

City of Hood River
Planning Commission
Worksession
January 4, 2021

via Zoom Videoconference
5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Mark Frost called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Commissioners Mark Frost (chair), Sue Powers, Tina Lassen, Megan Ramey, Amy Schlappi

ABSENT: Bill Irving, Erika Price

STAFF: Planning Director Dustin Nilsen, Senior Planner Kevin Liburdy, Associate Planner Jennifer Kaden

II. PLANNING DIRECTOR'S UPDATE:

Nilsen had no updates to share. Upcoming meetings – there are no pending quasi-judicial hearings for January. The next meeting will be on a Tuesday evening, January 19th, and will continue this legislative discussion.

III. WORK SESSION:

FILE NO. 2020-37

PROPOSAL: Middle Housing Code Updates

APPLICANT: City of Hood River

STAFF REPORT: Nilsen shared a PowerPoint presentation on Middle Housing including an overview of the previous discussion. Nilsen reminded the PC of its role in legislative matters. The PowerPoint included a summary of issues discussed at the December 21st worksession: impacts of curb cuts.

Curb cuts – Commission consensus on limiting curb cuts.

Street-facing dwellings – Commission consensus was that this is an issue worth legislating.

Encroachment of porches into setback areas – There was mixed discussion; will look at more examples tonight.

Reducing off-street parking requirements – PC did not reach consensus. Need to discuss tonight.

Dwelling size – Question of direct limitations vs. limitation by development standards. PC consensus was that indirect limitations through development standards such as building height, setbacks, lot coverage is preferable.

Landscaping/Open Space – Is there a different clear and objective standard from current practices?

ADUs in duplexes/triplexes – Commissioners had a lukewarm response.

Nilsen shared a slide illustrating existing allowed building size/volume on an R-1 lot and what could be permitted. He also shared slides illustrating a cottage cluster, a detached duplex in R-1. Nilsen then shared slides illustrating building volume and lot coverage in R-2 for existing code: two attached units, a detached duplex with one parking space/unit, a 3-unit configuration. Then he shared similar slides for the R-3 zone on a 6,500 s.f. lot and a 10,000 s.f. lot.

Key Questions –

- Permit porches in front setbacks?
- Do prototypes provide enough open space?
- Are prototype dwelling sizes large enough?
- Parking – Living space vs. parking space vs. open space - tradeoffs

Nilsen shared a slide explaining current code regarding landscaping and open space; a slide illustrating a garden court style development.

Frost asked Nilsen to summarize questions for tonight: parking, marketability, anything else the PC thinks should be addressed in final code draft. Frost – and open space? Nilsen – yes, and front setback.

Questions of Staff?

Powers asked for clarification of lot coverage. Nilsen – it includes parking and driveway areas in addition to the building. But not hard-surfaced.

Lassen asked about the Creekside neighborhood example and whether there was any encroachment in the 10-foot setback. Nilsen – those were all set back 10 feet.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Heather Staten, Thrive Hood River: There are a number of other housing types not included in the prototypes such as bungalow courts, courtyard apartments, and fourplexes that look like single-family homes with four separate entrances. The prototypes seem like they are intended to be sold as individual units rather than being rentals. Regarding feasibility of allowing ADUs in duplexes, there are a lot of ground-floor living spaces in townhouses that could be converted to ADUs. Appreciate the graphic in the PowerPoint comparing two parking spaces to living space.

Nilsen responded that tonight's meeting packet includes a "three plus three" design that provides more of a shared courtyard space, though the configuration is affected by parking. The "four-flat" or "mansion home" is an option though we do not currently have a prototype for it.

Powers asked for clarification of the primary benefit more congruent open space in those configurations.

Nilsen responded that the designs turn the residents inward, which differs from engaging neighbors outside of that development.

Ramey explained her support for courtyard apartments and 'plexes that look like large single-family homes.

Brian Towey: Reducing parking requirements for infill development will be harmful, especially for cyclists. The starting point for new housing types should be based on current parking requirements. Reducing parking requirements won't work until there is better transit available. Commissioner Irving was correct that people will buy what is available, and parking should be included. Reducing the curb cuts is a good idea and overdue.

Jacquie Barone: Does not support reducing parking requirements.

Frost asked for additional testimony. There was none.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION:

Frost asked commissioners for input on issues including unit size, front setback, open space, and parking.

Nilsen explained that marketability and support for smaller units also are questions for the commission.

Frost noted that, at the last meeting, Commissioner Irving noted that the market will not deliver certain housing types when other types sell more profitably.

Powers explained that, recognizing we are trying to add different size options and specifically smaller units, she would prefer to incentivize smaller units through mechanisms such as reducing System Development Charges.

Lassen noted that marketability for developers may differ from what is needed. Smaller units are missing such as 600-square foot apartments. How can the code be written to get smaller, more affordable units?

Schlappi asked if smaller units are expected to be rentals or for purchase. Is it intended to be a mix?

Nilsen responded that the market will decide. Condominiums are more challenging due to litigation so stacked units were not included in the prototypes.

Powers noted that if profitability is coming from larger units we will need incentives to get smaller units.

Ramey explained she met somebody who wants a place to live that is small and that is walkable and under \$400,000. People are willing to live in smaller units in Hood River because there are so many external life amenities.

Lassen asked if it is wise to provide incentives or to establish minimums and maximum standards.

Nilsen responded that the first thing to do is to make a use permissible in the code. Next, discuss how much you want something else to be built. Also, looking at what is being constructed, are we OK with it? Are previously made code changes effective or should they be revisited, for example with regard to townhouses? Also, should a 1,000-square foot unit be charged differently than a 2,000-square foot unit? It sounds like the commission supports incentivizing smaller units.

Frost agreed and suggested that if we rely exclusively on dimensional standards we may not get what we want, so it would be helpful to look at methods to incentivize what we want.

Schlappi is concerned there are not enough rental options. That said, it is important to incentivize smaller units.

Frost raised the next issue on tonight's list regarding area for open space and landscaping.

Nilsen noted that a minimum 10-foot front-yard setback currently is a standard but the designers who prepared the prototypes asked if we should consider building porches or other features in this area. The front yard setback is a very important area for neighborhood context.

Powers suggests maintaining a 10-foot minimum front-yard setback.

Ramey believes it is more important to have more of an 80/20 ratio of common to private space with higher density development, or more of a 50/50 ratio when it's just a couple of homes. Regarding Planned Unit Developments, are we trying to change this?

Nilsen responded that we are not trying to change the amount of common open space in PUDs. The current PUD open space requirement was included in the presentation to compare with landscaping requirements for housing types like multi-family.

Ramey prioritizes: 1) livable space, making the units affordable or attainable; 2) common or private space; 3) parking.

Lassen agreed with Ramey's priorities. We need to decide what we want to do with parking. A 10-foot front-yard setback seems comfortable.

Frost supports a 10-foot minimum front-yard setback.

Schlappi has lived in places with structures closer to street which allows more living space and a feeling of community engagement. If homes are very small, allowing some additional outdoor space may be useful. A six-foot encroachment seems acceptable for very small units.

Frost asked for feedback on the parking issue.

Powers appreciated comments from the public and is concerned about reducing parking requirements. For example, Young Lane near 30th Street is very narrow and garages are not used for vehicles.

Lassen appreciates people's interest in cars but if the goal is to create more options for housing, it is difficult to bake in requirements for off-street parking. Housing should be prioritized over vehicle storage.

Schlappi agrees with Lassen and recommends supporting public transportation as well as facilities for other modes of transportation. Reducing curb cuts is great to allow more on-street parking. We should talk about ways to make roads safer for bikes. Housing should be prioritized over parking.

Ramey believes this is a difficult issue for politicians. She recommends eliminating parking minimums to no more than one half of a space per unit, when units are located within a half mile of a grocery store or a transit station. If people can walk to the grocery store, they are less likely to drive. She agrees with concerns about cyclists' safety including "dooring" which can be addressed with bike network design. We want more off-street parking but we know people aren't using it, so what is the purpose of the requirement? For example, people fill their garages with gear and they use streets as free storage. If we keep requiring two off-street parking spaces per unit, expect more traffic and downtown congestion.

Frost recognizes people in the Hood River valley may not be able to avoid owning a car. Similarly, visitors travel here by car. And, people who live here use cars to travel and shuttle kids. After living in New York and Portland, cities with extensive transit systems, it is difficult to see this working in Hood River. Maybe letting the market decide is the right way to do this.

Lassen agrees with Frost's points but believes the City needs to offer different options. As the planning commission, we should be looking forward to car sharing and transit rather than continuing to encourage travel by car.

Powers questioned cause and effect between parking requirements and how people choose to use space. Garages are useful for storing things. It seems unlikely that less off-street parking will result in fewer vehicles. Electric vehicles may become more prolific.

Ramey is excited that a car-sharing program is coming to Hood River, and CAT continues to expand service. Bike-sharing should be coming within two years. Bike-parking minimums should be considered in lieu of two off-street vehicle parking spaces as this would encourage electric bikes. She favors a market-based approach.

Nilsen noted the tensions between open space, dwelling unit size and parking. Would the commission support taller and larger homes or less open space in exchange for accommodating off-street parking?

Ramey does understand the choices. She would always choose more open space or more floor area over parking.

Nilsen explained that a draft requirement is to limit unit size to 1,000-square feet. Would you allow a 1,400-square foot home with two parking spaces?

Lassen asked if the goal is to build smaller units. Parking is at the bottom of the priority list. Smaller units is more important than space for cars.

Ramey explained she supports converting garages to living space.

Frost noted that Nilsen is essentially talking about a density bonus. Taking a car off the street and placing it under a home may increase the mass of the house.

Ramey said she may support this if a street parking pass was required.

Lassen sees this as an enforcement problem with people parking their vehicles on streets for long periods of time. Residential parking permitting makes sense but that is a different conversation.

Powers would consider allowing more square feet to get another parking space. Allowing the garage to be converted to living space is appealing too.

Nilsen noted that it would be difficult to allow conversion of the garage to living space if it was built to meet parking requirements.

Schlappi explained she prioritizes open space over parking. Two parking spaces should not be required, potentially one. If you are making two instead of one, houses should go up. Housing units should be the main priority.

Ramey suggested reading Strong Towns which focuses on adaptability. They have a map of towns that have eliminated parking in favor of housing, and suggest specific areas where parking requirements should be reduced.

Nilsen appreciated the commission's input and will explain the commission's positions to the city council at their meeting on January 11th. This item will continue on the planning commission's January 19th agenda.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Powers moved to approve the minutes of December 21, 2020. Ramey seconded.

Planning staff noted two corrections: Commissioner Price was absent and House Bill 2001 was from 2019.

Commissioners agreed to make these corrections. Motion as amended passed unanimously.

V. ADJOURN

Frost adjourned the meeting at 7:21 p.m.



6/19/2021

Mark Frost, Chair

Date



6-21-2021

Dustin Nilsen, Planning Director

Date (Approved)