

Dana Smith

From: Maria Harris
Sent: Monday, October 25, 2021 1:54 PM
To: Mark Knox
Cc: Dana Smith; Bill Molnar
Subject: RE: housing in employment lands draft code



Hi Mark,

Thank you for your comment. We will forward your letter to the Planning Commission for the meeting tomorrow evening.

Best,
Maria Harris, AICP
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From: Mark Knox <knox@mind.net>
Sent: Monday, October 25, 2021 1:37 PM
To: Maria Harris <maria.harris@ashland.or.us>
Subject: housing in employment lands draft code

[EXTERNAL SENDER]

Hi Maria,

Thank you for sending the draft code language for temporary housing in the Employment zones over for review and comment. I didn't see any grammatical or structural issues within the draft, but of course I was focused on the code's intent. In that regard, I believe it recognizes the "negative" trend we're experiencing in the commercial development sector which should help provide some needed options for small business owners and owners of dormant employment property. As staff knows, I've been harping about this topic over the last couple of years since it came up during the Transit Triangle public hearings and contend the proposed code not only recognizes the lightning quick impacts on communities across the country caused by Amazon, E-commerce, China and now the pandemic, but also contend it could provide additional, diverse and affordable housing opportunities.

Unfortunately, I do not believe the proposed code does enough to really make a significant difference and contend the code should be written to reflect the codes already codified for the North Mountain Zone as well as the proposed code for the Transit Triangle area along Ashland Street where the ground floor commercial requirement is zero, but constructed to eventually convert a percentage of the ground floor to commercial space when market demand dictates. The North Mountain Neighborhood Master Plan code language is a GREAT example of how the code could work for

other employment lands with a "Residential Overlay". That area has seen a considerable amount of multi-story housing development in the last few years that would not otherwise be possible due to real world concerns/limitations over commercial lending which reflects the drastic decline in retail/employment/office demand. Unless it's a subsidized project, I do not know of ANY multi-story housing development outside the Downtown area that has provided housing numbers and small unit sizes comparable to the North Mountain area. If they do exist, they're few, condominiumized and definitely not affordable. On this point, I would urge the Planning Commission and City staff to consider applying the code to other Employment areas and get "ahead" of the obvious trend in order to encourage needed housing, to bolster economic opportunity and to avoid vacant buildings.

During past conversations with the Planning Commission on this topic, there seemed to be some hesitancy to consider an option that would essentially provide an "open-ended" timeframe for conversion of such "temporary" residential spaces to convert to commercial use which is understandable, but unfortunately not possible given the speed, trajectory and mutating dynamics in today's world commerce. That said, I would encourage the Planning Commission to consider a timing mechanism such as a 5 year Conditional Use Permit to force an applicant to come back and continue to justify the need for the temporary residential housing use (built to commercial codes and design standards). I would argue, *unfortunately*, demand for commercial space will continue to worsen and the multitude of hardships described herein and in past communications and articles presented to the Commission will continue if we just don't get ahead of the issue and mitigate where possible.

Thanks again and sorry to sound so pessimistic, but I believe the solution is a very optimistic approach to obtain needed housing, affordable housing and produce apartment housing while still producing positive mixed-use live/work environments. – Mark Knox



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