

#4. PROVIDING FLEXIBILITY FOR 'IN-FILL' AND SPECIFICALLY FOR NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

Consideration of 'in-fill' policies, including a proposed revision to PL21.3 regarding neighborhood centers

Summary of Comments

Various comments from the public expressed desire for the Plan to provide for more walkable neighborhoods, including flexibility for small-scale "in-fill" development (new development and changes in land use in existing developed areas.) Comments included desire for the City to encourage accessory dwelling units, neighborhood retail, and other small-scale destinations. Comments also touched on ensuring 'in-fill' is properly scaled within established residential neighborhoods.

Specifically, there was a comment that Neighborhood Centers are described within the Plan as a one-size-fits-all concept, and it should be clarified that new neighborhood centers may develop differently than existing ones, especially in regard to dense housing and parks.

Staff Analysis

The proposed Plan provides a basis for allowing and encouraging various types of small-scale 'in-fill' housing in low-density neighborhoods, including: accessory dwelling units, cottages, townhouses and manufactured homes (GL16.) The plan also sets goals and policies to maintain and improve neighborhood character and livability through limits on the intensity of use and scale (GL20); by promoting historic preservation (GL3, GL4, GL5); establishing attractive, pedestrian-oriented design codes (GL6); protecting views (GL8); planting and maintaining trees and other greenery (GL7, GL22.) Also, the Plan guides that each neighborhood has its own identity (GL6, GL14) and outlines a process by which the City will support neighborhood subarea planning (GL23.)

The next step is implementation, which may include review of existing codes and other actions as part of the Action Plan. For example, the City might consider potential changes to Accessory Dwelling Unit regulations that may make these easier to achieve. This option and other potential actions will be included in a list of ideas for the community and Council to prioritize as part of developing the City's first Action Plan once the Comprehensive Plan is adopted.

Work is already underway on another important 'in-fill' opportunity as the Planning Commission is currently reviewing the Neighborhood Center Code. Neighborhood Centers are small walk and transit-friendly business clusters within residential neighborhoods that provide for day-to-day retail and service needs and foster community interaction. These areas are an important aspect of local and regional goals to promote healthy neighborhoods and people, foster social interaction and the reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

On the whole, the Comprehensive Plan provides flexibility for the development of neighborhood centers. However, staff recommends the City Council make a change to

policy PL21.3 which will enable the Planning Commission to consider an option that would not be feasible as currently drafted.

Policy PL21.3 states that housing, food stores and a neighborhood park or green will be included (i.e., required,) and that commercial uses be focused on the civic green or park. Staff suggests removing these **requirements**. Doing so would allow for more flexibility and variation, hopefully making neighborhood centers easier to achieve. It also allows the Commission to consider an option that could provide more clarity for neighborhoods regarding the location and boundaries of their neighborhood centers.

This policy is a carry-over from the early 1990's; it guides the City's current regulations which require a master plan process to develop a neighborhood center sized between 2-10 acres, including a one acre park or green upon which to focus commercial uses – the specific boundaries and layout are to be determined by the master plan. Outside of the planned villages, this code has not been exercised within the past 20 years. At the same time, there is another process for developing “neighborhood retail zones (e.g., Wildwood, San Francisco Bakery).” Residents consider these to be their “neighborhood centers” and these are guided by zoning regulations that are more financially feasible, and result in more clearly defined boundaries within a neighborhood.

If the City policy is to consider **requiring** food stores, housing and a park within a neighborhood center the only practical way to promote these is through a master plan. Otherwise, it would seem the City must require each parcel in a neighborhood retail area to provide each of these things. The change to Policy PL21.3 as proposed will enable the Commission to consider options outside of the master plan process.

As part of their work this Fall, the Planning Commission will hold a public hearing and make a recommendation aimed at clarifying the process and tools for how neighborhood centers can develop. To be clear, no specific neighborhood center zoning or projects are being considered at this time.

Text of Public Hearing Draft

PL21.3: Include housing, a food store, and a neighborhood park or civic green at all neighborhood centers. Allow churches, schools, and convenience businesses and services that cater primarily to neighborhood residents. Prohibit auto-oriented uses. Vary the specific size and composition of such centers for balance with surrounding uses; focus commercial uses on civic greens or parks, and limit the size of commercial uses. (Note: A larger urban center is permitted in the Briggs Urban [Village](#).)

Proposed Clarification

~~Include~~ **Encourage** housing, a food store, and a neighborhood park or civic green at all neighborhood centers. Allow churches, schools, and convenience businesses and services that cater primarily to neighborhood residents. Prohibit auto-oriented uses. Vary the specific size and composition of such centers for balance with surrounding uses. **Where practical**, focus commercial uses on civic greens or parks. ~~and~~ **Limit** the size of commercial uses.