

Minutes
Cheney Planning Commission
Regular Meeting – By Phone/Video Conference

April 12, 2021

Commissioners Attending: Richard Mount, Natasha Jostad, Jake Vibbert, Dan Turbeville, and Daniel Hillman.

Commissioners Absent: Vara Lyn Conrath & David Early.

Staff Attending: Brett Lucas, Mark Schuller and Todd Ableman.

Councilmembers Attending: Vince Barthels.

Call to Order: Chairman Mount called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

Minutes: Commissioner Vibbert made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 8, 2021 regular meeting as distributed. Seconded by Commissioner Jostad, and the motion carried unanimously.

Citizen Participation: None.

Discussion Item - Continued: #2021-04
Amending R-3/R-3H Multi-Family Zoning Regulations

Mr. Lucas explained the concept of a bonus density. As currently prescribed in the zoning code for the R-3 zoning district, the density for the number of units on a lot is 21 units/acre. A 5,000 sq.ft. lot is 0.115 acres in size (5,000 sq.ft. divided by 43,560 sq.ft. in an acre). On a 5,000 sq.ft. lot, or 0.115 acres x 21 units/acre, that works out to 2.4 units on a 5,000 sq.ft. lot. As per our code (measurements section), we would round down to 2 units on that 5,000 sq.ft. lot.

The bonus density proposal would allow a developer to build a total of 3 units instead of 2, but only if the developer does only a 1 bedroom/1 bath unit for all three units.

Mr. Lucas explained that with the 1 bedroom unit scenario, there should be less demand on parking in comparison to a 2 bedroom or 3 bedroom unit configuration.

Mr. Lucas showed a map illustrating the parcels currently zoned R-3 which are 5,000 sq.ft. in size. He explained that there are 31 total parcels in the R-3 zone which are 5,000 sq.ft. in size. Of those, 2 are currently vacant land, and a handful of others might be candidates for redevelopment. And 18 of those lots are located within the Central Cheney Historic District.

Discussion followed. Commissioner Jostad asked if there is demand for this kind of development. Mr. Lucas answered that demand has ebbed and flowed, but right now there is a demand for studio or one bedroom apartments. From the developer's side, it may be more profitable to have 3 single units.

NOTE: Due to a technical issue, Chairman Mount left the meeting briefly. Discussion on this topic was paused until his return.

Discussion Item - Continued: #2021-05
Zoning & Land Use Regulations for Cottage Housing Development

Mr. Lucas explained that the State Legislature is pushing local jurisdictions to offer more affordable housing choices. The question is whether we should amend our zoning code to set rules for this type of housing. Mr. Lucas defined cottage housing as 'a development method where a group of smaller detached or attached single family homes are built together on one lot, often with shared open space.'

He suggested that these homes are small, often around 800 sq.ft. They provide a good alternative for households that may prefer a single family home to an apartment, but do not need a large unit. They are inherently affordable, and provide a bridge between single family and multifamily housing.

NOTE: Chairman Mount re-joined the meeting.

Mr. Lucas showed charts illustrating density on typical lot sizes in the R-2 and R-3 zones, when developed with either cottage housing or traditional multifamily units. He also compared typical residents per unit on those typical lot sizes.

Discussion followed. Commissioner Hillman said that he feels these are sure to turn into rentals for college housing, and he doesn't see how this is an improvement, except maybe to the folks in Olympia. Keeping these in the R-3 zone would be better, but he cannot generate much enthusiasm for them.

Chairman Mount agreed, and said that his concern is that the cottages would be 'affordable' but they will probably not be used as affordable units for home buyers unless there is some kind of requirement for them being owner-occupied. His biggest concern is that we have so many absentee landlords that really don't know what's happening on the property, or don't care what's happening on the property, and the neighbors live with the consequences.

Mr. Lucas said that he understood, and added that the ownership question is a hard one for local government to manage. When he has worked in other jurisdictions, there were cooperative housing situations, and it was up to the housing association to manage. He said that he is not sure the City has the capacity to manage something like this.

Chairman Mount suggested that when the State mandates we address this, then we should take a look at it again. He can see how this type of housing might be nice for juniors and seniors who want to live off campus, but he is reluctant to change our code to allow housing types that will make larger headaches for the neighbors.

Commissioner Hillman said that the State legislature is going to do whatever it is going to do, and he does not understand why we would rush to push this through, when their decision will override any decision we make, anyway.

Mr. Lucas said that we don't know if the legislature is going to come out with some general guidelines, or if they will dictate specific details. Mr. Schuller added that there is a definite movement to pre-empt local jurisdictions from making their own rules. He thinks the Commission is on the right track to not address this until we have to.

Commissioner Jostad added that these might be desirable units for juniors & seniors, but the intent is not to enable home ownership for college students who are here for just four years. We don't need to cater to a short-term vision for a student, to be able to live by themselves. This type of housing is not designed for student housing, and we need to be sure it is not used for that purpose.

Commissioner Jostad made a motion to table this topic until there is a directive from the State Legislature requiring us to address cottage housing as a classification in our code; seconded by Commissioner Hillman. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion Item - Continued: #2021-04
Amending R-3/R-3H Multi-Family Zoning Regulations

Chairman Mount called for a continuation of the discussion that was interrupted earlier in the meeting by technical issues.

Mr. Lucas noted that this is a discussion item. If the Commission is interested in moving this forward, we will need to schedule a public hearing.

Commissioner Jostad made a motion to schedule a public hearing on this issue at the June meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Vibbert, and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Reports:

Commissioner Hillman noted that the University is being very aggressive with their parking enforcement, even though the campus is relatively empty. If this is something we want to pursue, we should probably take that up soon.

Commissioner Jostad asked if there are plans to repair or replace the damaged playground equipment at Sutton Park. Mr. Schuller said that the equipment has been ordered.

Commissioner Jostad added that the tape at the top of the slide at Centennial Park is broken, and not much of a deterrent. Mr. Schuller said that he would ask staff to take a look at that.

Staff Reports:

Mr. Ableman reported that we are heading toward the Cheney Clean Sweep on April 24, and the Large Item Pickup service will be offered next week.

Mr. Lucas said that our next meeting, in May, will be public hearing to consider a rezone of the Business Park to Light Industrial.

He added that he received an award this week from the American Association of Geographers in recognition of outstanding service in the field of business & retail geography.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved By:

Susan Beeman, Secretary

Richard Mount, Chairman