



MEMORANDUM

Date: August 12, 2013
To: Olympia Planning Commission
From: Todd Stamm, Principal Planner
Subject: Neighborhood Centers

This memo is provided in support of the Planning Commission's August 24, 2013, tour of Olympia's proposed neighborhood centers. This background is just a part of the information that will be provided to the Commission.

Olympia's current Comprehensive Plan designates eight locations as potential "neighborhood centers." Four of these are within proposed 'villages.' (These 'villages are planned developments composed of a mix of housing types and a small mixed-use commercial center). As described below, development of these four has been approved as part of the village projects. The other four are 'floating' centers with general locations that have not yet been approved for development and thus, as explained below, are not shown on the City's zoning map. These four are at the intersections of Division Street and 20th Avenue NW, at Yauger Way and 5th Avenue SW, at San Francisco Avenue and Bethel Street NE, and at Fones Road and 18th Avenue SE.

The proposed Comprehensive Plan update as recommended by the Commission and staff and now being considered by the City Council would designate nine more neighborhood center sites. These would be the four village sites (Briggs, Mill Pond, Bentrige and Woodbury Crossing Villages) plus an additional one that has been approved by Thurston County at the intersection of Rich Road and Yelm Highway SE (Glenmore Village), ten where small food stores are now located, and the as-yet-undeveloped Yauger Way and Fones Road locations noted above. The Plan says that if any additional centers are designated they should be at least one-half mile from other commercial areas. The associated March 2013 version of the 'Urban Neighborhoods' proposal would designate the four neighborhood centers within one-quarter mile of the center of downtown, which are in low-density neighborhoods, as 'medium-density' neighborhood centers to 'emerge from a neighborhood public process.'

Land Use Goal 21 of the proposed Plan is, "Neighborhood centers are the focal point of neighborhoods and villages." According to the five associated policies:

- All neighborhood centers are to be located along collector or arterial (major) streets and within 600 feet of a transit stop; streets and trails are also to provide non-arterial access
- All are to include housing, a food store, and a neighborhood park or civic green
- Businesses and services catering primarily to neighborhood residents, and schools and churches, may be located in these centers. Auto-oriented businesses are to be prohibited
- Commercial uses are to be oriented to the civic green or park
- Each center is to vary in size and composition for balance with surrounding uses

- Designs, including signs, are to be compatible with adjoining uses, but innovation and variety are to be allowed; buildings are to provide direct access from sidewalks and be oriented to the park or green and to any adjacent housing

The current ‘village and center’ development regulations of the City require that before a neighborhood center can be developed, site-specific design criteria must be reviewed by the Olympia Design Review Board, and the Olympia Hearing Examiner must hold a public hearing and make recommendation regarding and the City Council must approve the “master plan” of each neighborhood center. Among other features, the regulations provide that:

- Neighborhood centers are to range from two to ten acres
- At least 5,000 square feet of retail floor area including a “food store” is required
- The maximum commercial floor area is 30,000 square feet with no more than 20,000 square feet of retail or services and no one business exceeding 5,000 square feet (except for the larger Briggs Urban Village and Glenmore Community Oriented Shopping Center developments on Yelm Highway)
- A ‘neighborhood park/village-green/plaza’ is required; it must be between one and four acres with good drainage and an average slope of less than 5%, with a minimum width of 150 feet and be “constructed” before the second half of the commercial space
- A ‘sheltered transit stop’ is required
- Auto-oriented uses, adult-oriented uses, firearm sales and pawnshops are prohibited
- Commercial buildings are limited to two stories, but residential and mixed-use buildings may have a third story unless at the perimeter or adjacent to a single-family designated area
- Generally housing densities in neighborhood centers are to range from 7 to 12 units per acre

As noted, five neighborhood centers have been approved as part of larger ‘village’ and ‘community oriented shopping center’ projects. These are the Woodbury Crossing, Briggs, Bentrige and Mill Pond villages and the Glenmore community oriented shopping center. (Sites D, I, L O, and J, respectively, on the accompanying map.) In these five projects at least 10% of the floor areas of the neighborhood center must be residential.

The draft Sustainable Development Plan for the Thurston Region recently released by the Thurston Regional Planning Council proposes that by 2035 72% of the region’s households should be within one-half mile of an urban center, urban corridor, or neighborhood center. Although there is no one simple formula for a successful neighborhood center, there are some ‘rules of thumb’ for centers similar to those proposed for Olympia. These features include:

- Be supported by at least 1,000 households or the equivalent, e.g., nearby offices or pass-by traffic may substitute for nearby housing
- To ensure this service population, at least 500 households should be within a walkable one-quarter mile and 1,000 to 1,500 households should be within one-half mile, with more within easy driving or transit travel
- The center should be at least two acres in size (not just an isolated business)

- Parking must be adequate to support the businesses, but consistent with walkable designs

The table below reflects rough estimates of existing and projected housing near the seventeen proposed centers in Olympia. Note that these estimates are based on current zoning and the simplistic radii shown on the accompanying map - which is lettered consistent with the planned tour - which do not represent true walking distances. Also note that these radii overlap, do not reflect proximity to other business and sometimes extend outside the City's urban growth area, so they do not necessarily reflect the service area exclusive to each proposed center. Nonetheless, they do provide some indication of the prospects for success of the seventeen proposed centers.

HOUSEHOLD ESTIMATES						
N'hood Center	Location Identifier	Year	Quarter Mile Radius		One-half Mile Radius	
			2010	2035	2010	2035
A	Westside Food Co-op		392	461	1,328	1,728
B	Handy Pantry		294	419	739	1,259
C	Kellerman's Corner		111	349	460	1,449
D	Woodbury Crossing		16	394	274	1,039
E	Capital Medical Center		292	635	874	1,906
F	Evergreen Park		97	115	1,426	1,593
G	Frog Pond grocery		445	464	761	819
H	Wildwood Center		199	224	838	980
I	Briggs Village		63	629	605	1,338
J	Glenmore Village		389	551	1,217	1,545
K	Victoria Square		293	308	1,095	1,276
L	Bentridge Village		189	530	904	1,375
M	Pit-Stop grocery		178	273	718	1,004
N	Fones & 18 th (DeTray site)		305	685	1,385	2,311
O	Mill Pond Village		149	456	513	1,218
P	San Francisco Bakery		453	479	1,379	1,603
Q	Puget Pantry		510	580	1,663	1,843

Notice that only site "Q" (Puget Pantry) currently meets the targets above - and its service area overlaps with other businesses. Even after twenty years many sites fall below the target of 500 households within one-quarter; but most are projected to be above the 1,000 households within one-half mile target. The 'best prospect' seems to be for site "N" at the Fones and 18th SE intersection. Of course, this table only includes households, it doesn't include other potential customers such as hospital staff and visitors at site 'E' or the office workers of Evergreen Park (site 'F') who are also likely to support neighborhood businesses.

*The Sustainable Thurston Program has collected a variety of reports and public comments on the topic of neighborhood centers. Among these is "Creating Walkable Neighborhood Business Districts: An exploration of the demographic and physical characteristics needed to support local retail services," June, 2009, by Gregory Easton and John Owen. Commission members are encouraged to visit TRPC's website, trpc.org, to become familiar with 'Sustainable Thurston.' In particular, staff suggests reviewing, 'Creating Places Preserving Spaces' the draft plan released in August of 2013.