



# TOWARD A NEW MASTER PLAN FOR CROMAN MILL

*Background document on a development proposal for a key “opportunity site”*

## Summary

Many Ashland citizens are eager to see the site of the former Croman Mill cleaned up and developed into a dynamic new district for the city. Townmakers LLC and its team also see an opportunity for an innovative and successful new development on the site, and they intend to move forward on acquisition and redevelopment. However, if the site is to be more than simply another form of conventional development, careful strategy and collaboration will be needed.

In a recent report on economic diversification of the City, the economics consulting firm ECONorthwest describe the Croman Mill site as “Perhaps the property with the most potential to redefine its area,” with a mixed-use development that provides family-wage jobs, employment and needed housing.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, the Townmakers team’s draft master plan features a walkable, mixed-use, live-work-play, sustainable form of urbanization that will incorporate climate-friendly strategies, seek to add core employment and family wage jobs, and provide much-needed housing supply, including affordable and workforce housing.



*Left: the site. Right: the current master plan showing potential use areas.*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ashlandchamber.com/files/2022AshlandEconDiversificationStrategy.pdf>

Broadly speaking, we plan to pursue two complementary strategies. One strategy is to try to capture existing markets for employment-generating industries, including agriculture-related products, technology businesses, and the like. Another complementary strategy, which we feel would be very appropriate for Ashland, would be to build on the unique qualities, assets, and local culture of the city, generating more businesses at a smaller and more local scale – including a diverse range of pay scales. Examples might include craft-based and value-added food and beverage products, specialty technologies, recreation-related businesses, businesses related to sustainability and climate change, fire resilience expertise, research and consulting expertise, and lifestyle-related health and wellness innovations, as well as other emerging opportunities.

Such an “ecosystem” of smaller businesses and so-called “makerspaces,” could be highly complementary to the more sustainable development model of a walkable, mixed-use, live-work-play district – and crucially, one that is complementary to, and not competitive with, other areas and established businesses of the city.

**The key role of housing in economically competitive, “live-work-play” neighborhoods**

The original 2010 Croman Mill District Plan did not contemplate a significant increment of housing. At that time, the main goal was the recruitment of large “core employers,” and housing was a secondary consideration. However, since 2010, conditions have shifted dramatically. There is now a housing crisis, fueled by a lack of diverse or affordable housing. There is an urgent need to create more housing supply to meet demand, and ease upward pressure on prices. And as the Ashland Housing Capacity Analysis of 2021 reported, “Ashland will need more diverse housing types [sometimes referred to as ‘missing middle’]...such as: small single-family detached housing, accessory dwelling units, cottage housing, townhouses, duplexes, tri- and quad-plexes, and apartments.” This is also an issue of economic competitiveness, since potential employers are looking for locations that are suitable for their employees.

Moreover, the nature of employment has changed, and the line between housing and employment has blurred. Especially in the wake of COVID, more people work from home, or have started home-based businesses. More employers want employees to live nearby, in desirable, livable neighborhoods with diverse amenities. Croman Mill needs to attract good employees, in order to attract good employers.



*Left: Bird's-eye view of “civic core” looking north from Siskiyou Boulevard. Right: The compatible industrial or “makerspace” district, integrated with nearby housing. Illustrations by Laurence Qamar for Townmakers LLC.*