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“There is a preference in the grant for rural and communities of color. We feel like we have a decent chance with this grant because we are so rural.”

If awarded the LIFT grant, NEDCO and WNHS will begin work on a potential affordable housing project on Airport Road that could bring up to 12 one- to three-bedroom houses to a 1.73-acre lot.

By partnering with NEDCO and WNHS, two nonprofits in the process of merging, Florence hopes the application is successful.

“These are two organizations that cover all of Lane County and Linn, Benton and Lincoln, so quite a few areas,” Weese said. “They are slowly starting to merge out to the rural areas. ... NEDCO has done quite a bit of affordable housing work in the Eugene-Springfield area. This is the first time they will spread this far west to Florence.”

The current plan, which both

the city and NEDCO representative Karen Saxe emphasized is still preliminary, involves 12 cottage cluster units with their own parking and storage gathered around a central green space.

“The common greenspace includes a pavilion, and this is all common area that people can share together. Each of the homes will have additional yards and patios that are theirs individually,” Weese said. “This is called ‘missing middle’ housing because it’s a middle ground between apartment living and homeownership in the traditional sense.”

The units will have a smaller footprint than traditional homes and should be easier for first-time buyers to purchase a home.

NEDCO will hold the land in a community land trust while the homes are purchased with mortgages, similarly to a condo, Weese said.

Saxe, NEDCO’s director of asset building programs, said, “We just plan to be a strong and active partner in this moving forward. The community land trust is an

ability for us to maintain permanent affordability. These will be held affordable in perpetuity. We are making sure that everything we do on the front-end allows homeowners to buy the home, build equity and move on to whatever their next step in homeownership is. And it allows us to give an affordable opportunity for the next first-time home buyer.”

The five city councilors approved the sale agreement for \$0, showing a local buy-in that should reflect positively in the grant application, Weese said. However, the property sale will only move forward if the grant succeeds.

“This agreement is between the city and NEDCO/WNHS for the city to sell the land should they achieve grant funding and be able to actually develop the property as is,” Weese said. “The property value was set for \$238,000 in 2017. It will be used as additional points in the grant system. We hope to have a very competitive grant with this sort of local government money going towards the project.”

The timeline for the development is contingent on receiving the grant, which will be announced in October. If approved, it will involve community interest meetings for potential buyers and community feedback, as well as classes and counseling through NEDCO’s financial and housing programs. In addition, a new site for the Florence Community Garden will be sought.

“All of that only occurs if grant funding is achieved,” Weese said. “If NEDCO/WNHS can’t get funding, then the city will maintain ownership of the property, the proposed sale agreement will expire and we’ll continue to have a community garden until we find another alternative for the site.”

The City of Florence continues to seek options for affordable housing on many different fronts.

“We feel like this meets the city’s goals of economic development and livability and quality of life,” Weese said. “Affordable housing is a dire issue in Florence. I don’t need to tell the council that, or the city. This is some-

thing that we have been working on for a year a half, and this is an opportunity to have an innovative solution that really works to help some families.

Mayor Joe Henry said, “We’ve really been working hard on affordable housing for longer than a year and a half. So far, we haven’t been very successful. I believe this is an opportunity ... I’m appreciative of NEDCO stepping in to show us their model and at least start this process.”

Before the council approved moving forward with the project, four residents in the Airport Road and 15th Street area spoke out against the project as it stood.

The primary concern was the character of the neighborhood, and how it already stands in an area of change.

According to resident Thomas Elzy, 15th Street is increasingly used by local traffic to access Kingwood Street and the Florence Municipal Airport. In addition, he added there is already a “pinch point” at the Highway 101 entrance because of local businesses and people needing to access their homes and the Boys and Girls Club of Western Lane County.

“I believe there needs to be a lot of research done on the impact to this neighborhood,” Elzy said. “This development would greatly increase the population, as well as the traffic. That would pose a safety concern to organizations directly on that street.”

Jonathon Hornung, a teacher at Siuslaw High School, also had concerns for the neighborhood.

“As a parent now,” he said, gesturing to his one-month old son and wife who also attended the meeting, “and as a teacher in this community, I understand the need for housing. However, I see a lot of problems with this project as it has been presented.”

He expressed worry about losing the “woody, quiet feel of the neighborhood,” especially if stands of native vegetation were removed.

“The City of Florence claims it is the ‘City of Rhododendrons’ and that the ‘city is committed to maintain natural beauty while welcoming new development,’ but the Florence Realization 2020 Comprehensive Plan states that the city has done a poor job of maintaining native stands of vegetation,” Hornung stated. “It says that if the city wants to keep using the ‘City of Rhododendrons’ title, it must get proactive.”

Besides wanting to preserve the area’s natural beauty, Hornung said the vegetation is vital to retaining the integrity of a dune that runs along part of the property, as well as the neighboring Mulberry land.

“I’m not a fan of this land sale, but if it does get approved, I implore you to add an amendment that the vegetation on the dune

along the southern border be preserved ... along with the western edge,” Hornung said. “It would help to stabilize things.”

Hornung also said the 2020 Plan requires a certain amount of native vegetation be kept on new developments.

Vegetation was also important to David and Rosemary Lauria.

“You’d be taking away a mountain, not just removing the community garden,” said Rosemary. “In May, that forest on the other side of the garden is a sea of pink — and I’d hate to see that gone. I hate to lose the song of the warblers in the spring. I hate to lose the family of deer that sleeps underneath our rhododendron bush. It’s our house that has the baby birds in our flower basket. It’s a quality of life.”

David said that “other considerations need to be thought out,” including the economic impact to the neighborhood.

He said an appraisal of his own property showed that lower-income housing already in that area had reduced his property value.

“What about the economic value of the property? If you lower the property value of somebody’s house, who pays for that, and how do you determine it?” David asked. “You are hurting all the other direct neighbors, property value wise, while you’re trying to help another sector of the community.”

He said he had lived through a similar pattern in Boulder, Colo., which turned into “a nightmare problem.”

“I have seen the effects of tremendous infill in the city that overtaxed the infrastructure that was never set up to hold the number of people living there,” he said. “I realize right now that affordable housing is a political hot button, and I agree with the need and the whole concept. ... But 15th street was never meant to take that kind of traffic.”

The speakers all agreed that housing, especially affordable housing, is important; they just worried that the current model would bring too much change to an already strained neighborhood.

Several of the speakers spoke of a need for a buffer between the single-family zoned homes and this proposed multi-family NEDCO site, especially as up to 40 people could occupy the 12 units.

“The public land is being misused,” Elzy said. “Any time the city deems property a surplus property, there needs to be a public hearing and there needs to be public input to determine what the public would like for the property. ... That land is not owned by the city or the city council. That land is owned by the taxpayers. I would like to see more input being given from the taxpayers.”

At the end of the hearing, Saxe and Weese answered questions.

“We’re in a very early stage of this,” Saxe said. “As applications go in for funding, and as funding is secured, a lot of the questions and concerns that came up from neighbors will certainly be a large part of our conversations and our process moving forward. Our next step is to really start a series of outreach meetings, both with prospective first-time buyers of these homes but also with the neighbors to get more of this info. ... I was very happy to hear from some close surrounding neighbors tonight.”

Weese said that the civil engineers and architects will be a major part of any decisions moving forward, as well as community stakeholders and the neighboring residents.

She added that the city has been partners with NEDCO/WNHS for six months so far.

“They both are really nonprofits focused on building quality, affordable housing. They’ve done a good job in their other areas, and they are not really here to bulldoze over vegetation and upset a neighborhood. They really want to make sure that this fits the needs of the community. That’s why we feel confident they will be able to do the work. But it is a leap of faith to some extent, since we do not have the permission to be able to say exactly what the development will look like at this stage. Frankly, we need the money for that,” Weese said.

She said the Florence Planning Department is well aware of every step necessary in any new development, and know about the slope of the dune and the importance of the stabilizing nature of the vegetation.

“When and if we get grant funding, we will need to have a civil engineer come in and assess the slope and the vegetation,” Weese said. “I will say, as already proposed, there is still intended to be quite a bit of vegetation on the slope on the south side of the development, just because the slope is steep. That vegetation is the best way to keep the slope intact, and we’re very much aware of that.”

During the council discussion, councilors questioned if it would be feasible to add clarifying language to the motion that these issues will be addressed.

Councilor Joshua Greene asked, “If the priority were to maintain a certain quality of the dunes and landscape, do you think NEDCO would be willing to reconfigure its design in a way that will incorporate that type of landscaping? If you are flexible enough to consider that, do you think that is still doable?”

Saxe agreed that NEDCO is willing to be flexible and reiterated the very early nature of the current design.

“(These comments) will be a central part of our exploration process moving forward,” she said. “We will make sure we have the right people at the table to really dive into that in a way that is sustainable to both homeowners who will be living there and also to the neighbors.”

Ultimately, it was decided that the motion would move forward as written.

Henry said, “We will move on with the idea that we will have additional public input and lots more planning to try to address some of the issues.”

Later, he added, “On paper, this development looks nicer than some of the other areas in this community.”

On June 21, Florence City Code changes from Ordinance No. 4, Series 2018, concerning Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) and other housing amendments, went into effect.

According to the code, an ADU is “an accessory building specifically designed and permitted as an additional dwelling, which is incidental, appropriate and subordinate to a primary dwelling on a property. ADUs may be part of the same structure as the primary dwelling as an interior dwelling unit, attached dwelling unit, or a detached dwelling unit on the same lot. These are also known as a secondary dwelling unit, granny-flat or in-law suite.”

Florence City Council also voted this year to lower systems development charges for new developments adding into the city’s infrastructure.



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