

**CITY OF
ASHLAND**
ASHLAND PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION
Minutes
March 22, 2022

I. CALL TO ORDER: 7:00 PM, via Zoom

Chair Haywood Norton called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present:

Michael Dawkins
Haywood Norton
Roger Pearce
Lynn Thompson
Lisa Verner
Kerry KenCairn
Doug Knauer

Staff Present:

Bill Molnar, Community Development Director
Brandon Goldman, Planning Manager
Derek Severson, Senior Planner
Michael Sullivan, Administrative Assistant

Absent Members:

None

Council Liaison:

Paula Hyatt

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Community Development Director Bill Molnar made the following announcements:

- The April 12, 2022 Planning Commission meeting will contain two Public Hearings: an appeal of a minor partition at 34 Scenic Drive, and the continuation of the 165 Water Street subdivision.
- Several years ago Gov. Brown passed an executive order directing state agencies to closely examine climate pollution. The Department of Land Conservation and Development has drafted guidelines specifically targeting transportation and housing planning in Oregon, primarily focused on its eight major urban areas, one being the Medford-Ashland urban area. This will likely result in land-use changes to encourage a wider mix of uses and to develop more walkable neighborhoods.

Senior Planner Derek Severson detailed that this would be a two-phased plan, the first being a study of potential climate friendly areas that could accommodate 30% of urban growth over the next 20 years. These identified areas would likely be downtowns and areas along transit routes. Once identified the cities would be required to look at any zoning changes necessary to accommodate that envisioned population growth, such as those increasing housing density, building height standards, and parking management strategies. Phase II would look at how to implement zoning map changes to those climate friendly areas.

Commissioner Doug Knauer requested elaboration on what characterized a climate friendly neighborhood. Mr. Severson replied that it arose out of Oregon's commitment to fighting climate change and its goal of significantly lowering carbon emissions by 2050. These neighborhoods would be pedestrian friendly areas and a mix of work-play-recreational buildings in the hopes of reducing automobile emissions.

Chair Norton asked for clarification on the need to re-notice the Public Hearing for 165 Water Street due to a late request for a Solar Exception in the application. Mr. Severson explained that staff was still waiting on new materials from the Applicant, which would dictate whether it would be necessary to re-notice for the April 12, 2022 Planning Commission meeting.

III. PUBLIC FORUM - None

IV. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. **Ashland Housing Production Strategy project introduction, presentation by ECONorthwest**

Planning Manager Brandon Goldman outlined how the City of Ashland initiated the development of the Housing Production Strategy (HPS) to identify and prioritize a variety of actions that the City can take to accommodate needed housing. The City of Ashland received a grant from the State Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) to undertake this effort, with consultant services provided by ECONorthwest. The draft HPS report is expected to be completed the end of 2022, at which time the City will have a hearings-ready draft and will schedule hearings before the Planning Commission and the City Council to adopt the Housing Production Strategy by May 2023. Completion of a Housing Production Strategy, following adoption of a Housing Capacity Analysis, is a new requirement adopted by the Oregon Legislature through passage of House Bill 2003 in 2019. The HPS will be informed by the recently adopted Ashland Housing Capacity Analysis and the goals and policies within the Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

The final Housing Production Strategy report will identify a set of specific actions the city will undertake over an 8 year period to promote the development of needed housing. Such actions may include land use ordinance amendments, zoning changes, financial incentives, and other actions within the City's purview (see attachment #1).

Mr. Goldman welcomed Beth Goodman from ECONorthwest to present their initial findings. Also in attendance were Commissioners Rich Rohde and Echo Fields from the Housing and Human Services Commission, both of whom will be serving alongside Commissioners Lisa Verner and Kerry KenCairn on the Housing Production Strategy Advisory Committee. Ms. Goodman began by giving an overview of the plans and goals of the Housing Production Strategy for the next year. She detailed how the HPS would develop strategies to meet the City's future housing needs which would then be implemented over the course of an eight year period. At the end of that period the City will develop another HPS report to address any remaining housing needs (see Attachment #2).

Ms. Goodman gave a presentation regarding the various housing issues within the City. These included the high percentage of cost-burdened home-owners and renters in Ashland, the exorbitant cost of homes for first time buyers, and the economic disparity that the elderly, minority groups, and disabled experience in the City. She also noted the rise in homelessness within Jackson County. She added that her team had thus far been unable to gather accurate data on homelessness in Ashland specifically, but that the homelessness situation in Jackson County was desperate.

Ms. Goodman also laid out the various courses of action that cities can take to create more affordable housing. These ranged from less impactful to more impactful, and included: production of informational materials; partnerships to leverage efforts and resources; removing regulatory barriers for developers; waiving or reducing upfront or ongoing charges on development; allocating funding; and direct land acquisition and disposition. Ms. Goodman stated that cities are rarely developers of housing, and that affordable housing built by private developers is usually government subsidized.

Questions and Discussion

Commissioner Knauer asked if the HPS will examine how private developers are overburdened with development costs and if the result is expensive homes outside the reach of those with lower incomes. Ms. Goodman replied that private developers will typically tend towards higher priced housing development because that yields a higher profit. Commissioner Verner pointed out that such private developments do not serve the lowest 36% of renters and buyers in the City.

Commissioner Pearce requested that Ms. Goodman provide context for the percentage of cost-burdened renters and homeowners in relation to the rest of Oregon. She replied that the cost for homeowners was actually lower in the City due to its expensive housing market. Because the average home sale price in Ashland is so great (approximately \$550,000) many who would normally own houses are unable to afford them and therefore the number of cost-burdened owners is relatively low.

Commissioner Fields asked that a breakdown of gender be included in the study, especially regarding elderly, single women and their intersection around income. Ms. Goodman responded that it would be factored into the HPS.

Council Liaison Paula Hyatt requested information on the data sources that will be used over the course of the HPS. Ms. Goodman informed her that the decennial census is less useful for studies because of its limited criteria. The annual census data will be compiled from the last five years and examined as one data set.

Commissioners Rohde and Fields emphasized the need for direct public engagement during the course of the HPS, particularly before any first drafts are made. Commissioner Rohde stated that many members of the community wanted to participate in this process and provide feedback and suggestions. Mr. Goldman summarized the various ways that the public would be involved outside of Commission meetings, including public meetings, open houses in-person and online, and the annual rent burden meeting where the HPS will be addressed. He concluded that members of the public would be encouraged to reach out to the Housing and Human Services Commission, as well as himself and Linda Reid, the city's Housing Program Specialist.

Chair Norton inquired if the Housing Production Strategy Advisory Committee meetings would be open to the public. Mr. Goldman responded that they would be viewable over Zoom, but that a Public Forum could be considered for the meetings. All meeting minutes and materials would also be made available to the public. Chair Norton further inquired if the meetings would fall under the Open Meetings Act, and asked that staff direct that question to the City Attorney.

Commissioner Thompson expressed a concern that the City was being converted into a retirement community or for couples without children. She asked what could be done to promote a healthy mix of families, individuals, and couples. Ms. Goodman replied that household composition will play a role on the HPS, but how that information is used will be based on the City's objectives. She stated that she believed the City would need to foster a healthy mix of households, but that there will be no simple solution to this problem. She added that there are fewer funds available to support affordable housing, and that such a process will be particularly difficult in an expensive city like Ashland.

Commissioner Fields cited the recent Alameda fire which resulted in the loss of over 2,000 mobile and manufactured homes in Jackson County, and expressed a concern over the lack of similarly constructed dwellings in the ECONorthwest presentation. She stated that many fire survivors had relied on that form of affordable housing, and brought attention to how such housing was becoming increasingly unaffordable as more mobile home parks are purchased by hedge funds and real estate investment groups. Ms. Goodman remarked that it is unlikely that new mobile home developments would be proposed in Ashland, but that the HPS will contain strategies to maintain the existing mobile and manufactured homes in the City as affordable housing.

Mr. Molnar queried what role local economic development would play in the HPS, and that such involvement could lead to greater housing opportunities for families or influence the composition of households. Ms. Goodman responded that she is working closely with the team developing the Diversification Strategy with the Chamber and that this question will be discussed. She added that the issue over whether there would be an employer assisted housing strategy would need to be considered. She briefly detailed how the accessibility of the Rogue Valley made it relatively easy for people to relocate in the absence of affordable housing, which puts additional stress on employers attempting to hire workers.

The Commission discussed creating an HPS progress page on the City website. Chair Norton remarked that the Committee should provide subsequent Commission meetings with periodic updates as a regular agenda item.

Councilor Hyatt informed the Commission that the City Council could potentially begin meeting in-person in April, 2022.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 8:44 p.m.

*Submitted by,
Michael Sullivan, Administrative Assistant*