

GROWTH: Sisters lacks inventory for expected growth

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National Forest lands surrounding the city and the lack of much land that could be brought in to expand the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB).

With the apparent continued growth of the population, it is prudent to address the housing needs now, when there is still the opportunity to plan wisely for the growth.

Before finalizing the HNA, which will inform the new Comprehensive Plan for the City, Community Development Director Patrick Davenport told a joint meeting of the Planning Commission and the Housing Policy Advisory Board, "We need community conversations regarding what we want Sisters to look like in the future."

The recently completed Sisters Horizons Vision provides some direction regarding growth.

Davenport said there are certain givens to be taken

into consideration, including needing to address statewide land-use goals and whether the City has the infrastructure to support the growth.

The last comp plan was completed in 2005, with input gathered in 2003-04, just a few years after the sewers went in. The city has changed dramatically in the past decade-and-a-half.

Planning Commissioner Bob Wright pointed to the many strategies called for in the earlier comp plan that have been instituted, noting that the general public may not be aware of much of their work. They want to review what has been done that worked and see how they can do even better.

The commissioners all agreed, "We need to have everyone on board to be able to provide for what's coming."

What is coming (or is already here) is the reality that Sisters is not going to have sufficient buildable land to meet the PSU population projections.

Planning Commission Vice Chair Jeff Seymour said, "We need to give the community time to accept

the changes [that are coming]. We must be open and transparent with the public to help them understand the needs and our decisions."

The open house on May 2 is an opportunity for citizens to educate themselves on the facts. There will be display boards showing varieties of housing options, a zoning map, buildable lands inventory map, and current housing map. Staff will provide a brief presentation, including an explanation of the State building and land use requirements. The staff, Planning Commission, and Housing Policy Advisory Board want to hear from the citizens and will be available to answer questions.

If the City were to "close the gates" to further growth (if that was possible), in a short period of time the city would become an enclave for the rich, as no new housing inflates the prices of available real estate. And right now, the focus is on providing more affordable housing.

The key is for the current residents to be educated on the facts and issues, and to become involved in finding solutions that will work for

the greatest number.

Scott Edelman, Central Region Representative for the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, told the Planning Commission that Sisters is not alone in their conundrum regarding growth. Hood River is in a similar situation, with the city bounded by the Columbia River and long-established orchards. His advice to the commissioners is to look at "what can we do with what we have." That may mean looking at farm and forest land, increased building heights, and more density.

Davenport made note of the fact that at this point in time, Sisters has some permissive zoning, allowing for the building of single-family detached homes (SFR) on land zoned multi-family (MFR). In other words, land zoned MFR doesn't have to have only MFR units; SFR are also allowed. In the Village at Cold Springs, which is zoned MFR, Hayden Homes was allowed to build mostly SFR units because of the permissive zoning. They still haven't built the apartments that are part of their

Master Plan, and the City has had to institute a requirement that no certificates of occupancy will be granted for the newest SFR units until at least half of the apartments are built.

Hayden's proposed McKenzie Meadows Village development would create the same situation – a majority of SFR homes in a MFR zone. Therefore, the City is not getting the most out of the MFR properties.

Density means more people, more traffic, and more demands on infrastructure, things people fear will downgrade the quality of life in Sisters. There are also positives, like more students for our schools that are facing challenges in enrollment. More people create a larger tax base, not only for the City, but all of the special taxing districts. Growth also means more business and more employees for our local merchants and more affordable housing so employees can live and work in Sisters.

The May 2 meeting is an opportunity to learn more, ask questions, and give voice to concerns and ideas about growth.

Planners cleaning up code

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

At their April 18, 2019 meeting, the Planning Commission reviewed a proposed Development Code text-amendment application. There are 12 amendments that will go before the Sisters City Council on April 24 as a single application.

Five of the amendments were discussed at an earlier meeting including Master Plan requirements, dwelling unit definition, childcare centers in the Downtown Commercial Zone, minor variances, and residential units in the North Sisters Business Park.

Last week the Planning Commission reviewed the seven remaining amendments

with some deletions, additions, and modifications approved. Currently, no building of service stations is allowed in the Downtown Commercial Zone. Those stations currently in that zone were grandfathered in and may not make any changes to their buildings. Modifications will be made to allow for renovations to existing stations. The required conditional-use permit for electric charging stations at the service stations will be removed.

Some inconsistencies in the regulations regarding Urban Area Reserve lands need to be corrected. Existing accessory structures such as cargo containers will be considered a legal nonconforming use but new ones

will only be allowed for temporary uses. Residential amenity buildings like clubhouses can be approved as part of a Master Plan, but if added at a later date, a site-plan review will be required. Clarifying language will be added to the requirements on the phasing of subdivisions.

The requirement saying a family member or the owner must live in either the primary house or the ADU will only be required for long-term rentals. The requirement for public art to be approved by the Planning Commission is being removed.

The Council will review the amendment package and any recommended changes will be sent back to the Planning Commission.

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