

Ashland Planning Commission

By Email

September 10, 2019

RE: PA-T2-2019-00011

Dear Commissioners:

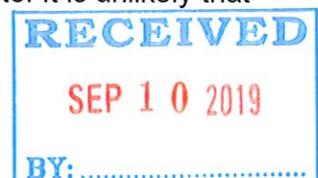
I am a strong proponent of the housing type proposed by this application. We are facing a shortage of housing that is affordable to the current and future residents to this region. Ashland, as I am sure you are aware, is certainly no exception. Cottage housing provides one more housing option in a continuum of housing types that were once built to meet the needs of a broad cross section of households with diverse needs and desires. I commend Ashland, and this Planning Commission, on seeking out solutions to this community's serious unmet demand for decent, affordable housing. Nevertheless, I am writing this letter to express some concerns regarding PA-T2-2019-00011 and this particular application of Ashland's Cottage Housing regulations.

The Applicant's ability to develop the subject property as it has proposed relies entirely on successfully obtaining exceptions to the provisions contained within 18.2.3.090.C.4. Specifically, you have been asked to find that

- the open space is adequately provided by a "series of interconnected spaces" (18.2.3.090.C.4.c);
- physically constrained areas (in this case Ashland's "Modified Floodplain") may be used as required open space; and
- 50% of cottage units need not abut a public open space.

"Common" or "public" open space and the purposeful organization of individual homes around a "central" open space is, perhaps, the most recognizable feature of a cottage court development. As I am sure you discussed during your deliberations on this subject, this orientation provides opportunities for informal social interaction, the creation of defensible space, and fosters a greater sense of community than a mere assemblage of several smaller homes built in close proximity to one another. There is a reason why this built form, which was not uncommon before the Second World War, has persisted despite our best efforts to zone it out of existence.

While I do acknowledge that this site poses challenges to achieving these objectives, I do not believe that this proposal provides adequate required public open space. The proposal is inconsistent with the intent of Section 18.2.3.090. Two public open spaces are provided at the extreme ends of the development and are not integral to the overall design. The Applicant suggests that public open space is achieved through a "series of interconnected spaces", but these spaces are isolated from the two units proposed in the middle of the site. It is unlikely that



anyone other than the resident of the existing single-family home located on Oak Street will use the "public" open space that separates that building from Oak Street. The residents of the westerly three units would be required to leave the immediacy of their own homes to enjoy this area. The Planning Commission could reasonably conclude that this open space will in fact function as a larger private open space for that unit.

The same is true for the public open space located at the extreme west end of the site. In order to access this space, the residents of the easterly three units would need to leave their homes and travel down a set of steps and a meandering sloped path to reach this space. However visually appealing that trip may be, it is nevertheless less convenient than opening one's front door to find a central open space or one that can be seen from one's residence and accessed with relative ease. This issue of accessibility presents real problems for anyone with limited mobility or young children, or anyone who would receive guests with limited mobility or young children. The perception of inaccessibility alone will deter the residents of the two interior units from using either public open space. Whether the four units are physically connected to public open space by pathways is irrelevant; the proposed site configuration is simply not conducive to enjoyment of the public open space by at least half of the residents. There is no "series of interconnected spaces" just as there is no central open space.

Furthermore, the need for the requested exception(s) arises from the Applicant's own preference for this particular site layout and not, as it asserts, unavoidable physical site constraints. It is conceivable that a slightly different design, one with three total units versus four for example, could achieve meaningful public open space that satisfies the intent as well as the language of the standards. As it stands, the Applicant is asking the Planning Commission to approve an exception that all but nullifies the larger policy objectives that cottage housing is meant to implement. The Planning Commission can find that, "the exception is NOT consistent with the stated purpose of the Site Development and Design [...]," and I encourage you to deny the proposal or more narrowly construct the exception such that this error in the application of the 10.2.3.090 is corrected.

There are two other issues that have been overlooked by the Applicant that should be addressed. First, the Land Development Ordinance states that Cottage Housing is subject to 18.4. (ALDO 18.2.3.090.C.3) As such, the proposal should more clearly identify the locations and method for screening recycling and refuse containers as required by 18.4.4.030.G.1. Recycle and Refuse Container Screen. A five to eight-foot fence or masonry wall should be provided to "limit" view of these containers from the view of adjacent properties. I suggest that the Planning Commission impose a condition of approval requiring the construction of compliant screening at time of development and prior to issuance of a final certificate of occupancy.

Finally, the site plan does not specify the location and type of outdoor lighting to be provided. Given the close proximity of surrounding residential development, this is a very important issue that should be addressed by the applicant. The following sections of the ALDO are applicable:

18.4.4.050.C Outdoor Lighting Standards

- 1. Arrange and install artificial lighting so there is no direct illumination onto adjacent residential properties.*

5. *Except as permitted for signs, direct outdoor light fixtures downward and have full shielding to minimize excessive light spillover onto adjacent properties.*

18.4.3.080 E.8 Lighting (Vehicle Area Design)

8. *Lighting. Lighting of parking areas within 100 feet of property in residential zones shall be directed into or on the site and away from property lines such that the light element shall not be directly visible from abutting residential property. Lighting shall comply with section 18.4.4.050.*

While it may be the Applicant's intent to provide site lighting that complies with these standards, the site plan does not identify locations or specifications for outdoor lighting. Therefore, I ask that the Planning Commission impose a condition of approval requiring that the applicant provide a photometric plan, or at least the locations and operating specifications of proposed outdoor lighting, to be reviewed and approved and by staff prior to issuance of building permits.

Thank you for your consideration of these matters. Cottage courts can provide a needed housing type, but developments like these must be done well if they are to be successful in serving the needs of their future residents and the neighborhoods in which they are located. I would also urge the Planning Commission to resist the temptation to approve exceptions that could be used by developers to construct cottage housing that is cottage housing in name only.

Sincerely,

Matt Brinkley
415 Wightman Street
Ashland, Oregon
97520