

To: Jennifer Dimsho & Jacob Graichen, City of St. Helens

Meeting Date: March 12, 2019

From: Todd Chase & Tim Wood, FCS GROUP

CC: Anne Debbaut & Kevin Young, Oregon DLCD

RE St. Helens HNA Planning Commission Meeting #3 Notes

The third St. Helens Housing Needs Analysis (HNA) Planning Commission (PC) advisory committee and public meeting was held on March 12, 2019 at City Hall at 6 p.m. A meeting attendance list and the Buildable Lands Inventory (BLI) Report and Presentation are on file with the City and uploaded to the [Project Website](#).

Land Need Reconciliation Overview

Tim Wood, Project Consultant with FCS GROUP introduced the Planning Commission to the Land Need Reconciliation Table which he explained is the key takeaway from the Task 4 Residential Land Need Analysis. Wood explained that there were 5 methods considered, each of which showed St. Helens had adequate residential land except for high-density land, which St. Helens needs more of. The public and planning commission had questions including the following:

- A member of the public asked if the projected dwelling unit need was reflective of a given timeframe. Wood clarified that it was meant to represent demand over a 20-year timeframe.
- A Commission member noted that the land supply numbers had changed since the last time FCS GROUP had reported to the Planning Commission. Wood noted that City Staff had identified tax lots and land use categories which were overlooked in the initial buildable land inventory. He stated that those lands were subsequently added, shifting buildable acre figures slightly.
- A Commission member asked whether the buildable land inventory had considered steep basalt as a constraint given that it is difficult and expensive to build on. Wood clarified that steep slopes over 25% have been removed from the buildable land inventory, but specific types of rock or geologic profiles (over and above that which is reflected in the 25% slope layer) were not included as land development constraints.
- A Commission member asked if infrastructure had been considered. The Buildable Land Inventory methodology assumes that adequate public facilities can be functionally provided over the next 20 years for roads, sewer, and water systems for the buildable vacant land inventory within the current Urban Growth Boundary.
- A Commission member asked whether it makes sense to analyze land based on its zoned density given bills being considered at the Legislature which might outlaw single family zoning. Wood said that FCS GROUP recommends that cities do not count on the speculative passage of new bills and carry on with the HNA process assuming no changes to state law.

Policy Consideration Overview:

The meeting transitioned to policy considerations that St. Helens might undertake to address some issues uncovered throughout the HNA process. The purpose of this discussion was to allow the Planning Commission to weigh in on whether the policies were feasible.

Minimum Density Standard

This policy would require builders to obtain a certain unit per acre standard when developing a parcel. Jacob Graichen pointed out that typically, builders do build as many units as they can because they want to produce as many units as they can sell. Commissioners were reluctant to comment because there was not a specific density standard proposed. Additionally, there was a preference by one commissioner to allow developers to determine market-based development densities.

Allowing Duplexes Outright

This policy suggestion was to allow duplexes by right in R-7 zoned land rather than being conditionally allowed as is current practice. Commissioners mostly voiced opposition to this policy consideration because it could be disruptive to neighborhood character and the current practice gives more oversight with regards to when a duplex is allowed. They observed that the current practice (allowing duplexes as a conditional use) works and that duplexes have been built under the existing regime.

Reduce Parking Requirements for Multifamily Development

This policy recommendation would have allowed conditional reductions in the provision of parking required for multifamily developments in St. Helens. The developer would be required to fund a parking study showing that the impacts of a reduction in parking provided on sight would be negligible. Commissioners mostly voiced opposition to this policy proposal given that parking is an issue that animates local politics already and to allow for less parking would make the situation worse. Additionally, they observed that St. Helens is more auto-dependent than many communities which adopt such policies. Some Commissioners voiced support for such a policy closer to downtown St. Helens or the Houlton Business District but that proposal did not garner further support from the broader commission.

Allow Cottage Clusters

This policy recommendation would call for St. Helens to draft and adopt rules allowing and regulating cottage clusters in the City. Essentially, these developments would consist of small homes on a single property. Commissioners had questions about specifics such as the average size of the homes and the density allowed for such developments. Mr. Graichen told Commissioners that specifics would be developed as the policy is written. Commissioners were broadly supportive of this recommendation.

Increase Allowable Density for Annexing Properties

Currently, properties annexing from unincorporated Columbia County into St. Helens must meet certain criteria to achieve higher density zoning upon annexation (such as R-5 and Apartment Residential). This policy recommendation calls for St. Helens to examine those standards and consider relaxing them to provide higher density housing on the periphery of the city. Commission members noted that the existing regime worked and did allow higher density for annexing properties but there should be some oversight to ensure that such density would not disrupt the character of the surrounding residential areas.

The meeting adjourned at 7pm.