

I. Call to Order

A regular session of the Gresham Planning Commission was called to order by Chair Drechsler on the 10th of May 2021, at 6:34 PM online via Zoom. The meeting was digitally recorded and minutes prepared by Jennifer McGinnis.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Paul Drechsler, Chair
Richard Anderson, Vice-Chair
Jef Kaiser
Tim Kamp
Sue Ruonala
Phil Wich

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Michael Bennett
Jason Ping
Laura Pramuk

COUNCIL LIAISONS PRESENT: Sue Piazza

COUNCIL LIAISONS ABSENT: Vince Jones-Dixon

STAFF PRESENT: David Berniker, Urban Design & Planning Director
Amanda Lunsford, Administrative Analyst
Kevin McConnell, Senior City Attorney
Mary Phillips, Senior Comprehensive Planner
Jim Wheeler, Urban Design Manager

II. Middle Housing Draft Code Outline

Mary Phillips reviewed what the Middle Housing Draft Code entails and reminded the Commissioners that they have some limited areas of choice within the requirements for implementing HB 2001 while other areas need to follow state regulations. The project team's discussions are focused on the areas of choice.

Brandy Steffen, consultant with JLA, shared a summary of feedback received from the public. She went over the results from two virtual online surveys and two virtual open houses. There were 129 responses for the first survey and about 20 people attended the first virtual open house. The feedback that was received was that cost is the biggest barrier to finding housing in Gresham. Lack of supply is also a large barrier. The second survey was a visual preference survey

focused on design elements. There were 472 respondents to the second survey and about 25 people at the second virtual open house. The feedback received is that there is a preference for maintaining mature trees, maintaining a neighborhood feeling, making homes accessible for people with disabilities, including private yards, wide garages, and street facing driveways. The most important feature was private yards.

The most important goals according to participants were supporting homeownership opportunities and buildings that maintain a neighborhood feel. The most preferred ways to maintain a neighborhood feel were through maintaining mature trees and building design. Other important goals were on-site parking and private or shared open spaces. Most people felt strongly that middle housing was a good way to provide housing choices in Gresham. More people responded to the second survey and while there was slightly less support for middle housing according to this survey, there was still strong support.

Marcy McInelly, consultant with JLA, then reviewed the code amendments. This includes reconciling Planning Commission and public input, ensuring compliance with HB 2001, addressing design standards to maintain a neighborhood feel, and improving design standards and how housing functions citywide. She went over the process of their analysis, which includes comparing Division 46 standards to the large city model code standards, examining the 19 different areas in the code that currently contain design standards for single-dwelling housing and comparing them with the benchmarks that must be met. She went over their recommended new standards on private open space, transparency, and garage and driveway width.

Ms. Phillips went over next steps. The consultant team is only on board through June 2021. There will be one more open house on Thursday, May 13. The project team will go over the draft code with the Planning Commission on June 14. Then staff will make refinements based on the Commission's feedback prior to bringing it to Council for a policy direction meeting. After that, the adoption process will start with the goal of having the amendments adopted and enacted by the end of the year.

Ms. Phillips said that remaining concerns that are outside of the Middle Housing scope include affordability of middle housing, access to amenities and services, and some components of preserving mature trees. These concerns have been heard and will be addressed through the Housing Capacity Analysis and Development Code and Process Updates projects. What is being addressed is allowing middle housing in low density residential districts, ensuring that middle housing is treated similarly to single family housing, and making sure parking standards for middle housing match the requirements of HB 2001.

Commissioner Kaiser said that he is frustrated that the comments he heard from the Commission regarding preserving tree canopy, preserving the utility of existing streets, and goals of overlay protection are not being achieved. He asked if there was any information from surveys regarding homeowners vs. renters.

Staff responded that HB 2001 provisions allow the City to apply environmental overlay standards for State Planning Goal protected areas to middle housing the same way they apply to single family detached units. State standards mandate that the highest number of parking spots the City can require is 1 space per unit. They can allow but not require more parking for middle housing. One way to address this is by implementing standards on driveway length. Sarale Hickson added that they currently do not get many permits for homes with the minimum amount of parking. Usually at least twice as much as the minimum amount required is provided. The process for how street improvements are required will be applied to middle housing.

Commissioner Anderson said that he is hesitant to adopt these standards prior to June 2022 because there may be changes to the legislature and it gives them less time to see what other jurisdictions do.

Public Testimony

Carol Rulla, 5162 SE 28th Dr, Gresham OR 97080: Ms. Rulla said that her concern is that there will be a loophole that if middle housing replaces a single-family dwelling, sidewalk improvements will not be required since you can replace a single-family dwelling with another single-family dwelling and not add improvements. She provided pictures of townhome developments that provided the minimum amount of parking that caused issues with blocking sidewalks and garbage collection. She does not understand why the preservation of mature trees is not being addressed since her concern is about trees on the lot, not just street trees. She encouraged using simple names for housing types and defining them in the definitions section of the code.

End of public testimony

Ms. Phillips responded that they can choose to allow middle housing to be attached or detached and this flexibility could help to maintain mature trees on site. They are addressing what they can with the middle housing code, but the issue with preserving mature trees is bigger than just this project.

Commissioner Ruonala asked if the Dolan finding would kick in for conversion of a single-family home to a fourplex as related to street improvements per the example shown to Planning Commissioners. Jim Wheeler responded that he does not know at this point but his suspicion is that they will not be able to assess or look at the impacts of infrastructure as it relates to conversion of a single family home to anything more than a single-family home.

Commissioner Ruonala pointed out that there were very few street trees in the pictures provided by Ms. Rulla as well as cars parked over the sidewalk, both of which do not create a pedestrian-friendly environment. There are many blue-collar workers in areas of Gresham that need to park their large work trucks at home, which contributes to the issue of blocking sidewalks. She is concerned about code compliance and their ability to follow up on tree removal and parking issues.

Commissioner Anderson said that they have tried shared driveways and private open space in the past and that didn't work well because they weren't maintained. He is concerned about cars parking in bike lanes.

David Berniker said that with the City's reorganization, code compliance and planning is under one umbrella so hopefully it will improve. Many of the examples provided were probably developed before the multifamily code was adopted and would not be able to be built the same way now. The improvements are incremental and can be hard to see sometimes. Ms. Phillips added that she has noted all the issues presented and will be working on addressing them with the DCPU project.

Chair Drechsler said there is a lot of opportunity for sidewalk infill and they do not want to miss it with conversions from single-family to middle housing. They want to ensure these improvements are required if at all possible.

Ms. Steffen shared that 73% of respondents to the second survey own their home and 18% are renters. The remaining 9% had an alternative living situation.

Chair Drechsler said that he did not see a large difference in the survey results between people who supported middle housing and those who did not and asked how the consultants found that there was overwhelming support for middle housing. Ms. Steffen responded that when they examined the open-ended comments, many of the concerns were that even if the code was adopted, middle housing wasn't actually going to be built or be affordable if built. The concerns were less against middle housing, but whether middle housing would solve the core issue. Since many did not know what middle housing is, there is a need for continued education.

Chair Drechsler asked what the harm would be in drafting the code but holding off on implementation. Ms. Phillips responded that it would take longer for the community to see the benefits if the code is adopted later. There are many communities in the state that have already implemented middle housing policies and she has not seen any potential changes coming out of the legislature that would have a strong impact.

Councilor Piazza emphasized that housing is a priority for Council and this creates opportunities for affordable homeownership, so she hopes it happens sooner rather than later.

III. City Council/Planning Commission Joint Meeting Discussion

Chair Dreschler sent out an invite to the subcommittee chairs to share their priorities prior to the joint work session with City Council.

Commissioner Anderson shared his previous experience with quarterly meetings with City Council. He said that Council would inform the Planning Commission on what their priorities were. They would have a general topic conversation and shared discussion to ensure the Council, Commission, and staff were all on the same page. This helped Planning Commission be

a greater resource for the Council because Council could rely on the Planning Commission to be the experts. He mentioned discussing housing and houselessness with Council at the work session. Chair Dreschler agreed with discussing housing and also mentioned the Climate Action, Transportation and Rockwood Rising topics from the Council Work Plan.

Councilor Piazza mentioned how important it is to have these conversations so that the Council fully understands what the Commission does and what they are the experts on. Chair Drechsler said that one of his major goals is to understand the expertise of each member of the Planning Commission and create lines of communication internally between the Planning Commission as well as with the Council. He would like to have a component of the meeting be an introduction to each person's resume or history on the Commission.

Commissioner Wich would like to see the letter that was drafted to City Council regarding the Commission's view of the future of Gresham and what is working and what is not. Chair Drechsler said that the letter was sent to the mayor and city councilors and it would be a good starting point in the discussion. Commissioner Kaiser said that he is concerned that a lot of work went into the letter and feels it did not go anywhere. He is looking for ways that they can communicate with Council about ideas that they would like to explore further and see if they are priorities the Council shares.

Mr. Berniker said that it sounds like the Commission is more process-oriented and interested in using this meeting to build a relationship for future dialogue, but other subcommittee chairs may be more topic-oriented.

Chair Drechsler said he wants the goal to be to create a strong connection between the Planning Commission's work and the Council's priorities and to work as a guiding body for the other subcommittees. He wants to establish communication to achieve Council's goals and help advise the Council. He wants to have some specific topics to help guide the conversation, but his true objective is to help conversations down the line.

Mr. Berniker said that staff can support the Commission by putting together a short bio of all of the Commissioners and an overview of projects that come to the Planning Commission. He thinks the format should be a roundtable discussion with introductions and a summary of some of the things the Planning Commission and subcommittees have worked on.

The Commissioners and Councilor Piazza discussed the hearings that were remanded and that joint meetings between Council and the Commission can help establish trust in the Commission's recommendations.

IV. Other Business/Adjournment

Review of 3/22 and 4/12 Minutes

Commissioner Ruonala presented changes to the 3/22 minutes. Commissioner Wich moved to approve the minutes with the amendments presented by Commissioner Ruonala, which Chair Kaiser seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved other than Commissioner Anderson who abstained. Commissioner Ruonala moved to approve the 4/12 minutes, which Anderson seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Subcommittee Liaisons

Chair Drechsler proposed June 14th to do a subcommittee liaison update. Commissioner Kaiser said that he listened in on the last neighborhood coalition meeting and they would welcome a Planning Commission liaison. Kevin McConnell said that this would be fine and he will speak with the appointed liaison to ensure they are not violating any ethical rules or other code provisions. Since three Commissioners were not present, the subcommittee liaison appointments were tabled until the June 7th meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Chairperson

Recording Assistant

Date

Date

A full recording of this meeting is available upon request.