



Planning Commission Minutes

Note: Anyone wishing to speak at any Planning Commission meeting is encouraged to do so. If you wish to speak, please rise and, after you have been recognized by the Chair, give your name and complete address for the record. You will then be allowed to speak. Please note the public testimony may be limited by the Chair.

April 23, 2024

STUDY SESSION

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I. CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Verner called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m. at the Civic Center Council Chambers, 1175 E. Main Street. Commissioner KenCairn attempted to attend the meeting remotely via Zoom but was prohibited from doing so due to technical difficulties.

Commissioners Present:

Lisa Verner
Eric Herron
Susan MacCracken Jain
Gregory Perkinson

Staff Present:

Brandon Goldman, Community Development Director
Derek Severson, Planning Manager

Absent Members:

Russell Phillips
Kerry KenCairn
Doug Knauer

Council Liaison:

Paula Hyatt (absent)

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Community Development Director Brandon Goldman made the following announcement:

- The City Council reviewed and awarded a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Housing Trust Fund, and social service grants for Community Development projects. The Housing Trust Fund was primarily directed towards the Sunstone Housing Collective, for the purpose of purchasing the ball fields across from the Council Chambers and develop affordable and family housing. \$40,000 was also granted to a new Ashland Community Land Trust organization to acquire property and develop affordable housing.

III. PUBLIC FORUM – None

IV. DISCUSSION ITEM

A. Discussion of changes proposed by the Development Process Management Advisory Committee (DPMAC)

Chair Verner noted that Commissioner KenCairn is the Commission's representative on the





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Development Process Management Advisory Committee (DPMAC) but is unable to attend tonight's meeting due to the aforementioned technical difficulties.

Staff Presentation

Mr. Goldman informed the Commission that the (DPMAC) was initiated by the previous City Manager in response to a City-held roundtable with local developers. This group included architects, designers, representatives of Southern Oregon University (SOU), local contractors, and Commissioner KenCairn to determine if there are efficiencies that can be gained in departmental processes, the issuance of building permits, or development code changes. Mr. Goldman explained that this process began with a survey of applicants who had applied for a building permit or planning action between 2018–2022. Staff received 71 responses, 93–97% of which were positive, though some spoke to the difficulty of the development process.

Mr. Goldman described how questions arose from the survey about how to streamline the application and permitting process. The City subsequently implemented its Citizen Self-Service (CSS) portal, which allows customers to apply for permits and planning actions online, as well as check the status of applications and request permit inspections. He noted that the CSS portal had seen 80 new registrants in the last month. He added that the City's permitting and application fees are higher than some neighboring cities, but are lower than the state median.

Mr. Goldman outlined several proposed changes to Land Use applications, including: making tree removals applications an administrative decision and removing the noticing requirement; streamlining the Outline Plan/Final Plan review process with regards to the number of units proposed for a development; reviewing the creation of private drives/requiring a street dedication depending on the number of lots proposed; solar ordinance amendments to allow intra-parcel shading; greater allowances for the conversion of buildings from commercial to residential use; and not requiring a permit for the construction, repair, or replacement of fences provided that they meet City standards.

The Commission discussed the impacts these suggested changes could have on the City and requested that staff provide a report on the DPMAC suggestions at the next Commission meeting. Mr. Goldman remarked that formal report would be presented to the Council at its May 20, 2024 meeting. He added that the City is also reviewing other priorities, such as the development of CFAs, an Economic Opportunity Analysis, and a Manufactured Park Zone Ordinance, which would then be followed by the DPMAC suggestions.

B. Discussion of video “Smart Cities: Toward a New Model for Urban Communities”

(<https://alum.mit.edu/forum/video-archive/smart-cities>)

Chair Verner related how the speaker in the video regarded zoning as an under-recognized platform cities could utilize, and discussed how cities could use incentives to achieve their desired outcomes.



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The Commission discussed shared-equity ownership and solar co-op arrangements, where people would invest a share and receive a proportional share of benefit. Commissioner MacCracken Jain cautioned against relying on complicated optimization strategies, stating that zoning and taxes are among the strongest levers the City can use to enact change, particularly in reducing CO2 emissions and improving quality of life. The Commission discussed how zoning could be used to impact climate change. Mr. Goldman expressed appreciation for the state's guidelines regarding Climate Friendly Areas (CFAs) and its use of zoning changes to address systemic issues.

V. OPEN DISCUSSION

Commissioner MacCracken Jain commented that she had forwarded an article from the New York Times to staff regarding the housing crisis in New Jersey. Mr. Goldman stated that the article would be included in the May 14, 2024 Regular Meeting packet as an informational item.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

*Submitted by,
Michael Sullivan, Executive Assistant*

