

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Mark Frost called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

PRESENT: Commissioners Mark Frost (chair), Sue Powers, Tina Lassen, Erika Price, Bill Irving, Megan Ramey (5:36pm)

ABSENT: Amy Schlappi

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

II. PLANNING DIRECTOR'S UPDATE:

Planning Director Dustin Nilsen did not have an update other than the middle housing code agenda item. Director Nelson paginated the document and incorporated recommendations from commissioners.

Commissioner Lassen asked for an update on direction provided from the city council. Nilsen explained that he will point out councilors' recommendations as the commission reviews the current code document.

There are no items on the Commission's agenda for February 16, 2021.

III. PUBLIC HEARING:

FILE NO. 2020-37

PROPOSAL: Middle Housing Code Updates

APPLICANT: City of Hood River

STAFF REPORT:

Chair Frost asked for highlights from the current draft code.

Nilsen shared the middle housing code package through the videoconference and provided an overview. He explained definitions that are proposed to be added or amended. A purpose statement is included to frame the standards. Land division will be permissible including through an expedited process. Concerns have been raised about provisions requiring Homeowners Associations to address common features in a middle housing development. Section 17.25.070 draft code includes a side-by-side comparison of current code vs. proposed code. Nilsen noted that the big changes are in the R-2 and R-3 standards where a more progressive approach is presented in order to encourage smaller dwelling units, and he requested feedback from the commission.

Commissioner Irving explained that he sent an email to the commission with about 15 points, and he recommended a discussion on quad-plexes as well as methods for density calculation.

Frost focused on the R-1 Zone and draft allowances for up to three dwellings on an 8,000-square-foot lot. He believes residents might be surprised at this and recommends further discussion.

Commissioner Powers responded to a comment from Greg Crafts about demand for one-bedroom homes. There must be demand.

Irving noted that he has a five-plex with one-bedroom units and they are rented all the time. The issue may be rentals vs. for-sale units. There is a ton demand for one-bedrooms on the rental side. Irving also asked about feasibility of three units on an 8,000-square-foot lot in the R-1 Zone. Nilsen confirmed feasibility based on the current draft. Irving asked about State requirements. Nilsen responded that House Bill 2001 (2019) has thresholds for cities of 10,000 and 25,000. For Hood River, requirements for plexes will not be effective until it has a population of 10,000. Nilsen explained that he discussed this with the city council and they supported allowances for duplexes now rather than waiting to reach a population of 10,000.

Nilsen continued by reviewing draft code. He explained overlap between definitions for multi-family and quad-plex. Setbacks/buffers include greater latitude for construction along side- and rear yards. Irving asked if there is diagram that explains what an interior side yard is. Nilsen explained this is a side-yard that is not on a corner lot. Provisions for maximum lot coverage have been deleted based on the commission's previous directions. The existing street connectivity provisions are included to encourage walkable blocks, as well as requirements for street frontage improvements. The code addresses requirements for utilities. Parking requirements are addressed.

Commissioner Ramey questioned a requirement for on bicycle storage space and asked if it could be covered. Frost noted that most bikes are stored inside. Price does not recommend requirement covered bike parking. Ramey suggested that this will be a make or break issue for people with big cargo bikes and suggested building a structure to accommodate multiple bikes on a development site. Ramey also noted that cities are beginning to eliminate minimum off-street parking requirements and she read a quote from the mayor of Berkley, California. Ramey does not believe a reduction of parking requirements from two to one space per unit is going far enough. Nilsen noted that the Homebuilders Association recommended ratios of 0.5 and 0.75 spaces per unit. Ramey asked how this would work for example with a four-plex and if two units could be sold with a parking space and two without. Nilsen responded that ownership is decoupled, and spaces are not tied to a unit. Frost noted that the developer can decide which units get parking. Commissioner Lassen suggested being bold, dialing back parking requirements, and letting developers decide what is marketable.

Irving suggested letting Nilsen get through the presentation, taking testimony and then returning to testimony. Frost agreed.

Nilsen continued with the presentation and addressed requirements for driveway access, turning radii and turn-arounds, then discussed standards for landscaping, stormwater and Low Impact Development. Landscaping provisions have become more important after requirements for maximum lot coverage were removed. Diagrams were provided to help visualize how much development can cover on a lot in different zoning districts. Landscaping standards describe minimum planting requirements. Irving asked how precise the spacing requirements are. Nilsen responded that the requirements result in a minimum number of trees and shrubs. Open space provisions have been deleted as recommended by the commission. Internal pedestrian circulation is addressed.

Irving asked about landscaping would be measured and what contributes to it. Can it be hard scaped? Frost asked if paths in setbacks and count toward landscaping. Nilsen explained that the standards result in a certain amount of coverage. Side yards cannot be converted exclusively to sidewalks but some decorate hardscape can count toward landscaping. Irving asked where this is addressed in the landscape code. Nilsen noted the landscaping provisions that are in the table.

Nilsen continued with the presentation and address provisions for dwelling unit size restrictions and a development ceiling. The code explains that additions will not be permitted after a middle housing development is constructed. Building height provisions rely on calculation of average grade, measured from finished grade rather than existing grade. The height standards is intended to facilitate two-story construction. Standards for architectural features have been revised based on feedback from the commission and building community. Requirements for front porches have been revised as well, and a list of items allowed in setback areas is provided. Fence height is recommended to be limited to four feet. Allowances for accessory buildings are addressed. Restrictions on Accessory Dwelling Units and short-term rentals are also addressed.

Frost asked from comments from the public.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Heather Staten, Thrive Hood River: Code revisions are looking good. Regarding density, every medium-sized city needs to allow duplexes now. The City's code already allows duplexes in the R-1 Zone through a Planned Unit Development process. She does not anticipate these will be disruptive to existing neighborhoods. She recommends using Floor Area Ratio to accommodate more units and removing parking minimums.

Irving asked for feedback on open space provisions. Staten checked with the Homebuilders Association and they recommend 25% per lot to get more smaller units. She recommends inclusion of allowances for four-plexes.

Linda Maddox: Very unhappy with the process. Hood River is not close to 25,000 population. This is an enormous policy change. Is there a way to get more input from the community before proceeding? She understands the need for housing but this is too much. She has concerns about parking and has looked at recent development of townhouses and noted the number of vehicles parked on the street. Parking in her neighborhood is a problem and the HOA has not enforced it well. She is concerned that too much coverage is proposed on lots. She is concerned about cost to the city for infrastructure. It is not clear where middle housing will be permitted.

Nancy Roach: Submitted written comments on behalf of Greg Crafts. There are examples around the city that we would like to have seen done differently. Middle housing won't be desirable for everyone but it will help those who need it. One-bedroom rentals may be needed but there is little demand for one-bedroom homes for sale.

COMMISSION DELIBERATION:

Chair Frost noted issues that the commission will need to address and asked for feedback. He suggested starting with the issue of CC&Rs.

Irving explained that there are two approaches in real estate to address common improvement. In many cases they can be addressed in recorded documents. Larger HOAs require a lot of overhead and they are expensive. Suggest a requirement that, in lieu of an HOA, there is some type of common-wall or common maintenance agreement. Frost asked for examples. Irving noted that townhouses use agreements for issues such as paint, common walls, roofs and shared driveways. Nilsen suggested modifying the code language to allow an alternative to HOA. There was unanimous support from the commission to change code language for maintenance of common elements.

Frost asked about allowances for quad-plexes. Powers missed the last meeting but noted that previously there was discussion of using a range of size. Irving assumed cottages were intended to be detached. Lassen asked about overlap with the City's definition of multi-family housing. Nilsen noted that the City could permit the quad as a use subject to middle housing standards with the size restrictions, etc. As buildings get bigger, the design gets more important. Irving asked if the draft code allows two duplexes on an R-3 lot, side by side. Nilsen confirmed subject to a size limitation of 800-square feet, and plexes can be detached. Elimination of common open space requirements affected the code for cottage housing, and created opportunity for attached cottages. Irving asked about changing provisions for buildings with a certain number of units, and eliminating the cottage concept. For example, the townhouse code allows a certain number of townhouses in a townhouse building, and allows multiple townhouse buildings in a townhouse project. Nilsen explained that the cottage concept was intended to apply to project with four or more units with common open space. Irving explained he is a proponent for four units, whether attached or detached, in R-2 and R-3 Zones. Lassen agrees. Nilsen asked for confirmation of allowing four or less in R-2 and R-1, and something less in R-1. Lassen is not sure it makes sense to have greater limitations on the number of permissible units in the R-1 Zone, because some existing large homes could be converted. Frost noted that people have some expectations about what can occur on adjacent properties based on zoning. R-1 typically feature deeper lots, and there may be concerns about adding more buildings behind existing buildings. Irving suggested looking at floor area ratio to help address this concern and prevent R-1 from becoming R-3. Frost noted that what we want is more doors and better affordability but the way this is shaping up is more density without respect to affordability. Commissioner noted that there is also risk to losing existing housing stock, with existing homes being torn down. Frost noted this concern has been raised but asked if this can be controlled. Dustin responded, no. Irving asked if commissioners read comments from Thrive Hood River about how Portland addressed this with provisions for affordability. Frost confirmed. Powers, Lassen, Price and Ramey supported investigating Portland's Floor Area Ratio provisions. Nilsen responded that the proposed code gets at floor area ratio by regulating height and setbacks and including provisions for density bonuses for smaller units. Powers and Frost noted that Portland's code is easier to understand. Irving asked if Hood River's code can be organized in a manner similar to Portland's for clarity. Nilsen has concerns about use of FAR on larger building sites. Frost suggest taking a look at FAR for Hood River's code so that, with more units there are smaller units.

Frost asked about inclusion of block length and street standards. Nilsen explained it may not be used in smaller scale projects but it is useful. Lassen supports inclusion but asked about a provision that the City Engineer can waive requirements for sidewalks. Nilsen explained that it may not make sense to install an improvement that will soon be torn out in association with another project. Commissioners agreed to include street standards as drafted.

Frost asked about building height provisions. Irving believes the building height standard in Hood River is broken. Hood River's standards allowed up to 35 feet until about 10 years ago. Irving recommends

avoiding two different sets of height standards in the code. Powers supports 28 feet maximum height based on testimony received from builders. Price supports 28 feet. Ramey and Lassen support 28 feet. Frost concurs. Nilsen asked if that would allow 28 feet to flat roof. Frost suggested changing the standard to match the rest of the city.

Frost asked about parking input, zero spaces vs. 0.5 vs. 0.75 vs. 1. Price supports 0.75 or .5, to get at least some off-street parking. Ramey supports zero parking for equity, climate change and congestion. Lassen supports zero parking for this code section only. Powers explained she has supported provision of all required off-street parking but can support a ratio of 0.5 or 0.75. Irving does not support eliminating all off-street parking, and can support a ratio of 0.5 or 0.75, subject to provisions that clearly explain how to round numbers. Frost acknowledges Linda Maddox's concern about parking in the Dana Lane neighborhood. Irving suggests the commission does not have consensus and recommends explaining to the council the split and the reasons. Nilsen confirmed that Commissioner Schlappi would support a ratio of 0.75. Ramey suggested the commission is the policy maker and can help eliminate cars, and recommends sharing the commission's range of opinions with the council. Irving noted that if there is no parking off-street, it will go on the street. Lassen suggests planning for choices and noted this would not prevent off-street parking, it just does not require it.

Frost asked about other issues such as STRs, porches and unit size. Nilsen noted that unit size is related to the FAR discussion. Lassen supports maximum unit size, and supports a maximum floor-area ratio. Frost asked if there is an FAR for Dana Lane. Irving asked if the code had been modified after comments from Greg Crafts were received. Nilsen confirmed how Mr. Crafts' comments were addressed in the code. Powers supports a cap at 1,500-square feet. Irving explained that Mr. Crafts' comments were related to a 900-square-foot maximum size. Nilsen noted this size limit is in the definition for cottage housing. Irving asked if the cottage definition could be stricken. Nilsen will review and asked for feedback on whether this would allow four units or less in the R-2 and R-3 and two-or less in the R-1, or is it four or less regardless of the zone. Frost, Powers and Lassen support a limit of two units in R-1. Ramey supports a limit of two units in R-1 except she supports up to four units with conversion of existing home with no change to footprint, or if they are all detached and small. Price supports limiting to two units in R-1. Irving supports limit of two units in R-1, subject to looking at the zoning map and rezoning R-1 properties that are close to C-2 property. Frost noted that these changes would be tied to the chart limiting square-footage. Nilsen noted that he'll need to make some revisions when using FAR. Lassen asked about retrofits to existing homes. Nilsen responded that this is addressed in the draft code. Ramey asked how many units could come from a 4,000-square foot home. Nilsen responded a maximum of three. The commission generally supports a maximum of two units in the R-1 Zone, except existing homes can be retrofitted to allow up to four units. Powers has some concerns. Nilsen asked if any other sidebars should be applied such as for parking. Lassen suggested using the text that is in the code for retrofits. Irving expressed concern about forcing parking into rear yards and suggested allowing up to 50% of required parking in the front-yard setback as is currently allowed. Lassen and Ramey do not believe cars need to be in rear yards and support allowing up to half of required parking in front yards. Powers asked if this is based on 0.75 spaces per unit. Frost confirmed but noted one other issue is the need to reduce the width of curb cuts. The commission suggested forwarding their concerns to the council.

Frost asked about allowances for short-term rental. Irving expressed concerns about enforcement and the challenges realtors will have explaining whether a unit can be short-term rented. Nilsen explained one problem is with respect to parking and who has the right to use it. Irving suggested parking spaces will need to assigned to specific units. Lassen does not support allowing STRs in middle-housing

