



# 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.

**July 25, 2023**  
**STUDY SESSION**  
**Minutes**

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

Chair Verner called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Civic Center Council Chambers, 1175 E. Main Street.

**Commissioners Present:**

Lisa Verner  
Kerry KenCairn  
Doug Knauer  
Gregory Perkinson  
Russell Phillips  
Susan MacCracken Jain

**Staff Present:**

Brandon Goldman, Community Development Director  
Derek Severson, Planning Manager  
Michael Sullivan, Executive Assistant

**Absent Members:**

Eric Herron

**Council Liaison:**

Paula Hyatt

**II. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Community Development Director Brandon Goldman made the following announcements:

- The City Council will hear an update from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) regarding the Croman Mill Site. The DEQ conducted testing of the site on May 5, 2023, where contaminants were identified. A cleanup plan and timeline for development are now being created.
- The Community Development Department is in the process of creating a Development Process Advisory Committee. The group will meet once a month to discuss the department's development process by utilizing feedback from frequent developers in the area. Mr. Goldman stated that a liaison from the Commission to the Committee would be beneficial. Commissioner Knauer inquired if the purview of the new Committee would exclusively be land use. Mr. Goldman responded that it would, stating that building code is based off established guidelines from the Oregon Building Codes Division and would be difficult to change.

**III. PUBLIC FORUM - None**





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## IV. **OTHER BUSINESS**

### A. **Croman Mill Site Update**

Mr. Goldman stated that Townmakers, LLC had spoken before the Commission before on January 25, 2022, and have since been working on a conceptual development proposal for the site.

#### **Presentation**

Michael Mehaffy began by introducing Michael Weinstock from Townmakers, LLC, and Carlene Chin, a third-party consultant. Mr. Mehaffy stated that this will be an informal update, and that the team would be returning in the coming months with a formal application.

Mr. Mehaffy gave a brief history of the site, stating that it was first used as a municipal airport before becoming a mill site in 1934. The mill was closed in 1996, with further industrial uses for the site planned but never realized. He described how the site encompasses 61 square acres and is in an ideal position for urban expansion. He added that the proposed neighborhood would complement the downtown area, and that the team is currently trying to identify a large commercial employer to readily bring business and employment opportunities to the neighborhood (see attachment #1).

Mr. Mehaffy emphasized their commitment to retaining as much of the Ashland Municipal Code related to the Croman Mill Site as possible, but that some changes would be necessary. He detailed how the COVID-19 pandemic had altered the work-life paradigm, with more people working from home and starting small businesses. He noted that the Ashland Economic Diversification Plan had called for the cultivation of small-batch businesses. Mr. Mehaffy detailed the need for more live-work-play areas, particularly those that could provide market-ready employment housing opportunities, stating that a lack of workforce housing results in a lack of workforce.

Mr. Mehaffy stated that the project's planning team is focused on a climate and environmentally friendly development and want to incorporate features of the state's new Climate Friendly Area (CFA) guidelines. He mentioned that the team had engaged in several public outreach activities and had received valuable feedback from the community.

Mr. Mehaffy detailed his team's plan to employ a phased development, starting from Siskiyou Boulevard and moving north with each subsequent phase. He explained that the proposed plan would include a binding site plan, some proposed amendments to district standards, and an annexation plan. Mr. Mehaffy stated that his team is currently conducting a Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA), an economic analysis, and a financial development plan. He added that the team's philosophy behind this project is to regulate the impacts of buildings, not the uses.

#### **Questions**



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Chair Verner asked if the applicants would be the one to develop the site. Mr. Weinstock responded that his team would do portions of the commercial developments, but that they would likely use individual builders for some of the smaller and residential projects. He emphasized his commitment to retaining the rental properties. Mr. Mehaffy stated that their proposed buildings would all be built to the same standard, even if they were built by different developers. Ms. Chin added that the team has specific design standards and is committed to developing a quality neighborhood.

Chair Verner inquired how the team would attract a core employer to the new development. Mr. Weinstock responded that his team had met with a wide variety of employers already, but that they are also garnering feedback from the community, including the Commission. Ms. Chin stated that the team is also looking for employers outside the City to bring their business in and inject capital into the community. She added that the community has significant outdoor recreational resources to help increase employment opportunities, such as the popularity of biking, skiing, and pickleball in the area.

Commissioner MacCracken Jain asked how already existing businesses in the area would be supported by the project. Ms. Chin responded those existing small businesses are aspirational for the team, and that they hope to support and complement those businesses with the new neighborhood.

Commissioner Perkinson asked what the greatest risks are to this project with regards to land use. Mr. Weinstock responded that a “no further action needed” notice from the DEQ is necessary before development begins, as well as flexible zoning to allow for the new development to be market-facing. Mr. Mehaffy explained that a market-facing development would be one that had readily available spaces for businesses to open. He added that the team is dedicated to seeing the neighborhood grow, and not to simply sell residential properties.

Commissioner Perkinson asked how the team’s commitment to fully realizing the development of the site would be enforced. Mr. Mehaffy responded that Townmakers, LLC will have a minimum commitment to the City, with some flexibility. This will ensure that the plans for development are not drastically changed after approval is granted. Ms. Chin added that the team could not simply build residential units and then leave without fulfilling its obligation to also develop the promised commercial and industrial buildings. Mr. Goldman commented that the development would be done in phases, and that each phase will have a minimum percentage of residential, commercial, and industrial buildings being developed before the next phase could begin.

Commissioner KenCairn stated that some annexations with comparable development plans had failed in the past, and that the City was forced to dissolve similar agreements with developers. She asked how the applicants would protect the City from a similar situation. Mr. Weinstock responded that his retention of ownership rights ensures his commitment to fully realizing the project. Mr. Mehaffy reiterated that the applicants will hold all buildings developed to the same high standard.



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Commissioner Knauer requested clarification over the applicant's goal to "regulate the impacts, not the uses" of the site, stating that such a philosophy could open the development to unintended uses. He emphasized the need for a regulatory apparatus, particularly if this philosophy negatively impacts the downtown plaza. Mr. Mehaffy responded that form-based zoning has a similar impact, where commercial buildings adjacent to residential units are subject to setbacks and other mitigating requirements, rather than them being disallowed outright. Mr. Goldman commented that the City has hybrid zones that allow residential and commercial buildings adjacent to each other, but that the Croman Mill Site would be the largest area for this adaptive use. He added that the existing Croman Mill Site code will need to be amended for this development.

The Commission discussed the difficulty in arranging residential and commercial buildings in the same neighborhood, as well as the impact of noise from the railroad on the proposed dwelling units.

Commissioners MacCracken Jain and KenCairn lamented the lack of detailed plans for this project, and Mr. Mehaffy responded that a more detailed plan will be submitted with the formal application.

Commissioner MacCracken Jain requested further clarification regarding the applicants aim to "regulate the impact, not the use." Mr. Mehaffy related the dangers in over-regulating zoning, and that the needs of the neighborhood's residents should be the focus of the City. He explained that this is the practice of mitigating any potential impact a commercial building could have on an adjacent residential building, such as requiring setbacks. He stated that the City is already engaging in this practice, and that he hopes it can be applied to the Croman Mill Site. Commissioner KenCairn cautioned that too many restrictions on commercial buildings could dissuade businesses from operating there. Mr. Mehaffy responded that the City is a desirable place for residences and businesses, and that these types of conflicts are seen in any mixed-use areas. He emphasized the importance in not over-regulating, stating that private landlord/tenant agreements will be as vital as regulations from the public sector. Commissioner Knauer expressed appreciation for the project and that he is anticipating the formal application.

Mr. Mehaffy asked if there was support from the Commission for this project to employ a phased-development model that included a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial buildings in each phase. There was general support from the Commission. Mr. Goldman commented that greater allowances would also be granted to this project if the site was designated as a CFA.

### **B. Legislative Update**

#### **Presentation**

Planning Manager Derek Severson gave a brief update to the Commission on recent House and



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Senate bills that have passed the Oregon Legislature. Mr. Severson limited this update to those bills that could affect the City, such as those relating to housing, wildfire resilience, climate, and transportation (see attachment #2).

### **Questions of Staff**

Councilor Hyatt thanked staff for the update, particularly with regards to HB 3151, stating that increasing rents are in danger of pricing residents out of the City. HB 3151 would provide protections and incentives for residents living in manufactured home parks, as well as designating manufactured dwellings as affordable housing.

The Commission asked clarifying questions about the various House and Senate bills. Commissioner Knauer inquired about the vulnerable communities referenced in SB 80. Mr. Severson responded that these likely refer to community members who are underserved. Commissioner Perkinson thanked staff for putting this information together.

### **V. OPEN DISCUSSION**

Mr. Goldman informed the Commission that staff had received a request to consider the remand issues for PA-T3-2022-00004, 1511 Highway 99 North. He stated that this item would be coming before the Commission on August 8, 2023.

### **VI. ADJOURNMENT**

*Meeting adjourned at 8:47 p.m.*

*Submitted by,  
Michael Sullivan, Executive Assistant*