

Planning Commission Considers Zoning Changes *Part II: How Rezoning Might Impact Property Owners*

By Scott Laird

The Vernonia Planning Commission has begun to consider rezoning portions of some residential areas of the city in order to provide additional areas for development of commercial properties.

The City of Vernonia recently sent a letter and map to residents who live along First Avenue and Weed Avenue, which is an area of town which is being considered for rezoning. The letter invited the property owners to attend a meeting on July 19, 2012 with the Planning Commission. A second meeting was added for August 16. The meetings were designed to help inform citizens of the planning and rezoning process, collect feedback from property owners, identify potential issues for the Planning Commissioners and to give citizens an opportunity to ask questions and discuss their concerns.

At the second meeting on August 16, the Planning Commission agreed to move forward with exploring the rezoning of the half block that fronts Rose Avenue from Umatilla Street to Maple Street and the half block that fronts Weed Avenue from Umatilla to Maple, rather than the original full block in those areas.

At the heart of the matter for the City of Vernonia is a lack of potential growth areas that can accommodate commercial development. The City has lost the ability to expand in several key areas that are currently zoned Downtown, General Commercial and Light Industrial because they now sit in the floodplain or are publicly owned. The City is currently moving forward with plans to rezone dozens of publicly owned properties to an Institutional Public or Park & Recreation designation. Those properties are restricted to uses as open space due to flood insurance regulations. When this rezoning is complete there will still be an ample supply of residential land but the City will find itself with a shortage of land that is zoned to accommodate future commercial use and business development.

The City is currently not pursuing to expand their Urban Growth Boundary to create new areas for growth. The other option to create additional space for commercial development is by rezoning residential areas suitable to commercial use.

The City of Vernonia currently has three zoning designations that are acceptable for development of business: Light Industrial, General Commercial and Downtown. At this time the Planning Commission is only considering a rezoning from General Residential to either Downtown or General Commercial.

The Downtown Zone in the City of Vernonia is designed to be a vibrant commercial center and "heart" of the community. It is the business center and would be the logical place for people to gather. This zone is based on a mixture of uses that encourages walking, employment, community gathering and efficient use of land. It provides visitor accommodations and connections to residential areas. The Downtown Zone allows

for most uses including single and multi-family dwellings, retail and trade services, churches, community and government buildings, medical offices, entertainment facilities, offices, personal and professional services and more.

It could also accommodate uses like hotels, day care facilities and light manufacturing with a Conditional Use Permit.

General Commercial Zones in the City of Vernonia are more restrictive and are designed to provide a broad range of operations and services for the functioning of a commercial center. Permitted uses include: retail and wholesale establishments, retail or maintenance services, office space, eating and drinking establishments and more. Conditional Use Permits could allow athletic fields, RV parks, public buildings, single or multi-family dwellings, and other uses.

Although the Planning Commission has not decided exactly where they might rezone, it appears that the best option is along the Highway 47 corridor at the south end of town. The Planning Commission narrowed down the area under consideration after meeting with citizens and discussing their options together as a Commission in the August 16 meeting.

Both meetings were well attended by residents and property owners who could potentially be affected by a change to the zoning of their property.

Several concerns were raised at the first meeting on July 19. City Planner Carole Connell and the Commission members addressed many of those issues at the second meeting. Among the information provided at the August 16 meeting was the following:

- A residence that is 80% destroyed may be rebuilt in a Downtown Zone; it may not be rebuilt in a General Commercial zone.
- There is no change to tax assessment values after rezoning until the use of the property is actually permitted and changed.
- Any new business will have to provide for parking according to City ordinance. City Council is currently considering changes to the parking ordinance that would allow businesses that do not have room on their property for parking to have access to public parking provided by the City.
- The only remaining property that will be zoned Light Industrial is on Knott Street which has development issues and is too far away from

Vernonia City News...

At the August 20, 2012 City Council Meeting:

Council Authorizes Leak Detection Testing in Water System—Council authorized the City Administrator to enter into a contract with American Leak Detection to provide a leak detection survey of the city water system. Based on long-term water production records the City loses 30 to 34 million gallons of water that it produces each year. The Public Works Department believes those losses are coming from the following areas: 1) leaks in the water distribution piping system, 2) faulty water meters at points of delivery, 3) faulty water meter at the production plant. The Vernonia sys-

tem has approximately 2-3 miles of main pipelines and approximately 700 connections. American Leak Detection will work with the city to test these components and identify trouble areas. Cost for the survey is estimated to be less than \$4,000.

Council Spends Time in Executive Session—Council Adjourned to Executive Session under ORS 192.660(2)(h) which allows Council to consult with their attorney regarding their legal rights and duties in regard to current litigation or litigation that is more likely than not to be filed. Council took no further action when they returned to open session.

the downtown corridor to be a good place to develop General Commercial type businesses.

- There are currently only three or four vacant properties in the Downtown Zone that could be used as a business. There are several additional properties and businesses that are for sale. Some of those properties have complications that could hinder business development.
- The City rezoned approximately fifteen residential parcels several years ago that is contiguous with the rest of the Downtown Zone. Only four or five of them are still strictly residential.
- When considering business development in a residential area, property owners asked that the Planning Commission consider the negative impacts that the development of the WOEC headquarters has had to neighboring residents including bright lights.

There were several additional ideas and concerns raised by members of the audience at the second meeting. The Planning Commission took those ideas under consideration and are continuing to research these questions. Among the questions asked:

- Is Eminent Domain easier when properties are zoned for some type of commercial use?
- Is it more difficult for a new buyer to receive financing from a lending institution for a property that is zoned for commercial use?
- Are there already enough lots within the current Downtown Zone that are buildable and could accommodate new development?
- Can the Planning Commission consider rezoning a property at the west end of Maple Avenue to be used for business development?
- What happens to tax assessment values after rezoning if a property changes its use to commercial and then want to change back to residential?

The Planning Commission meets on the first and third Thursday of each month and is scheduled to meet again on September 6th.

Vernonia City Council Meetings and Closures

City Council Meetings are scheduled for 7 PM:

Tuesday, September 4, 2012
Monday, September 17, 2012
Monday, October 1, 2012

City Closures are scheduled for:
Monday, September 3, 2012

Dates and times subject to change due to conflicts of schedules



Need body work?
At Meyer's Auto Body
we'll take your order and give you great service.

MEYER'S AUTO BODY
493 BRIDGE STREET,
VERNONIA
503-429-0248



291
a
street
CALL KIM

Happy Grooming
Dog Salon
429-0576

LOVABLE SERVICE AT
A REASONABLE PRICE

- BATHING
- HAIRCUTS
- NAIL CLIPPING
- NAIL POLISHING
- SPECIALTY SHAMPOOS