M E M O R A N D U M

AUGUST 7, 2013
TO: North Plains Planning Commission
FROM: Martha DeBry, City Manager
RE: Discussion of Comprehensive Plan

In February 2013, the Planning Commission held a work session to discuss the Comprehensive Plan (Plan). At that time it was noted that City Ordinance and policies did not always align, and some aspects of Comprehensive Plan are in need of evaluation.

At the heart of the Comprehensive Plan are the housing goals. In general, the Plan strives for compact growth, and the ability to accommodate up to 4,000 residents by 2021. The approved plan sets a goal of 1,600 housing units, assuming that the average household size in the North Plains remains about 2.5 persons per dwelling.

Municipal code Section 15.02.020 Land Use Planning states "Residential: The City's goal is to achieve a mix of low density (40%), medium density (40%), and high density (20%) residential uses providing an average density of 8.4 units per acre."

The City has not successfully achieved the 40/40/20 mix, and is on pace to have a higher density than 8.4 units per net acre. In 2012 there were 806 dwelling units in North Plains. The housing mix is about 27% low, 44% medium and 27.5% high, with few handfuls of housing units in the commercial and industrial areas. By 2015, if progress is made by developers to build out the Highland Court, McKay Fields and East expansion area the City will have 959 dwelling units and the mix of housing will be about 26.4% low, 40.2 medium and 33.3 high density. These percentages will likely evolve to 26.8% low, 36.5% medium and 36.6% high if the plans for the remaining parts of the East and North expansion areas are built out as proposed reaching a total of 1,438 dwelling units.

What is not well explained in the plan is the potential growth in housing in the R2.5 zone. At present there are subdivision maps for 71 dwelling units near Gordon Road. However if these maps expire, (which is likely) a different developer could propose up to 174 units in the same space. Likewise R2.5 parcels near McKay Creek can also be developed or redevelop with the 17.4 units per net acre density resulting in another 209 homes. In theory this could push the total number of dwelling units in the City to a number in excess of 1,800, with more than 50% of the units in a high density area.

(It should be noted most zoning codes are written in a manner that encourages meeting density goals, but does not require meeting the goal. For example in 2007 the original McKay Fields subdivision map provided 27 homes on roughly 2 net acres, which is a density of 13 units per net acre. The 2013 McKay Fields subdivision map provides a density of 17 units per net acre. The exception is the Neighborhood Community zone which requires a density of 8.4 units per net acre.)

As staff is preparing to propose modifications to the Comprehensive Plan, it is important that the Planning Commission and City Council provide direction regarding growth trends. From the recent work sessions, it is apparent there is a desire to see more low and medium density housing, however that is not clearly reflected in the Plan or the codes.

If the City wants to create a trend towards larger lots, the Comprehensive Plan should be addressed sooner than later, in order to allow the modification of existing master plans for expansion areas in the North and East, and to align the zoning with acreage available for development and redevelopment.

In terms of process, there are a couple routes that can be explored. If the Plan is modified to retain the overall 8.4 density per net acre, and relatively minor changes are made to the Plan, the proposed ordinance can be presented to DLCD for comment in a manner similar to other ordinances. The process will require at least six months to complete and require public outreach. If the Plan requires major modifications it may be advisable to conduct a more extensive public outreach prior to submitting information to DLCD.

Recommendation: The Planning Commission provide comments on long-term housing and urbanization goals.