

DATE: December 7, 2020
TO: Department of Land Conservation and Development
FROM: Sadie DiNatale, ECONorthwest
SUBJECT: Ashland Housing Capacity Analysis Advisory Committee #1: Meeting Notes

Ashland Advisory Committee Meeting Notes

The City of Ashland's Advisory Committee met virtually on December 7, 2020 (3:00 PM – 5:00 PM) for their first meeting regarding Ashland's Housing Capacity Analysis. ECONorthwest facilitated the meeting, using the City of Ashland's Zoom account. The City of Ashland recorded the meeting.

Meeting presenters and attendees included: Sadie DiNatale, Beth Goodman, Luna Ou, Bill Molnar, Brandon Goldman, Ryan Haynes, Echo Fields, Heidi Parker-Shames, Gil Livni, James Westrick, Mark Knox, Linda Reid, Christopher Brown, Robert Kendrick, Kerry, and Lynn Thompson.

Notes outlined below provide a high-level summary of the meeting, organized by agenda item. It is focused on Committee member's thoughts and feedback.

Overview of the Project

Bill Molnar kicked off the meeting with a brief background of the study. Then, Beth Goodman described what a Housing Capacity Analysis is, the role of the advisory committee, and the overall planning process for the project. Prior to this overview, the project team and members of the committee introduced themselves. Some advisory committee members shared some of their concerns as it relates to housing in Ashland. Comments included concerns about:

- School enrollment decreasing because young families cannot afford to live in Ashland.
- The very low housing vacancy rate in Ashland.
- Housing development in the last few years is trending too much toward small units (~500 square feet), which limits larger households' ability to find housing that meets their needs

Preliminary Key Findings of the Housing Capacity Analysis, Buildable Lands Inventory, and Housing Forecast

Beth Goodman presented the preliminary key findings of the Buildable Lands Inventory (BLI). While some questions were posed about the methodology, committee members did not share any concerns with the BLI results.

Sadie DiNatale and Beth Goodman presented the preliminary key findings about Ashland's housing market. Committee members did not share any concerns about the data.

Beth Goodman discussed key assumptions of the housing forecast, including the housing forecast by housing type. Committee members inquired about the population forecast and some of the assumptions about vacancy and household size. Some discussion centered around a need for more multifamily housing to accommodate Ashland's lower-income households. Committee members recognized the directive to plan for more multifamily housing could be contentious, resulting from community opposition to development and density. Assumptions for a housing mix were not determined at the meeting. Thus, at the second advisory committee meeting, the residential land needs analysis will evaluate two housing mix scenarios.

Some conversations skewed toward policy identification, which was deferred to the next advisory committee meeting. These topics included:

- Ashland should expand housing into commercial zones. However, Ashland's zoning code requires ground floor commercial in all buildings in its commercial zones. Banks are hesitant to provide loans for mixed-use, residential buildings in Ashland because of this ground floor commercial requirement. The City should consider modifying its zoning code to alleviate this housing development barrier.
- Ashland should consider converting hotel / motel space to single-room occupancy (SRO) housing to provide housing options for people with extremely low-income incomes. The City of Ashland would need to allow SRO housing types in their zoning code.

Discussion: Desired Outcomes of the Project

To conclude the meeting, Advisory Committee members shared their thoughts on a few key questions, including: (1) What would make this project a success? (2) What do you hope this project achieves? And (3) What are the risks of the project?

Thoughts shared are summarized below. They are not verbatim.

- Ashland needs a surplus of housing of all types, but should not change its current character to accommodate more, diverse housing options
- To accommodate housing, Ashland should densify rather than sprawl out
- The community should push forward with efforts to address the city's housing needs as quickly as possible
- Multifamily development in commercial areas is a good approach because there is likely to be less community opposition to multifamily development in commercial areas than in existing residential areas.
- Consider rezoning some land that has been set aside in pre-planned neighborhoods to multifamily zoning (especially areas that are close to downtown and near services)
- Expand housing types to include vertical housing with commercial uses (mixed-use), single-room occupancies, higher-amenity manufactured home communities, and non-traditional housing options

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- Consider opportunities for development of more inviting mobile home parks, possibly clustered around green areas. This may be very important for providing housing options for people who lost their homes in the fires.
 - Is there opportunity for more flexibility in development regulations? Is there a way to change the preconceptions of what housing should look like in Ashland to allow for more development of multifamily housing, possibly in commercial areas.
 - Attract and plan for families in Ashland which may require development of larger, single-family homes
 - Address opposition to density; talk to property owners about development of higher density housing
 - Support development of housing across the income spectrum, but prioritize getting people off the street (e.g., allowing hotel conversions to SROs), as well as housing that enables young creatives to live in this community with their children
 - Ashland should strive to see change – the community needs to see action, not just talk
 - Alleviate decline in school enrollment because people cannot afford to live in Ashland

Next Steps

As a next step, ECONorthwest will begin working on the residential land needs analysis. The Advisory Committee's next meeting is scheduled for January 11, 2021 at 3:00 – 5:00 PM.