

The New Normal & The Normal Neighborhood Master Plan Working Group Proposal -  
April 15, 2015

Introduction

During the time we have been together in this Working Group I feel we've made progress but also haven't dealt with fundamental issues linked to this particular parcel of land.

In my State of the City speech for 2015 I put forth five related proposals for land use and circulation in Ashland, one of which was to make the Normal Neighborhood Master Plan a showcase of family-friendly housing for our community.

This raised the question: how does this proposal relate to our Working Group - and a few weeks ago our Chair, Pam Marsh, suggested she and I sort the question out. We were joined by Brandon Goldman and Bill Molnar - and the following proposal is the outcome of our efforts so far (though only I am responsible for it).

Framework

I believe that family friendly housing can and should be a unifying theme for the Normal Neighborhood Master Plan, for the following reasons:

- 1) Family-friendly housing has been in short supply in Ashland for many years despite calls for the City to do something about it, especially from the School District, that has seen it's enrollment steadily diminish during that time.
- 2) The demographics of Ashland are skewed to the retirement age end of the spectrum and we don't have enough families with young children in town. Moreover, most of the new housing that has been built is more suited to retirees than to families with children.
- 3) Normal is the last large parcel of land within the Urban Growth Boundary not yet developed for residential use and therefore this is our last chance to do something really significant regarding family friendly housing.
- 4) Normal is also a prospective annexation rather than already within the City limits and therefore subject to its land use regulations. This gives the City, and the City Council, greater flexibility in shaping what kind of development occurs on the parcel.
- 5) The 2015 Council Goals include updating the Comprehensive Plan. This also may help in generating a creative vision for Normal. (In fact the 2015 Council Goals have a lot to say that potentially applies to Normal - see below.)

Such a unifying theme would resolve issues that, until now, have been handled on a technical basis rather than through fundamental principles of land use planning. We need a vision that inspires people. Here are some of the important details:

## What Is 'Family Friendly Housing'?

Starting with the basics:

Detached houses with at least 3 or 4 bedrooms  
and

Safe, attractive outdoor spaces in which children can play.

This leads to the subject of neighborhoods - which was explored early in the Planning Commission's work on the NMP and to which the Working Group returned via 'cluster housing'.

A third theme is 'life cycle housing', referring to the fact that a family may inhabit the same house in different ways over time. For example starting with a couple that is considering starting a family; then the children are born and go to school; then gradually leaving home (and sometimes return); eventually leaving the parents once again as the sole inhabitants but with special physical needs that should be provided for in the design of the house from the beginning.

Life cycle housing can be extended via ARUs that can be easily and inexpensively added in the future, for example to allow a teenager to have her/his independent living situation, or to provide a source of supplemental income while also increasing the community's stock of long term rental units.

Lurking behind these ideas, however, and demanding attention is the disparity between the income of families and the price of housing that meets their needs.

We can explore these ideas via the tool of a neighborhood template.

### Normal Neighborhood Template

The attached Template 1 is a visual representation of a family friendly neighborhood cluster.

This cluster is based on a specific area of the Normal parcel so that we can evaluate it in a more realistic setting. It is oriented north-south to conform to the prevalent fall line of the parcel and this alignment accommodates water courses, the 'viewshed' and wildlife corridors.

Template 1 contains 18 primary dwelling units of three different types:

- Five 2 bedroom, 1 1/2 bath, 1000 sq ft 'starter' homes;
- Nine 3 bedroom, 2 bath, 1400 sq ft homes for families with 3 school age children;
- Four 4 bedroom, 2 1/2 bath, 1600+ sq ft homes for families with 4 or more children including some in high school.

Two story configurations are used for the two larger home types to minimize the buildings' footprints and conserve land.

In keeping with life-cycle housing, each of the three types has one bedroom and bath on the ground floor.

In addition, 4 of the primary units in the cluster are shown with 500 sq ft attached ARUs, configured as one bedroom rental units.

Parking is provided in the form of 2-car garages for the houses and an off-street space for each ARU.

Drawing from earlier work on the ideas of cottage housing and cluster development, the units face on a central space, which includes a children's play areas and one or more sun shelters. The intent is to create a space that naturally draws the cluster together as a neighborhood.

Work yet to be done concerns how this Template fits in other parts of the Normal parcel, how it relates to N-S streets and to adjacent other clusters (because, tentatively, 18 primary units is an upper limit that preserves the identity of an individual neighborhood.)

Houses are on individual lots and the central area is in shared ownership.

### Analysis

Template 1 allows us to examine a number of important questions, such as:

- Would there be a market for this kind of housing?
- Would it actually be 'family friendly'?
- Would families earning typical Rogue Valley incomes be able to buy into such neighborhoods?
- Would developers be interested in building this kind of housing, assuming agreement could be reached on infrastructure and open space?

### Template 1A

Before becoming too deeply involved in Template 1, however, consider a variant suggested by other Council Goals. For example:

- Aging in Place goal:
  - = Adopt 'senior friendly' construction standards.
- Community Climate Action Plan goal:

- = Use net zero energy conservation design;
- = Construct units that are PV and Solar hot water ready.
- Water Conservation and Drought Adapted goal:
  - = Grey Water ready:
  - = Rainwater Catchment ready:
  - = Drip Irrigation ready:
- Fire Adapted Community goal:
  - = Fire safety construction and landscaping standards.
- Home Food Production goal:
  - = Individual vegetable and flower gardens for each unit.

Template 1A also calls for front (and 'back') porches for the primary units, as conducive to neighborhood creation and also to provide shaded outdoor space because the number of trees in the cluster may be limited by long-term drought conditions.

### Additional Questions

- What kind of ground cover or landscaping is compatible with the Template 1A model?
- How is Affordable Housing factored into this design?
- How much land is allocated to open space, including riparian areas?
- Are there pedestrian paths through the middle of the clusters? (Yes)
- Will this approach meet RPS density requirements?
- How will infrastructure costs be covered?

### Next Steps

I propose that we study Template 1 and 1A and their associated questions, for consideration at our next meeting as basic building blocks of a family friendly NMP. Experimentation, modification and alternative models are encouraged.

We can also discuss how the Templates would be used in the approval process for development and whether or not R-2 zoning can be compatible with family friendly housing.

If we can create a Plan that incorporates the Council Goals mentioned above and especially family friendly housing, I believe it will enable us to negotiate with the County and State for flexibility in the interpretation of regulations and also to pursue grant funding to enable us to create a living model of sustainable community for 21st Century Ashland.

We could call it, "The New Normal".