



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.

June 27, 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
Eric Herron
Gregory Perkinson
Russell Phillips
Susan MacCracken Jain

Staff Present:

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

Absent Members:

Council Liaison:

Paula Hyatt

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Community Development Director Brandon Goldman made the following announcements:

- The City Council approved the findings for PA-T2-2023-00041, Tax Lot 404 Clinton Street at their last meeting, and that the timeframe to submit an appeal has closed.
- The applicants for PA-T3-2023-00004, 1511 Highway 99 North have asked staff to review the articles of remand that were sent by the Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA).

III. PUBLIC FORUM – None

IV. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Ashland Chamber of Commerce Economic Diversification Study (Chamber Staff)

Presentation

Mr. Goldman stated that two pieces of public testimony were submitted to staff prior to the meeting, both of which were shared with the Commission (see attachment #1).





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Sandra Slattery, Executive Director of the Ashland Chamber of Commerce, spoke about the diversification strategies being considered by the City to revitalize the economy following the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chamber of Commerce employed the services of ECONorthwest, which also conducted the City's Housing Production Strategy (HPS) study, to assist in identifying potential revitalization strategies (see attachment #2).

Ms. Slattery stated that the Chamber and ECONorthwest conducted a study and developed an actionable plan, while also engaging in public out-reach to garner feedback from the community. Through these methods ECONorthwest and the Chamber were able to develop a plan that utilized the strengths and weaknesses of the City. Ms. Slattery stated that this resulted in the development of a plan with four core pillars to increase the economic diversification of the City; 1) fostering business growth by improving public sector collaboration, supporting specialty districts, and establishing small batch Ashland; 2) diversifying tourism by providing more opportunities for residents to engage with nature and the community; 3) rediscovering downtown by investing in public spaces; 4) expanding the City's talent pool by hiring qualified workers to fill vacancies in the workforce, particularly in health care.

Questions

Commissioner Knauer asked if the Chamber spoke with business owners about the types of buildings they look for and want to see developed more. Ms. Slattery responded that they ensured that developers were present during the process, who were able to provide valuable feedback for the study. Commissioner Knauer asked if the City had that building space available, and Ms. Slattery responded that it would need to be built.

Commissioner MacCracken Jain asked how the Chamber and ECONorthwest identified the four pillars in their presentation. Ms. Slattery responded that they were developed through the study and as part of the public outreach process. She added that some of the priorities identified could evolve in the future and as the City's goals change. She emphasized that it will be a fluid process.

Chair Verner asked what the implementation timeframe would be. Ms. Slattery stated that separate groups handling the different pillars have already begun to establish their own timelines, with some groups also creating subcommittees to assist in the implementation process.

Commissioner Perkinson inquired about the challenges to implementation that the City could face. Ms. Slattery responded that ECONorthwest determined that success would be dependent upon the coordinated efforts of both staff and the participating committees. Commissioner Perkinson asked how the community would be involved in the process, and Ms. Slattery replied that the Chamber has an extensive and multi-layered communications plan to inform the community, including utilizing social media. Councilor Hyatt added that the Chamber has a record of successfully convening





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partners and that the Council is has heard the call from the community to revitalize the downtown area.

Commissioner Knauer commended Ms. Slattery for her report, but lamented the lack of a core objective. Ms. Slattery agreed, stating that the values of the community will help guide the initiatives. She emphasized the importance of community members like the Commission in helping drive those conversations. She commented that ECONorthwest is excited about the Chamber's work, and that the goals and initiatives will evolve as time goes on.

Chair Verner invited Ms. Slattery to return in a year to give the Commission an update on the Chamber's progress.

Public Testimony

Michael Orendurff/Mr. Orendurff commended the Chamber's plan, but stated there were some aspects unaccounted for in its study. He implored the City to develop a plan to make biking more accessible and safer in the City, citing economical, environmental, and safety reasons for encouraging cycling and the creation of dedicated bike lanes.

B. Ashland Climate & Environmental Policy Advisory Committee Natural Gas Ordinance Update (CEPAC Chair Bryan D. Sohl)

Presentation

Chair Bryan Sohl of the Climate & Environmental Policy Advisory Committee (CEPAC) provided the Commission with a brief update regarding legislation to reduce greenhouse emissions. He was encouraged by Climate Friendly Areas (CFA) guidelines that promote pedestrian-safe works, but stated that Oregon is significantly behind in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Chair Sohl voiced his support for an ordinance developed by young activists to eliminate the use of gas in all new commercial and residential developments in the City. He stated that an edict of the Ashland Climate Plan is to educate City staffers about it, and so all Commissions and Committees should consider climate action goals in every decision they make.

Chair Sohl stated that there is an increased risk of childhood asthma associated with increased exposure to methane gas. He informed the Commission that the Rogue Climate Action Team (RCAT) brought an ordinance proposal before the Council that would eliminate gas from any new developments, and that the CEPAC had been directed to study the feasibility of such an ordinance. Chair Sohl stated that the city of Berkeley had approved a similar ordinance, but it was struck down by the California 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. The RCAT has now limited the ordinance to only effect residential developments in the hope of passing a more legally viable version.





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Chair Sohl stated that the RCAT and CEPAC have identified three alternative options for an ordinance applying to new residential construction; 1) an emissions based strategy; 2) a local amendment to the State Building Code; 3) and applying restrictions in new rights-of-way (ROW). He stated that the CEPAC had requested that the Council direct City staff to work CEPAC to create the new ordinance, and provided the Commission with an outline of an adoption schedule (see attachment #3).

C. DRAFT Ashland Climate Friendly Area (CFA) Study

Staff Presentation

Mr. Severson briefly provided a background on the Climate Friendly Area (CFA) guidelines and their goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. These guidelines are targeted at metropolitan areas and would affect 60% of the Oregon population. With regards to land use, these guidelines would designate walkable areas, reform parking, and support electric vehicles.

Mr. Severson described how the City has employed a public engagement process for this initiative, and has received assistance from the Rogue Valley Council of Governments (RVCOG) in this endeavor. The City has identified The Croman Mill Site, the Railroad Property, and the Transit Triangle as potential sites for CFAs, which would need to accommodate 30% of the City's current population and expected growth by 2041. Downtown would serve as a secondary CFA site if necessary, but is already largely built out with limited capacity for development.

Mr. Severson spoke to the viability of establishing CFAs in the identified sites, and noted that staff is working on several plans to mitigate any potential population displacement as a result of redevelopment (see attachment #4).

Questions of Staff

Chair Verner expressed concern that the housing density guidelines from the state were not viable, and asked how staff saw the City developing in the coming years. Mr. Goldman stated that staff's goal is to apply CFA guidelines to areas that are readily available for development or redevelopment, and not merely to apply the guidelines to areas that already have high density housing. He added that the CFA guidelines call for a density of 15 units per square acre at a minimum, and the City need not exceed that rate.

Commissioner Knauer asked if the City was directed to identify more than one area as a CFA, and whether the development of all three designated areas would be more than the City would require. Mr. Severson responded that the state was satisfied with the City's first site, but that staff wanted to find a viable way to meet these guidelines and therefore chose three sites.

Commissioner MacCracken Jain asked if having CFAs would be practical for the City to manage,





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and commented that the vision for Ashland should fit into the broader strategy for the City. Mr. Goldman responded that the Commission has not yet conducted an assessment of the designated areas, and that this is merely an initial presentation based on the report done by RVCOG. The City can now refine its plan and create a final document by the end of the year. Chair Verner asked what the Commission's timeline will be in reviewing these initiatives. Mr. Goldman responded that it would begin in October or November of 2023, starting with a review of the parking initiatives.

Public Comments

Robert Cortright/Mr. Cortright stated that he had submitted written comments to staff before the meeting. He informed the Commission that he previously worked with the DLCD regarding climate issues before he retired. He stated that the City does not need paper capacity, it requires the land necessary to accommodate the City's needs over the next 20-25 years. He also encouraged staff to use the alternative path allowed by the Climate Friendly and Equitable Communities (CFEC) guidelines to develop a more practical estimate of the housing capacity for CFAs.

D. 2023 Annual Planning Commission Retreat

The Commission discussed which items should be reviewed at the annual retreat. Chair Verner and Commissioner Knauer expressed an interest in learning more about protocols and proper meeting procedures for the Commission, as well as how to effectively run a public meeting. The Commission also discussed relationship between the Council and the Commission, particularly with regards to larger projects, like the Croman Mill Site development. Councilor Hyatt commented that she had benefited from a review of the difference between Type I, Type II, and Type III planning actions, and recommended a review of those items for all new Commissioners.

Mr. Goldman informed the Commission that there are no items scheduled for the July 11, 2023 meeting, and that all of these items could be reviewed in a similar manner to a Study Session. The Commission agreed.

The Commission decided to hold its annual retreat on August 29, 2023.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 8:53 p.m.

*Submitted by,
Michael Sullivan, Executive Assistant*

