Plan to establish a street network for the district;
- Amending Comprehensive Plan to establish the district boundaries and designate conservation areas.

Although future development of this area is expected to occur in an incremental way, as individual parcels propose annexation for specific housing developments, with an adopted neighborhood plan in place each individual development proposal can better coordinate the provision of streets, pedestrian connections, utilities, storm water management, and open space. Such an approach can ultimately help reduce development costs through appropriate sizing of needed facilities, provision of easements, and secured street access. Additionally a significant benefit of an adopted plan is that there is a clear expectation and understanding regarding the level of development anticipated by both developers and neighboring residents. In this way the development and annexation process for all properties with the plan area is streamlined while ensuring the City can accommodate its future growth in a systematic and efficient manner.



### **The Planned Housing Types and Land Use Designations**

As proposed, the Normal Neighborhood District will contain four residential zones (NN-01, NN-2, NN-03, and NN-O3-C). The use regulations and development standards set forth in the proposed land use ordinance are intended to provide a significant degree of flexibility as to the form and character of individual developments. The Normal Neighborhood Land Use Zones map establishes the proposed designations for the properties within the district as follows:

#### NN-01:

The Land Use designation NN-01 is intended to provide single family dwellings, accessory residential units, and cottage housing with a base density of 5 units per acre. The “cottage” housing type is to be consistent with the standards proposed in the Unified Land Use Ordinance as proposed under a separate legislative planning action.

#### NN-02

The NN-02 designation provides housing opportunities for individual households through development of a mix of single-dwelling housing, duplexes, townhomes, accessory residential units, and pedestrian oriented clustered housing with a base density of 10 units per acre. Clustered housing, commonly referred to as “pocket neighborhoods”, are a new housing type envisioned for the plan area where multiple compact detached or attached dwellings are grouped around common open space. Through the consolidation of common open space and or parking cluster housing developments can often achieve a housing density comparable to attached row houses or low-rise apartments, yet with a lower profile retaining the appearance of traditional single-family homes.

#### NN-03

The NN-03 land use designation is intended to address Ashland’s housing needs through development of multi-dwelling housing with a base density of 15 units per acre.

#### NN-03-C

The NN-03-C zone is a residential designation consistent with NN-03, however it would additionally allow for limited neighborhood serving commercial uses such as a coffee shop on the ground floor.

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 under the county rural residential zone. 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.



Affordable housing within the plan area would be provided by future development as a condition of annexation consistent with current requirements. Ashland’s existing annexation ordinance provides for a range of affordable housing options including rental units targeted to low income households earning less than 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI) and ownership units targeted to households earning between 80% and 120% AMI. Dependent upon the level of affordability proposed, the total number of affordable units provided in any annexation will range between 15-35% of the project’s base housing density. These designated units are deed restricted to remain within the Ashland Affordable Housing Program for a minimum of 60 years. On average it is anticipated that approximately one out of every four new units developed through annexation requests will be designated as affordable housing.

**Traffic volumes, street types and locations, and system capacity**

Walking and cycling, or “active transportation,” is fundamental to the Normal 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 City of Ashland has long worked to maintain a compact urban form and provide multimodal transportation options to allow residents to use less energy and spend less money to get around, whether by making fewer or shorter car trips, or using other less expensive modes of transportation like bicycling, walking, or transit. Given transportation costs typically represent the second highest household expense, following housing, it is expected that through a decrease in transportation costs as a result of efficient urbanization, and improved multi-modal transportation options, the City can continue to improve the overall affordability of living in Ashland. The Normal Neighborhood Plan is centrally located with nearby schools, shopping, parks, and as it is relatively level it is expected to be a highly walkable neighborhood. With the full build out of the area within the Urban Growth Boundary it is expected that sufficient housing density will ultimately exist in this area to support the establishment of transit to serve the district.

**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 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. The Plan's approach to the greenway and open space framework is to establish "Conservation Areas" through a proposed amendment to the Comprehensive Plan Map. As proposed these areas are to include FEMA's 100 year floodplain, Ashland's designated floodplain boundaries, wetlands identified in the 2007 Local Wetland Inventory, and wetland and riparian buffer areas identified in the Water Resource Protection Zone ordinance. The Planning Commission has expressed an interest in exploring whether the designated Conservation Areas be considered the minimum area of open space to be preserved even under the scenario that an actual delineated wetland area in the future is less than is currently assumed. Property owners with developable property have raised concerns that such a requirement for dedication of open space, that is not otherwise associated with wetlands or other natural areas, would effectively reduce development potential without furthering the objective of protecting environmentally sensitive lands.

### **Plan flexibility**

The Normal 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 to ensure the area does not develop in a homogeneous and standardized manner and provides for a mix of building types which address a full cross section of Ashland's future housing needs in response 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 location's 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 contains 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.

### **Project Guiding Principles and Objective**

Throughout the process of developing the Normal Avenue Neighborhood Plan over the course of the last year the Planning Commission, Design Team, resident participants engaged in the process, and Staff have referenced the following objectives to help guide discussions about various plan elements:

- Increase efficiency in the use of land through concentration of housing in a centrally located area within the City Urban Growth Boundary planned for future urban development;
- Achieve a development pattern that results in a balanced, multi-modal transportation system and that enhances opportunities for walking, bicycling or using transit in areas planned for transit service;



- Delineate housing, neighborhood serving commercial, open space, public space, and green infrastructure improvements, in a manner that provides for preservation and enhancement of creeks and wetlands;
- Develop new illustrative conceptual architectural and site plans for the project area consistent with Transportation and Growth Management objectives. Concepts will meet City's and the property owners' development goals and standards.
- Design a local street grid for the Project Area including connections to existing and planned street, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities outside the project area, to more fully integrate the Project Area into the City transportation system;
- Provide for pedestrian and bicycle routes and facility improvements within the project area that will provide safe access to local schools;
- Provide alternatives to, or delay the need for, expansion of the City Urban Growth Boundary;
- Reduce emissions that contribute to climate change through changes to transportation or land use plans that reduce expected automobile vehicle miles traveled;
- Provide an implementation strategy that includes supporting Comprehensive Plan and updated Transportation System amendments, form based codes, and design standards; and
- Present the Plan and documentation necessary to support adoption to City's Planning Commission and City Council.

## Background Studies

To inform the neighborhood planning process a number of studies were completed and previously presented to the Planning Commission in support of this project including:

- A [Buildable Lands Inventory](#) (approved November 15, 2011- ordinance #3055) provided a basis for evaluation of the amount of available land within the City Limits and Urban Growth Boundary.
- A [Housing Needs Analysis](#) (approved September 3, 2013 - ordinance #3085), summarized the types of housing that have been developed throughout the City in the recent decades, as well as the projected needed housing based on income and population demographics.
- An [Executive Summary of Existing Conditions](#) to provide background information for the Normal plan area including the [results of a resident survey](#) conducted in June-July 2012.
- An analysis of five components of the neighborhood design including infrastructure, mobility, sustainability, open space and greenways, and housing and land use.
  - [Infrastructure Framework](#)
  - [Sustainability Framework](#)
  - [Mobility Framework](#)
  - [Greenway and Open space Framework](#)
  - [Housing and Land Use Framework](#)



- The traffic engineering firm SCJ Alliance completed an [Existing Traffic Conditions technical memorandum](#) (dated September 12, 2012) , and a [Future Traffic Analysis](#) (dated November 19, 2013) to investigate current and future traffic conditions in the Normal Neighborhood Plan study area.

The above noted studies are available on the City's website and project page at [www.ashland.or.us/normalplan](http://www.ashland.or.us/normalplan)

### **PUBLIC MEETINGS AND OUTREACH**

The neighborhood planning process has involved considerable public involvement including a resident survey, two neighborhood meetings, three public open houses, two Planning Commission site visits, individual stakeholder meetings with property owners and nearby residents, and numerous Planning Commission, Transportation Commission, Housing Commission and City Council study sessions.

The design phase of the planning process was initiated in October 2012 with a three day public design charrette, or workshop. The charrette allowed for the identification of issues and concerns, development of goals and objectives for the master plan, and creation of a conceptual neighborhood design. Following the October 2012 charrette, plan options were developed and presented at study sessions and public open houses to obtain public input to assist the design team, city staff, and the Planning Commission to further refine the plan concept. The final Normal Neighborhood Plan, and draft implementing ordinances, were completed in February 2014 and presented to the Planning Commission at a study session on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014, and at the public hearing on March 11, 2014.

### **NEXT STEPS**

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on March 11, 2014 and will continue their discussion on April 8<sup>th</sup> to forward a recommendation to the City Council. On May 6<sup>th</sup> the City Council is scheduled to hold a public hearing on the Normal Neighborhood Plan. Should the Housing and Human Services Commission wish to forward comments to the City Council for consideration it is recommended that the Commission schedule their review and discussion for April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

- [Normal Neighborhood Plan Framework Document](#) (dated March 2014)
- Normal Neighborhood Plan Maps (dated 3/11/14)
  - [Comprehensive Plan Map Amendment](#)
  - [Street Network](#)
  - [Pedestrian and Bicycle Network](#)
  - [Green Streets](#)
  - [Open Space Network](#)
- [Normal Neighborhood District Draft Code Amendments](#) (dated 3/11/14)
- Letters:  
To review recent comments left by the public on the Final Normal Neighborhood Plan on the OpenCityHall forum please visit:  
[http://www.ashland.or.us/Page.asp?NavID=13461#peak\\_democracy](http://www.ashland.or.us/Page.asp?NavID=13461#peak_democracy)

