

Pending Questions Regarding 'Urban Neighborhoods'

The Planning Commission is still deliberating on the Urban Neighborhoods proposal, and may make changes to the map or text until the deliberation has been completed with a final vote. Final deliberation on this matter is expected to take place in December of 2013, and may result in an alternative recommendation for the City Council and public to consider.

Refer to the document titled 'Comparison of March 18 & Addendum' for more complete policy text.

Questions related to the Urban Neighborhood Map?

1. **Did we get the draft map right? Before the next OPC discussion on 11/18, are there any changes needed to the draft Future Land Use Map (FLU)?**
 - **Specifically, is the land use designation southeast of Black Lake Boulevard that is currently zoned as RM-24 supposed to be Medium Density Neighborhood?**

Staff Comment: *On November 4, the Commission confirmed this map for continued discussion, except asked staff to make the following corrections:*

- *Remove the area north of Thurston Avenue from the High Density Neighborhood (hatched area) on the downtown peninsula.*
- *Compare the Medium Density Neighborhoods (MDN) with the current Zoning Map. Change the designation to Low Density Neighborhoods (LDN) in cases where the underlying zoning would be consistent with LDN rather than MDN.*

The draft map included in this packet has been changed to reflect the above. Several small areas throughout the City were changed to LDN.

2. **Are the boundaries correct; is this where you want to locate?**
 - **Urban Corridors**
 - **High Density Neighborhoods**
 - **Low Density Neighborhoods**
 - **Medium Density Neighborhoods**
 - **Medium Density Neighborhood Centers (Do we want this many?)**
 - **Eight Gateways**

Staff Comment: *On November 4, the Commission confirmed these locations on the map for continued discussion.*

3. **Are the High Density Neighborhoods an overlay or a land use designation? Currently, they show as an overlay atop the Urban Corridor land use designation.**

Staff Comment: *On November 4, the Commission indicated the HDN areas should be viewed as an overlay, rather than a separate land use designation.*

4. **For the eight gateways depicted, what is the difference between the green lines and the green circles? Are the “gateways” to be where the circles are, and “civic boulevards” to be where the green lines are? (See question #6 below)**

Staff Comment: The Commission confirmed the “gateways” are to be where the circles are, and “civic boulevards” are to be where the green lines are. (See question #6 below)

Questions related to Text:

5. **Goal 14: What does it mean to have neighborhoods “shaped by public planning processes that continuously involve citizens ...?”**

Staff Comment: The word “continuously” gives pause because it seems to imply something a little beyond the reality of our planning process. For example, most planning processes have points when the record is closed and citizens are not being involved because the City needs time to focus on analyzing the proposal and the public comments and to prepare materials for the next stage of review. I’m not saying this needs to be changed. Rather, it would be helpful for the Commission to clarify what is implied here. Is it non-ending involvement, or a high level of involvement?

6. **Gateways & Civic Boulevards:**

6A - Policy 14.1: Please clarify the vision for the gateway areas vs. the civic boulevard areas. (Notes from April reflect that OPC agreed the term “civic boulevards was to be interpreted in a general or generic sense and did not mandate the creation of medians or other specific design features. The use of the words “tree lined” was agreed to illustrative of an intended ambiance.” Correct?)

Staff Comment: We recommend the same approach as OPC provided in April because it would allow more flexibility to create unique designs that take into consideration existing conditions and available land.

6B - Additional Text provided in Addendum: The Addendum proposes the following as a definition under Appendix A – Future land use Map Designations: “Establish eight gateways that are entry/exit pathways along major streets to downtown Olympia and the State Capitol Campus. These major streets act as tree-lined civic boulevards, providing a unified streetscape that enhances the grandeur of our Capital City. Gateways to the Deschutes River Valley are located at entry/exit points and along the green civic boulevards that enter the state capital city of the State of Washington. They are located at: city boundaries; topographical changes; transitions in land use; and shifts in transportation densities. Three of the eight gateways are located at the city limits. An option, at the three entrances allow for "Welcome to Olympia" signage. Gateways are densely planted with native trees and under stories that form the

transition between distinct land uses and the formal green civic boulevards. Each civic boulevard forms a unique urban space of its own.”

*Staff Comment: We recommend 1) removing the first two sentences since they are a repeat of policy 14.1, and 2) that this text **not** be considered a land use designation definition. The Commission might consider including some of this text in policy 14.1, or some of it to the section’s introductory text.*

6C - The Addendum also includes a new policy with descriptions for each gateway:

“Each Civic Boulevard will have a distinct special environmental setting that is shaped by the public planning process that continuously involves citizens, neighborhoods, and city officials. Urban Corridors will be primarily accessed by transit and motor vehicles with provisions for pedestrian and bicycle travel. City of Olympia’s consistent theme along all civic boulevards will be “Urban Green Spaces.” The following table includes: the Urban Gateway number, name, and location; and the Civic Boulevard’s adjoining land use ...

- 1. Priest Point Park Gateway: East Bay Drive at City Limits. Corridor Land Uses: Single-family and Multi-family Residential and Natural ... [see page 8 of ‘Comparison’ document for full list.]”**

Staff Comment: The policy contains a similar question about the phrase “continuously involve ...” as addressed in question #5.

The Commission might consider including some of this text within policy 14.1, or another location as determined by the Commission. If the phrase “urban green spaces” is still used, please define what that means in this context.

Within the list, there are some inconsistencies between the corridor land uses described in this text and the current version of the map being discussed by the Commission (For example, the gateway at Martin Way & Pacific describes Low Density Mixed Use in Single-Family Residential, but the new map shows this as the mixed use Urban Corridor designation.) Staff recommends removing corridor land use descriptions from this section since the underlying land use designations are included on the map and have corresponding definitions in the Comprehensive Plan.

*If the descriptions are not removed, it should be made clear that while the land uses described represent the **primary** land uses to be allowed by the underlying zoning, some zones allow limited other types of uses. For example, R4-8 is a single family zone that allows commercial uses ‘child day care’ and ‘nurseries’ with a conditional use permit. Unless the intention is to change what’s allowed under zoning, we would not want the courts or Growth Hearings Management Board to view this section as rendering our zoning inconsistent.*

7. **Policy 14.2: High Density Neighborhoods described as “primarily walk dependent” – different from current vision in these areas, as described in PL13.7 and HDC-4 zoning?**

Staff Comment: *Is the intent to make these areas **more** walkable, or to significantly reduce vehicle traffic by removing drive options?*

The HDN areas are currently high vehicle traffic locations, and this is currently recognized in Plan policies and High Density Corridor-4 zoning. The mall triangle is one example of a highly vehicle dependent area, and where the surrounding arterials are key to fulfilling traffic concurrency required under the Growth Management Act (we need to provide adequate transportation facilities to meet the demand consistent with our level of service standards.) So, if the City were to reduce vehicle options in this area, we would need to provide alternative transportation facilities to meet the demand. Or, the City Council could lower our level of service (LOS) in these areas and not worry about the hassle to drivers (for example, establish a threshold that waiting 15 minutes at the intersection is acceptable.) However, such an approach could have negative economic impacts as the mall area is where the City collects most of the sales tax revenue that supplies our Operating Budget.

On the other hand, the Plan has several goals toward addressing major environmental and lifestyle issues such as climate change, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and human health. It’s an honest challenge to balance the goals and requirements of the Plan. Rather than taking the approach in the above paragraph, another approach would be for the City to focus investment and other tools on transitioning these areas so they become more walkable over time and can thrive as primarily walk dependent in the future.

8. **Policy 14.2: ¼ growth “shall” be downtown. Notes from April reflect that OPC meant this to mean ¼ of growth could be accommodated and will be encouraged to go downtown, but not that it must be. Also, the Addendum proposed changing “shall” to “is planned for.” Do you agree with this direction, and do you want to make the text change proposed by the Addendum?**

Staff Comment: *Staff agrees with the direction provided by OPC in April and the text change proposed in the Addendum.*

9. **Policy 14.3: “Protect and preserve the existing ...” – is this enduring language such that the meaning will last through a 20 year plan?**

Staff Comment: *Preserving all aspects of an existing neighborhood may not always be desirable. For clarity, the Commission might consider editing this policy to state, “**Preserve and enhance the character** of existing ...”*

- 10. Policy P13.1 & PL13.5: The draft online and the Addendum are the same. Policies are inconsistent with new draft FLU map. For example, language should reflect that corridors will have “transit supportive densities,” but not be described as ½ mile wide.**

Staff Comment: Staff initially proposes the following edits below. However, staff would like additional time to compare for consistency the lines being struck with related transportation policies and other areas of the Plan draft:

PL13.1: Establish urban corridors as shown on the [Future Land Use Map](#) with sufficient area (about one-half mile wide) and potential employment and residential density (over 15 housing units per acre) to support frequent transit service, encourage pedestrian traffic between businesses, provide a large customer base and minimize auto use for local trips. ~~Where existing single-family housing abuts the main road, seek to increase the density to at least 7 units per acre~~

PL13.5: Ensure appropriate transitional land uses from high intensity land uses along the arterial streets of the urban corridors to the less intensive land uses at the fringe of the corridors; ~~generally the most intensive uses will be within 400 feet of the major streets;~~ corridor redevelopment should enhance both the corridor and quality of life in adjacent residential neighborhoods.

- 11. Policy PL13.7: Current OPC Draft and Addendum have quite different text, and this should be reconciled. New text should be consistent with map (i.e., remove description of urban corridor south of I-5.)**

Staff Comment: Staff proposes using the urban corridor policy PL13.7 proposed in the July Draft, but delete the last bullet about the areas south of I-5 for consistency with the new map. It is hard to distinguish between the first four bullets though, so staff can return with a revision for OPC to consider at the next meeting, pending some initial direction from the Commission.

*The Addendum proposes to replace PL13.7 with a policy that describes Civic Boulevards. Presuming the Commission agrees that the Civic Boulevards are an overlay and not a land use designation, staff would recommend this text **not** replace the urban corridor policy. See question #6 for further questions about the Civic Boulevard policy.*

- 12. Policy PL16.9: The Addendum proposed removing “townhomes” from the policy language. Does OPC still want to do that?**

Staff Comment: Removing the word does not preclude the City from allowing townhomes in a residential zone – it just means the Comprehensive Plan is silent on the matter. Townhomes have typically been a successful form of infill in Olympia. They are typically more affordable to build and purchase than single-family housing; also, our

goals encourage infill, and a variety of housing options. Staff recommends allowing townhomes in all residential zones, thus keeping “townhomes” in the policy.

13. Definitions need some confirmation and possible revision. Would OPC like staff to return with suggestions?

13.A - Definition of Low Density Housing

Staff Comments:

- *Need to include allowance for lower densities due to environmental constraints.*
- *“Protect and preserve” and “grandfathering” might not be the clearest concepts.*
- *Confirm: 14 units per acre - the max density you want here? And a 35’ height limit?*

Staff proposes a hybrid of the definitions provided in the July Draft and Addendum; a draft for initial consideration follows:

Low-Density Neighborhoods. *This designation provides for low-density residential development-primarily single-family detached housing and low rise multi-family housing- in densities ranging from fourteen units per acre to one unit per five acres depending on environmental sensitivity of the area. Where environmental constraints are significant, to achieve minimum densities extraordinary clustering may be allowed when combined with environmental protection. Barring environmental constraints, densities of at least four units per acre should be achieved. Supportive land uses and other types of housing, including townhomes and small apartment buildings, may be permitted. Specific zoning and densities are to be based on the unique characteristics of each area with special attention to stormwater drainage and aquatic habitat. [Also, consider including more robust criteria for how rezones are to be considered within this designation. See question #14.] Medium Density Neighborhood Centers are allowed within Low-Density Neighborhoods. Clustered development to provide future urbanization opportunities will be required where urban utilities are not readily available.*

13.B - Definition of Medium Density Housing & Medium Density Neighborhood Centers

Staff Comment:

- *Confirm: 15-30 units per acre.*
- *Would be difficult to achieve these densities with a 35’ height limit.*

Staff proposes a hybrid of the definitions provided in the July Draft and Addendum; a draft for initial consideration follows:

Medium-Density Neighborhoods. *This designation provides for townhomes and multi-family residential densities ranging from 15 to 30 units per acre. Specific zoning is to be based on proximity to bus routes and major streets, land use compatibility, and environmental constraints. Specific zoning will include minimum and maximum densities to ensure efficient use of developable land and to ensure provision of an adequate variety of types of housing to serve the community. Higher densities should be located close to major employment or commercial areas. Clustering may be permitted.*

13.C - Definition of High Density Housing

Staff Comments: *See question #3 regarding HDN as an overlay vs. land use designation. Staff recommends this not be a land use designation definition, but that the description be included elsewhere in the Plan.*

- *Confirm: Minimum density of 30 units per acre? We haven't had this dense of development in Olympia before.*
- *Since no height limits proposed – except for view protection – focus in and confirm this for all hatched areas.*
- *“Primarily walk dependent” different from current vision in these areas, as described in PL13.7 and HDC-4 zoning?*
- *There has been some confusion over terms. Do you wish to call the HDN areas, “nodes” or “urban corridor districts,” which mean the same thing?*

Answers to the above questions should help shape the final definition; a draft for initial consideration follows:

“High-density Neighborhoods are Multi-family Residential and Commercial neighborhoods with a goal of densities of more than 30 dwelling units per acre. Specific zoning may provide for densities between 15-30 units per acre with additional capacity shown for future development density. High-density Neighborhoods concentrate housing into a number of designated sites: Downtown Olympia; Pacific/Martin/Lilly Triangle; and West Capital Mall. Commercial uses directly serve the high-density neighborhoods and allow people to meet their daily needs without traveling outside their neighborhood. High-density neighborhoods are primarily walk dependent services. The height in this neighborhood would be based on the “Height and View Protection Goals and Policies.”

Other Outstanding Issues:

14. **It may be a good idea to include guidance on when and how to consider rezones in the 4-14 designated areas. Under current conditions, rezones may be initiated by the City,**

or a private applicant. The Urban Neighborhood proposal implies – but does not explicitly state – that rezones could emerge from public processes (such as the subarea process or others,) and in such cases it may be fairly easy to decide on the rezone. But what about rezone requests initiated by private applicants? These may not be as popular with the neighborhood, creating even more of a case for specific criteria. What criteria should the City look at for rezones?

- 15. Staff will need to complete more analysis on any new recommendation put forward by the Planning Commission. Of key consideration will be whether or not the proposal would require changes to infrastructure planning. Such analysis could lead to a different recommendation from staff. We just want to make sure the Planning Commission is aware of this.**