

Staff Report Addendum

DATE: August 11, 2015

TO: Ashland Planning Commission

FROM: Brandon Goldman, Senior Planner

RE: Continuation of the July 28, 2015 Planning Commission Public Hearing regarding the Normal Neighborhood Plan.

At the July 28, 2015 Planning Commission meeting, the Commission held a public hearing on proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, Comprehensive Plan Map, Transportation System Plan, and Ashland Land Use Ordinance to implement the Normal Neighborhood Plan. The Commission deferred action to the Commission's next available meeting in order to continue deliberations and forward recommendations to the City Council. The Council is scheduled to hold a public hearing on September 1, 2015.

Please refer to the July 28, 2015 Staff Report for the project background, description of site and proposal, and discussion of project impact. There have been no changes to the Normal Neighborhood Plan following the July 28, 2015 meeting. At the prior meeting Staff presented changes to the plan that were made by the Normal Neighborhood Plan Working Group following the City Council's update on December 2, 2014. The City Council directed staff to amend the Normal Neighborhood Plan's implementing ordinances to incorporate the selected recommendations of the Normal Neighborhood Working Group, and to present the updated plan to the Planning Commission, Transportation Commission, and Parks Department for comment. The City Council is seeking comments regarding the changes that were made to the plan by the Working Group subsequent to the Planning Commission's original review and public hearing (4/08/2014).

The modifications to the Plan that were incorporated by the Working Group include the following:

- Modifications to the proposed zoning
- Modifications to the street dedication map
- Modifications to the mobility section of the Normal Neighborhood Plan Framework to address timing of East Main Street and RR Crossing improvements
- Modifications to the Land Use Ordinance to allow a minor amendment process for non-resource open space adjustments
- Modifications to the Housing and Land Use section of the Normal Neighborhood Plan to include conceptual illustrations of preferred site planning elements and a summary of characteristics that future developments should address (pgs 9-11).

The first three items in the bulleted list above were presented to the Planning Commission at a study session on March 31, 2015 and are outlined below in greater detail. The last two items listed above were incorporated into the Plan and implementing ordinances based on the Working Group's direction during their May, 2015 meetings and had not been previously reviewed by the Planning Commission.

Land Use Framework

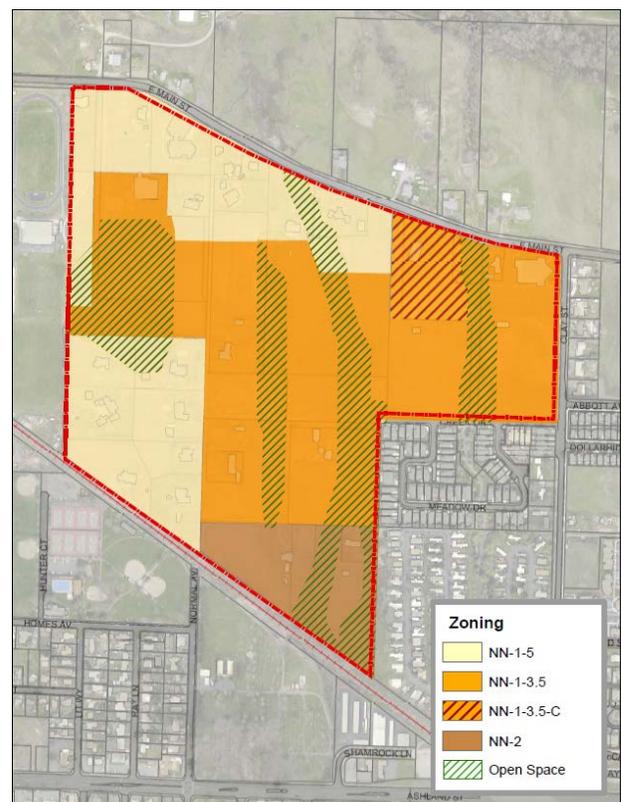
In the final plan and proposed land use ordinance these recommendations of the working group have been incorporated which include the following:

- Changing the originally proposed land zoning designations to be more consistent with the zoning of adjacent land within the City Limits
- Using zoning labels and housing densities that are comparable to those used in the rest of the city while recognizing the Normal Neighborhood (NN) district
- Maintain the option for neighborhood serving businesses and services close to East Main St near the northeast corner of the plan area (NN-1-3.5-C).
- Locating higher density development (NN-2) near the railroad tracks and within a relatively short distance to local businesses, transit stops along Ashland St., parks and community facilities.
- Locating lower density development along East Main Street to protect the existing viewshed and maintain a gradual transition between rural and urban areas.



Previously Proposed Land Use Designations (4/2014)

Zone	Density
NN-01	5 units per acre
NN-02	10 units per acre
NN-03	15 units per acre
NN-03C	15 units per acre + mixed-use



Revised Land Use Designations (7/2015)

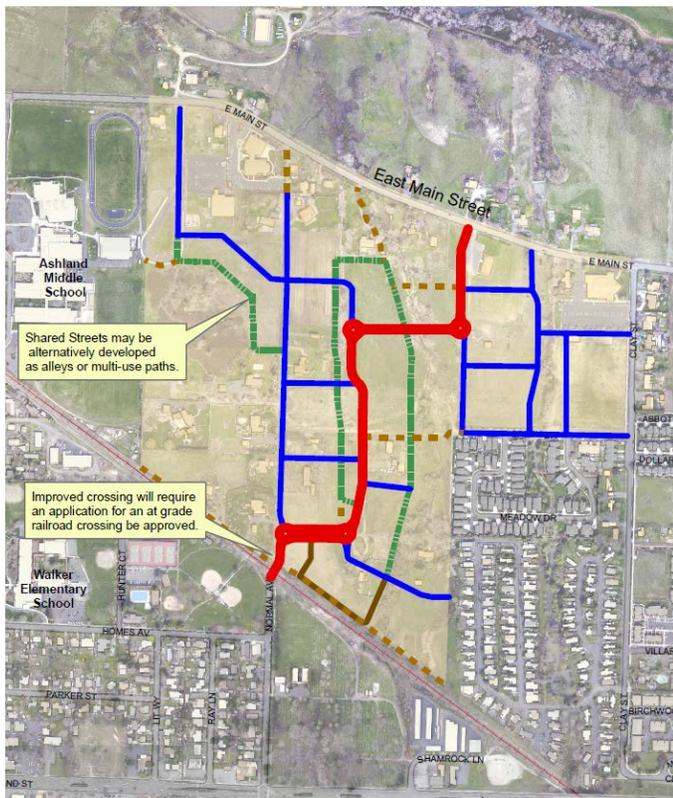
Zone	Density
NN-1-5	4.5 units per acre
NN-1-3.5	7.2 units per acre
NN-1-3.5-C	7.2 units per acre + mixed-use
NN-2	13.5 units per acre



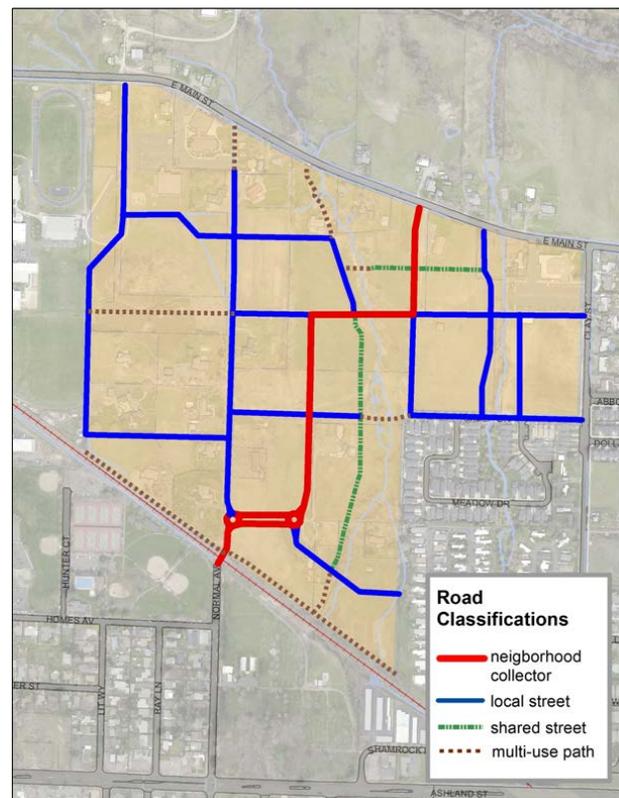
Transportation Framework

The Normal Neighborhood Plan Working Group had a number of specific recommendations relating to the future transportation system which have been incorporated into the neighborhood plan as follows:

- o The internal transportation system’s local street network should incorporate multiple connections with East Main Street 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.
- o Internal local streets should be aligned to provide a more standardized grid pattern, including a reduction in offset intersections and straight east-west connections.
- o Pedestrian and bicycle pathways are critical, especially as a means to connect residents with the middle school and the existing bike path.
- o External transportation improvements, including the railroad crossing and improvements to East Main Street are integral and should proceed in concert with development. The mobility section of the Plan Framework newly includes narrative stating that the City could consider a phased improvement approach and the formation of an Advanced Financing District as part of future annexation proposals.
- The extent of improvements needed along East Main Street would ultimately be determined by a Transportation Impact Analysis submitted with a proposed development application. With a phased approach it is anticipated that when the first new intersection with East Main is created at least 250’ on either side of that intersection should be fully improved to include a sidewalk, parkrow, bike lanes and a center turn lane. The plan stipulates a pedestrian and bicycle path connecting to the Middle School should also be improved at that initial phase.



Previously proposed Transportation Network (4/2014)



Revised Transportation Network (3/2015)



Open space

The Planning Commission’s report dated April 22, 2014 expressed that the provision of open space within the plan area has environmental, recreational, and aesthetic value to the neighborhood. The Normal Neighborhood working group concurred with this sentiment and as such the Planning Commission’s originally proposed recommendation to amend the Normal Neighborhood Plan Framework’s Greenway and Open Space chapter to further emphasize the community value of open space retention has been included in the framework document with the following introductory statement (page 13).

The Normal Neighborhood’s distinctive character is shaped by the presence of prominent open spaces and natural areas. The preservation of these neighborhood defining features is central to the success of the neighborhood plan as they ensure the protection of fragile ecosystems, provide passive recreational opportunities where people can connect with nature, protect scenic views considered important to the community, protect future development from flood hazards, and preserve community character and quality of life by buffering areas of development from one another. The permanent establishment of interconnected open spaces and contiguous conservation areas as proposed in the Open Space Framework is essential to promote and maintain high quality residential development which is appropriate to the distinct character of the neighborhood.

The neighborhood areas designated as future open space are largely consistent in shape, size and locations of previously designated floodplains, riparian corridors, wetlands, and wetland buffer areas within the plan area. Further as the plan envisions the use of these open spaces for habitat preservation, passive recreation, and preservation of scenic views the boundaries of these spaces address the proposed street pattern to retain accessibility by the neighborhood residents.



Previously proposed Open Space Network (4/2014)



Revised Open Space Network(7/2015)



As proposed in the draft Land Use Ordinance as recommended by the Working Group, in the future event that a Department of State Lands (DSL) approved wetland delineation differs from the boundaries presented in the 2007 Local Wetland Inventory an applicant could apply for a minor plan amendment to alter the Open Space Network Map to reflect the then current delineation. As such, a revised delineation showing a decrease in a regulated wetland area could result in a reduction in designated open space area within the district.

Planning Commission July 28th items for further discussion

In addition to the revisions to the plan that were made by the Working Group as described above, the Planning Commission identified the following issues during discussions on July 28, 2015 that they would like to further address in formulating final recommendations to be presented to the City Council.

Housing

- Commissioners discussed allowing greater flexibility for “clustered housing” within the proposed single family zone (NN-1-5). The City’s current performance standards options for subdivisions within R-1 zones, and the NN-1-5 zone as proposed, would presently allow single family units to be clustered around a common green consistent with the general concept for clustered housing as presented in the plan. However such a NN-1-5 development approved through the Performance Standards subdivision process would retain the lower residential base density than typical pocket neighborhoods, and would have individual household parking located adjacent to each home unless an exception to parking standards was requested and approved
- Allowing Pedestrian Cluster Housing as a permitted use within the Single-Family zoning designation (NN-1-5) would newly allow such developments to utilize provisions for consolidated parking, however the density of the development would remain consistent with the NN-1-5 zone. If recommended by the Planning Commission such a change would require the following amendments:
 - Amending Table 18.3.4.040 Land Use Descriptions to list this use as “Permitted” (P) under NN-1-5
 - Amending the Normal Neighborhood Plan Framework housing types description for Pedestrian-Oriented Clustered Residential Units (pg.8) to newly include NN-1-5 as a zoning classification that permits such units.

Transportation

- Broaden the Shared Street description to allow this new street type to be applied in areas other than those that are physically constrained .
 - The existing description reads as follows:
Shared Street
Provides access to residential in an area in which right-of-way is constrained by natural features, topography or historically significant structures. The constrained right-of-way prevents typical bicycle and pedestrian facilities such as sidewalks and bicycle lanes. Therefore, the entire width of the street is collectively shared by pedestrians, bicycles, and autos. The design of the street should emphasize a slower speed environment and provide clear physical and visual indications the space is shared across modes.
 - To broaden the applicability of this street type the Planning Commission could recommend amendments to this section:
Provides access to residential in an area in which right-of-way is constrained by natural features, topography or historically significant structures. ~~The~~ Shared streets may additionally be used in



circumstances where ~~constrained right of way does not prevents~~ typical bicycle and pedestrian facilities such as sidewalks and bicycle lanes, a slower speed street, collectively shared by pedestrians, bicycles, and autos, is a functional and preferred design alternative. Therefore, the entire width of the street is collectively shared by pedestrians, bicycles, and autos. The design of the street should emphasize a slower speed environment and provide clear physical and visual indications the space is shared across modes.

- Elimination of wording that indicates the use of alleys and rear lanes reduces pavement:
 - The only current reference to the impact of alleys upon reduced pavement in the presently proposed framework document is located in the mobility section of the framework within the description of alleys (pg 28): *“the narrow street section of rear lanes reduces the extent of impervious surfaces in the Normal Neighborhood and supports wetland and stream health”*. If recommended by the Planning Commission, and approved by Council, this section could be revised to eliminate that specific sentence within the alley description.
 - In a prior version of the framework (2/25/2014) it additionally stated on page 16 of the mobility section *“The use of rear lanes helps to reduce the extent of paved areas, and will support a complete grid of finely-grained urban blocks.”* In subsequent versions of the framework, including the version currently proposed, this language was modified as follows: *“The use of rear lanes helps to support a complete grid of finely-grained urban blocks, and provide access to garages and backyards.”*

Open Space – Wetland Delineations

- The proposed Land Use Ordinance (LUO ch.18.3.4) would allow an applicant to apply for a minor amendment to the plan in order to alter the Open Space Network Map to reflect the DSL approved wetland delineation. The early drafts of the proposed LUO previously reviewed by the Planning Commission had required a major amendment to the plan to reduce the area of a designated Open Space. The Planning Commission could forward a recommendation to reinstate the major amendment provision, and only allow for minor amendments when the area of open space provided is not reduced, or alternatively could recommend additional ordinance language to clarify the factors to be considered in approving a minor amendment to reduce open space.
- The current land use code (18.5.2.050) permits an exception to standards through a minor amendment if the circumstances in either subsection 1 or 2, below, are found to exist.
 1. *There is a demonstrable difficulty meeting the specific requirements of the Site Development and Design Standards due to a unique or unusual aspect of an existing structure or the proposed use of a site; and approval of the exception will not substantially negatively impact adjacent properties; and approval of the exception is consistent with the stated purpose of the Site Development and Design; and the exception requested is the minimum which would alleviate the difficulty.; or*
 2. *There is no demonstrable difficulty in meeting the specific requirements, but granting the exception will result in a design that equally or better achieves the stated purpose of the Site Development and Design Standards.*
- Should the commission elect to recommend modifying the minor amendment process staff would recommend the following revisions:



- Amend the Normal Neighborhood District Site Development and Design Standards(18.3.4.060) to directly reference the language in the framework document , and to include a stated purpose for open space within a new section as follows:

18.3.4.060 A

5. Conformance with Open Space Network Plan

New developments must provide open space consistent with the design concepts within the Greenway and Open Space chapter of the Normal Neighborhood Plan Framework and in conformance with the Normal Neighborhood Plan Open Space Network Map. The open space network will be designed to support the neighborhood’s distinctive character and provide passive recreational opportunities where people can connect with nature, where water resources are protected, and where riparian corridors and wetlands are preserved and enhanced.

- a. The application demonstrates that equal or better protection for identified resources will be ensured through restoration, enhancement, and mitigation measures.
- b. The application demonstrates that connections between open spaces are created and maintained providing for an interlinked system of greenways.
- c. The application demonstrates that open spaces function to provide habitat for wildlife, promote environmental quality by absorbing, storing, and releasing stormwater, and protect future development from flood hazards.
- d. The application demonstrates that scenic views considered important to the community are protected, and community character and quality of life are preserved by buffering areas of development from one another.

Recommendations

A Planning Commission recommendation for approval of Ordinance #1(as presented, or with specific recommended changes) would affect the following:

- Recommend the Ashland Comprehensive Plan Map be amended to create a designation for the Normal Neighborhood Plan District
- Recommend the Introduction and Definitions, and Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan be amended to incorporate the Normal Neighborhood district and land use classifications as proposed.
- Recommend the Normal Neighborhood Plan Framework document be included as a supporting document to the City’s Comprehensive Plan, with recommended changes to the mobility and open space chapters as incorporated by the Working Group, or as amended by the Planning Commission recommendation.

A Planning Commission recommendation for approval of Ordinance #2(as presented, or with specific recommended changes) would affect the following:

- Recommend the Transportation System Plan be amended to incorporate the Normal Neighborhood Street network as proposed:
 - Amend the Street Dedication Map (TSP Figure 10-1) to incorporate the plan area’s proposed Street Network, and reclassification of Normal “Avenue” to be a Neighborhood Collector.



- Amend the Planned Intersection and Roadway Improvement Map (TSP Figure 10-3) to include East Main Street as a Planned Roadway Project.
- Amend the Planned Bikeway Network Map (TSP Figure 8-1) to incorporate the planned multi-use trails within the Normal Neighborhood Plan.
- Amend the Street Design Standards to incorporate the Shared Street classification.

A Planning Commission recommendation for approval of Ordinance #3 (as presented, or with specific recommended changes) would affect the following:

- Recommend the Land Use ordinance be amended to include the Normal Neighborhood District Chapter (18.3.4) including the Normal Neighborhood Plan Zoning Classification map, and Site Development and Design Standards as proposed, or as amended by the Planning Commission recommendation.

The Planning Commission's recommendations relating to the revisions to the neighborhood plan's proposed land use designations, conservation and open space designations, street network, and draft land use ordinance will be forwarded to the City Council for consideration on September 1, 2015.

