

City of Milwaukie - Code Assistance Phase 2 Stakeholder Meeting #3 Summary

May 3, 2011

City of Milwaukie Planning Department

Overview

The purpose of this meeting was to explore options for new multi-family development and design standards and gather feedback from developers and designers in the Milwaukie area.

Attendees

The following PMT members attended the meeting.

- Susan Shanks, City of Milwaukie Senior Planner
- Marcy McInelly, Urbsworks President
- Serah Breakstone, Angelo Planning Group
- Attendees: Brett Schulz (architect), David Burdick (developer), Sara Garrett (Motive Space director), Paul Klein (architect), Stephen McMurtry (Northwest Housing Alternatives), Gene Dieringer (developer), Pat Dieringer (developer), Mary Bradshaw (Housing Authority of Clackamas County).

Summary

- Susan provided an overview of the Residential Development Standards project and explained the meeting's focus on multi-family development and design standards.
- Marcy gave an overview of national trends in household size, and impacts on the housing market of the current recession, the baby boomer generation, and immigrants and their families.
- Marcy also provided a quick explanation of the prototypes for multi-family development in Milwaukie. She explained that the focus of this discussion was on infill development and compatibility solutions such as requiring transitions, limiting scale, using gradients, or a combination of all these elements.
- The stakeholders were asked to consider the question: How can Milwaukie achieve the city's goals for compatibility without dissuading development of multi-family housing? They were asked to share what kinds of standards help them build good projects and what kinds of standards prevent or make it difficult for them to build good projects based on their experience developing multi-family housing.

The following is a summary of stakeholder responses to the above question.



- Design standards should not be too prescriptive and should allow flexibility. It is better to include goal or intent statements so the developer understands what the city is trying to achieve. Overly prescriptive standards tend to filter out both bad and good design (especially more modern design) and result in development that is mediocre.
- The city should have an avenue for a developer to demonstrate better design that is not technically in compliance with standards, without having to go through a variance or other cumbersome process.
- The code should not preclude development of sustainable structures at higher densities. For example, setbacks and parking requirements consume land that could be used for high-quality, dense design. Some street-facing façade requirements preclude the development of buildings that are designed with a south-facing solar access orientation and/or with an inward-facing courtyard.
- Lot size will be an important factor to consider if the city wants to encourage a greater variety of multifamily development. The city is evaluating revisions to existing lot size standards as part of this project. The city is not amending the density standards.
- The master planning process is useful for multifamily development because it allows flexibility and incorporates more public involvement.
- The city should be aware of other programs and certifications (LEED, LEED ND, etc) when writing new code so that conflicts are not created that might preclude these types of green certifications, as they are often required by the funders of affordable housing projects.
- Clark County code allows the option of meeting their design standards or meeting the LEED Living Building Challenge instead. The city could consider this approach for the new code.
- Some level of design standards is necessary. Clear and objective standards are desirable. Allow flexibility through an alternative design review process.
- Has the city considered allowing more flexibility between standards to achieve compatibility? For example, allowing more height in exchange for less lot coverage or allowing more lot coverage in exchange for less height.
- The code should create incentives for good multifamily design and minimize disincentives. The zoning code should not create conflicts with the building code.
- Higher density does not necessarily equate to unlivable communities, which is sometimes the perception. A city can achieve both with good design standards. It's also helpful when the community can visualize the design standards at higher densities - the city should consider using illustrations and graphics to help people understand the intent of the standards.
- “Cookie cutter” developments should be avoided. The challenge is that some repetition makes housing affordable and too much makes it monotonous. Over time, uniform development becomes less uniform as homeowners personalize their houses. However, this transformation takes a long time.
- Lot consolidation and density averaging can be useful for larger multifamily developments. Lot division standards should allow for lots to front on a common green or courtyard, not just on a public street.
- Access to staff and their involvement is very helpful, especially when going through an alternative design process. Staff discretion is also important. Common sense should take precedence over specific code language.
- Coordination between the planning department and other departments (transportation, building, fire safety) is important to ensure the permitting process is smooth and efficient for the developer.
- The code should encourage re-use of existing housing stock whenever possible. Allowing ADU development can help achieve that goal.