

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

Meeting Date: May 1, 2019

From: Todd Chase & Tim Wood, FCS GROUP

CC: Anne Debbaut & Kevin Young, Oregon DLCD

RE: St. Helens HNA City Council & Public Forum Notes

The St. Helens Housing Needs Analysis (HNA) City Council & Public Forum was held on May 1, 2019 at City Hall at 6 p.m. A PowerPoint presentation is on file with the City and uploaded to the [Project Website](#). Formal minutes of the Public Forum will be uploaded to the City's Minutes Page once they are approved.

HNA Project Overview

Todd Chase, Principal and Economist with FCS GROUP introduced the City Council to the concept of the HNA, the process, and the project schedule for the St. Helens project. The principal conclusions of the analysis performed by FCS GROUP are that St. Helens has adequate developable residential land within the UGB for the next 20 years. The HNA document will go before the Planning Commission and City Council for adoption into the Comprehensive Plan in 2019.. Despite the conclusion that there is adequate residential developable land, there are some changes to city policy governing housing that could help builders provide more affordable housing. The policies will be further discussed, refined, and adopted, likely in 2020. Policies under consideration by staff, Council, and the Planning Commission are outlined below:

Requiring a Minimum Density Standard

This policy would require builders to obtain a certain unit per acre standard when developing a parcel. Locally, builders typically do build as many units as they can because they want to produce as many units as they can sell but this could help provide more housing overall. When introduced to the Planning Commission, members 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. Among the City Council the reaction was similar, with members unwilling to change something that is not currently an issue.

Allowing Duplexes Outright

This policy suggestion was to allow duplexes by right in R7 zoned land rather than being conditionally allowed as is current practice. When this policy was introduced to the Planning Commission, members 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. City Councilors, meanwhile, expressed similar reservations with some saying they would like to see it debated given that the current process to cite a duplex in R7 land is onerous and the protections to neighborhood character are somewhat inequitable.

Reducing Parking Requirements for Multifamily Development

This policy recommendation would allow 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. When introduced to the Planning Commission, members 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. City Councilors largely agreed with the conclusions of the Planning Commission.

Allowing 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. When introduced to the Planning Commission, members expressed support for such a policy, pending dimensions and specifications regarding design. The City Council referred to the proposal as a “slam dunk” saying they were eager to see it enacted.

Increasing 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 R5 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. When introduced to the Planning 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 City Council, in contrast, was supportive of such a suggestion, pending more specifics.

Questions from City Council Members

City Council members were actively engaged throughout the meeting and asked several questions of FCS GROUP. Highlights are as follows:

- Councilor Morten asked if transportation facilities are factored in to the “buildability” of land analyzed. Mr. Chase responded that it was factored in along with other infrastructure considerations.
- Councilor Morten clarified the annexation process for the City.
- Mayor Scholl asked if the statewide need for affordable housing had been considered in this analysis. Mr. Chase responded that it was the impetus for the state funding the studies in the first place but otherwise, no. The analysis focused on St. Helens.
- Several councilors asked how challenging expanding the urban growth boundary (UGB) would be. Mr. Chase responded that such processes are very time consuming and that several instances had taken nearly a decade from start to finish.
- A member of the public, Shawna Stroup-Harrison, shared her concern that the recommendations would sacrifice the livability of St. Helens in the name of density and affordability. The Council assured her that the policies discussed at this meeting were merely recommendations made by FCS GROUP and that the Council would debate each policy before adoption.

The meeting adjourned at 7:18 pm.