

Clear as Mud

City muddles mixed-use development.

Eugene planning staff came to the City Council last week for an endorsement of their approach to controlling urban sprawl and traffic congestion with denser and walkable mixed-use centers. They didn't get it.

What they did get was criticism of allowing tall apartment and commercial buildings next to established single-family homes and a unanimous council vote to use "opportunity siting" to more carefully chose sites for higher density rather than blanket up-zoning neighborhoods.

"With the current rules that are in place, it is destroying the neighborhood," said Councilor George Poling of planning staff's proposal to allow apartments alongside houses in the Chambers Mixed Use (Nodal) Development zone.

Councilor Betty Taylor said planning staff should recognize that allowing apartment buildings next to home owner's back yards "is totally inappropriate in many places" and is "really upsetting people and decreasing property values, and in some cases destroying neighborhoods."

Before the meeting a group of Chambers area neighbors had lobbied the council with an alternative plan that they said would meet goals by increasing density in commercial parts of the area while protecting the established single-family residential neighborhood.

"We are tremendously pleased" with the council vote last week, said Matt Purvis, a leader of the Chambers neighborhood group. However Purvis said at a public forum this week that neighbors continue to be disappointed that planning staff proposals for the neighborhood still seek to put tall buildings next to homes and continue to be "rife with error and have widespread opposition from the public."

City Manager Dennis Taylor told councilors he would look into the discrepancy between the staff proposal and the unanimous council vote directing that opportunity siting be the "primary strategy" of the city's mixed use development effort. "Point well taken," he said.

But that's not the only problem MUD has. MUD was previously called "nodal development," but the city changed the name after intense opposition and confu-

sion. Nodal development was the city's response after the state required 15 years ago that it control traffic congestion by reducing vehicle miles traveled per capita by 10 percent over 20 years. City staff claimed such a reduction was impossible

and instead proposed an alternative measure of complying with the transportation planning rule: using nodal development to concentrate much of the new growth in pedestrian and transit friendly mixed-use zones — and thus reduce driving. In TransPlan the city promised to set up 38 such zones.

But implementation of the zones quickly ran in to trouble as businesses and developers balked at regulation and limiting traf-

fic, and home owners opposed putting big apartments and busy commercial buildings next to established homes. In 1993 the city put two of its most promising nodes at 29th and Willamette and in the East University neighborhood on indefinite hold.

City Planner Allen Lowe told the council this week the city had learned its lessons from the problems. The "one size fits all" approach to nodal/MUD rezonings proved "wildly unpopular," he said.

But tailoring MUD designations for each neighborhood will be expensive and slow, Lowe warned. MUD's impact in controlling congestion will be very slow, he said. "The change will occur incrementally and over a very long period of time."

But Councilor David Kelly said the city was moving too slowly to control traffic with land-use planning. "Incremental is one thing and snail's pace plodding is another thing and that's where, unfortunately, I think we are."

Councilor Bonny Bettman said she was concerned that the city's MUD centers would not have the frequent transit service that is crucial for their success. "Many of these centers are not going to see these kinds of service for multiple decades," she said.

Taylor said she was concerned that the city had ignored council direction to eliminate commercial only nodes from city plans since they wouldn't meet mixed-use goals.

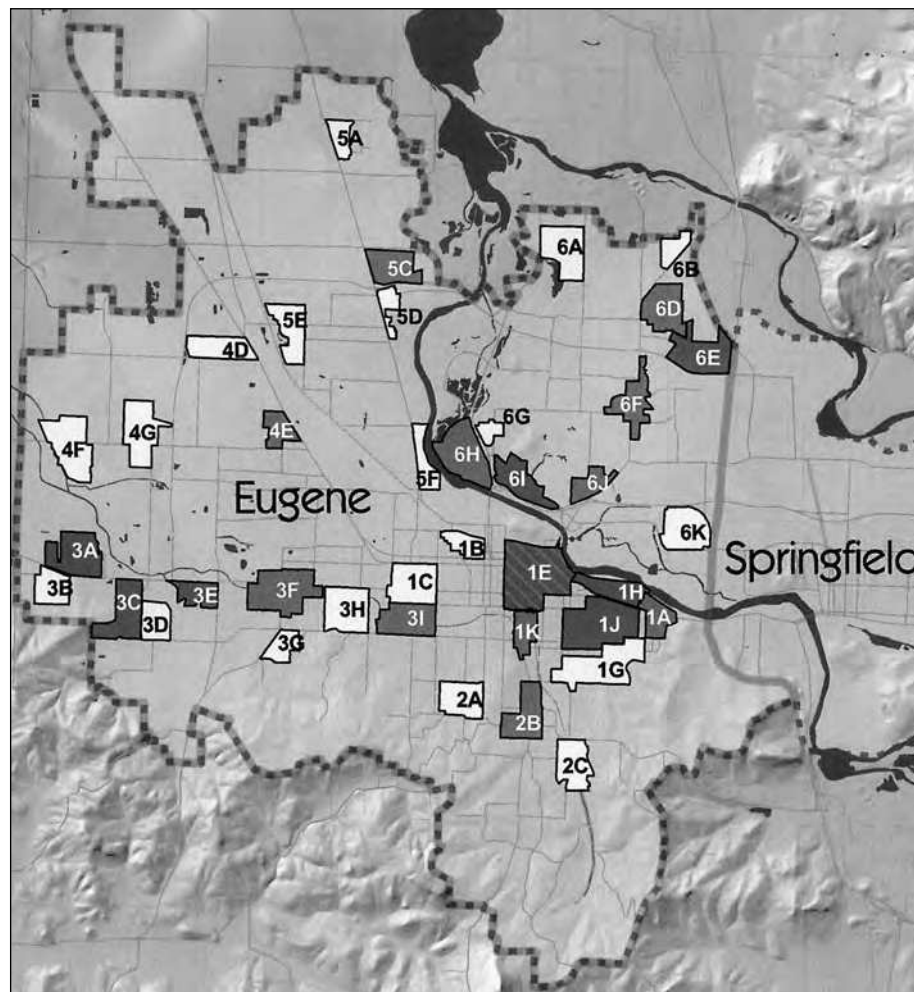
Friends of Eugene President Kevin Matthews faulted the city for its muddled MUD planning. He said the proposed Chambers node is "dead on arrival because it's got a hundred lanes of traffic going through it." The huge "river of traffic" will never allow the area to be pedestrian friendly, he said.

Matthews also faulted the city for putting some nodes on the car-dependent edge of the city. "It's like planning 101 has been skipped," he said. "Basically nodal development is being used as a cover for subsidizing sprawl at the Royal [Ave.] node."

Previous city surveys have shown widespread support for the concept of controlling urban sprawl and traffic congestion by increasing density. But Councilor Kelly said it "has to be density done right."

Councilor Taylor praised the Chambers neighborhood group for pushing to improve the city's planning efforts. "What they're doing will help not only their neighborhood, but the entire city, if they're successful."

POTENTIAL MIXED-USE CENTERS



SOURCE: CITY OF EUGENE

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— COUNCILOR DAVID KELLY —

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