

**DATE:** 9 March 2021

**TO:** Planning & Zoning Commission

**FROM:** Jim Brown, Director, CP&D

**SUBJECT:** Comprehensive Plan Update – Discussion Guide and Memo on the Revised Draft Land Use Chapter

---

## **PURPOSE**

We appreciate the commission's careful review and hours of discussion over now six meetings on the Comprehensive Plan Land Use chapters (9 March 2021 will be the seventh). You will see in the memo an attempt to facilitate a discussion so that at its conclusion, staff can receive the go-ahead to advance the working draft to the final draft/layout phase. I propose that the review discussion be organized around these themes:

- *Housing density and retaining predominant single-family detached character:*
  - Suggestions of new two-family being inserted into single-family areas has been scaled back. Does this revised version of the draft reflect the right balance?
  
- *Expanding commercial areas:*
  - Based on the edits and comments in the current version of the draft, what is your conclusion on how to describe and illustrate the right mix of commercial, particularly new commercial?
  - Where would new commercial – including ground-floor commercial – be practical, and where won't it be?

## **BACKGROUND**

Following discussions of the draft land use chapter last summer and last October, staff presented a full draft chapter for review on 26 January 2021. The Planning & Zoning Commission (P&Z) devoted one meeting each in January and February to review of the draft chapter. Some progress was made on consensus, but clarification on some issues needs to be made, and some issues have not been thoroughly addressed. For the most part, what follows approaches the issues as themes, rather than from the geography of distinct areas of the city.

## **THEME: HOUSING DENSITY AND RETAINING PREDOMINANTLY SINGLE-FAMILY DETACHED CHARACTER**

### Background on Theme

During the public outreach process, people expressed varying and strong opinions on topics related to density, housing, and the character of the city. Although few called for an outright increase in population or an increase in housing units, they advocated for changes that would bring increases to both. In some instances, people did express a desire to see more dwelling units in specific, generally condensed areas (higher densities), but such desires were mostly confined to areas where such increases would serve to bolster economic activity, increase patronage at restaurants and businesses, and entice other businesses to establish in those areas. It is an axiom that “development follows rooftops,” i.e. increased residential densities are necessary to support a variety of retail and service uses. Several commenters thought increases in residential density around the Dee Road Metra station area, Uptown, or—to a lesser extent—South Park and Higgins Road, would help improve the economic climate of the community and lead to a wider range of retail, restaurant and service options for residents. A few people wanted to see more housing options, or at least less expensive housing options, near the hospital, so that a jobs-housing connection with the area’s largest employer could be improved, i.e. employees of the hospital could reside close to where they work.

For the most part, however, respondents to the public input efforts wanted to increase options for various demographic categories: housing options at lower price points so their young adult children, young families, or others on relatively modest incomes (perhaps hospital workers, police) could reside in Park Ridge; or, more options, i.e. less expensive options, for seniors and others desiring to downsize but remain in town. A few wanted more starter homes—“ranch-style homes” as some put it. As some commissioners intimated during the discussion on 9 February, this was a desire for the *preservation* of existing housing stock, not the *creation* of new starter homes. Such desires are not unique to Park Ridge: the lamenting of the destruction of smaller “starter” homes and their replacement with larger, much more expensive homes (“teardowns”) has been common throughout the region for over two decades. However, in the case of our respondents it was unclear whether they simply wanted to retain a stock of starter homes for economic reasons, or whether they were also lamenting the loss of neighborhood charm or character. Although there were many comments about increasing the range of housing options, increasing more affordable options, or placing more units near specific economic or transportation nodes, one sentiment remained clear: Park Ridge should remain a community of primarily single-family neighborhoods; or, if you prefer, a community of single-family homes. The future land use chapter, both maps and text, are intended to capture this. Commissioner attempts to fortify the language have been incorporated in the latest version.

Nonetheless, the P&Z has wrestled with the issues of density, housing type, location, and how to retain that single-family character. How much of an increase is desirable, and where are increases appropriate? The consensus was for “a light touch.” That phrase wasn’t defined but based on the discussions at the January and February P&Z meetings, “light touch” seemed to refer to several manifestations related to density:

- Limited physical scale of new residential projects (bulk, height, and often done in conjunction with a commercial component)
- Limited number of new dwelling units, but nonetheless, a small amount of net increase
- Limited range of locations where an increase would be acceptable

While the comprehensive plan is separate from zoning, it does *inform* zoning, so it’s good to have our eyes on the fundamentals of the zoning map and text as we think about how we might implement the land use vision. The city has an R-3 zoning district, which is “intended to create a moderate density environment of single-family homes, two-family dwellings and multi-family dwellings, including townhomes.” Areas currently zoned R-3 remain designated for two-family on the land use maps, e.g. along Northwest Highway. These are not areas that, in an attempt to implement the comprehensive plan, we want to “downzone.” Doing so would have troublesome consequences.

However, it is obvious from the last two P&Z meetings that commissioners support the insertion of two-unit dwellings into single-family neighborhoods only in very limited ways and very limited locations. By and large, the idea is to keep single-family detached neighborhoods as single-family detached. Therefore, this theme has been scaled back in the revised version for review on 9 March. Some references to two-family dwellings have been deleted from the current draft and/or deleted from the future land use map. To summarize:

- Two-family immediately south of Uptown eliminated on land use map; two-family adjacent to Uptown in vicinity of Grant Place retained on map.
- Two-family east of hospital eliminated on land use map and text deleted (see below).

The following areas have been retained as having the potential for (or remaining as) two-family:

- Two-family along NW Highway (areas are already zoned R-3);
- Two-family in vicinity of Dee Road Metra station; and
- Two-family along Cumberland and in vicinity of Mariano’s supermarket

### Target Area – East of Lutheran General Hospital – Deleted

There was much discussion regarding the target area “East of Lutheran General Hospital.” Two issues arose: (1) the preservation of the existing multi-family housing, especially north of Carol Street; and (2) the need for increased density and the attendant insertion of two-family housing into the single-family residential areas. Despite some public comment, I do not believe there is a need to increase density in the hospital area to satisfy demand for hospital workers. Within Park Ridge in the immediate vicinity, there are numerous multi-family buildings, and across the boundaries into other communities the nearby housing is almost exclusively multifamily.

The original draft text of the chapter included recommendations that the multifamily area north of Carol should be “preserved.” Some P&Z members countered with the idea that the text and map should instead indicate that the city would be open to this existing multifamily housing being converted into single-family housing. Under almost no circumstances would a property owner or developer desire to forego the existing multi-family zoning and construct less intensive uses. Zoning and development requests are always for an increase in intensity and density. Moreover, our zoning regulations are cumulative: the multifamily districts like R-3 and R-4 already allow single-family so if the property owner did indeed want to demolish existing multifamily and replace with single-family, that would be as-of-right redevelopment.

Based on the above, we see no need for continued debate or for the inclusion of this target area in the draft. “East of Lutheran General Hospital” has been deleted from the text and maps. The existing multifamily areas should remain denoted as such on the future land use map, and the single family residential should be preserved as such and so denoted on the future land use map.

Additionally, revisions under “Guiding Principles” have been made to emphasize the preservation of single-family residential.

### **THEME: EXPANDING COMMERCIAL AREAS**

Discussions over the aforementioned P&Z meetings drifted in and out of another theme: expanding commercial areas to bolster the tax base. There were several suggestions that areas currently zoned or used for multi-family should be designated for mixed-use, i.e. commercial-residential, development.

However, CP&D has not fielded requests to convert residential zoning or residential uses into commercial space. Rather, development inquires to City staff have been for: (1) currently

vacant commercial space, of which we have a an inventory, but not always in the size, shape or location desired by the inquirer; or (2) vacant or under-utilized space, regardless of current zoning, that might be appropriate for multi-family uses.

The leasing of commercial space remains tough, particularly in mixed-use buildings. For example, at 400 Talcott and 600 Talcott, two recent mixed-use buildings that received occupancy certificates in 2020, the commercial space is virtually all empty (except for a commercial-educational use in one of the buildings). You can point to COVID-19 as a reason for lack of interest, but both developers were marketing the commercial space long before COVID hit. Yes, filling commercial space in mixed-use buildings is tough: There is only so much demand for coffee shops, small boutique retail, cellular network stores and the like. Further, a staple of the small neighborhood commercial space—dry cleaners—is disappearing. Often the spaces in such buildings do not lend themselves to full-service restaurants.

The trend in the region—and in Park Ridge—has been to go from exclusively commercial to limited commercial with residential on top, or from commercial or industrial land uses to strictly residential uses. In Park Ridge think of: former one-story auto repair use (commercial) becomes 400 Talcott; former bank becomes 600 Talcott; former hobby shop becomes the Fairview apartments (with commercial remaining on ground floor). The idea that we are going to encourage swapping out existing multi-family areas for mixed-use is not realistic.

The city still has under-utilized commercial land uses that could be redeveloped as commercial or mixed-use and thus bolster the tax base. Additionally, the concept of development air rights over municipal parking lots—that currently do not generate any property tax revenue—is a recommendation in the draft land use chapter.

**Based on the above, staff has marked existing multi-family areas near the Uptown and in the other target areas as multifamily on the future land use maps.**

#### **THEME: SPECIAL USE APPROVAL AND UPTOWN**

From time to time I hear suggestions that portions of the Uptown—generally Main and Prospect north of the tracks—should be an “entertainment district” and that the City should encourage this. Actually, the Zoning Ordinance already indicates the preference for an entertainment district in the Uptown Core:

“The U-Core Sub-District is intended to preserve buildings located within the Central Business District that are of architectural significance, and ensure the new development is compatible with and maintains the historical character of the core.

The U-Core Sub-District is characterized by a mix of small retail and service uses within a mixed-use pedestrian-oriented environment. Retail, restaurant and entertainment uses shall be located along the ground floor, with personal service, office and residential above.”

The issue in this U-Core district has been a mismatch between this sub-district purpose statement—from the zoning ordinance—and the actual table of permitted and special uses found in the very same ordinance. The vision of the purpose statement is for personal services and offices *above the ground floor*, yet the table of uses allows such establishments on the ground-floor as special uses. So we should have a recommendation in the comprehensive plan to align both sections of the zoning ordinance. Therefore, our recommendation in the draft chapter as now revised and submitted for review is to more narrowly define this entertainment area *and* to recommend the zoning ordinance be amended to align with this vision of personal services and offices above the ground floor only. See text change in the revised draft chapter. We think it captures what is needed and what the P&Z was driving at.

#### **THEME: OFFICE/FLEX LAND USE CATEGORY**

Although it barely surfaced in the aforementioned two P&Z discussions on the draft chapter, I would like to call attention to the “office/flex” land use category. There is nothing inherently wrong with this idea, but I just want to call out that the City already allows logistics, warehousing and distribution uses in its B-3 zoning. These category aims to expand such uses to areas that are zoned office. So the P&Z should examine this and decide if such an expansion of areas for the logistics/warehousing/distribution is worthy of a separate land use category in text and on the map. My own opinion is that while there is certainly a regional need for such uses, locally the city gets few benefits from having them here. My own experience in dealing with logistics and distribution uses in other communities has been almost entirely negative.

#### **ATTACHED**

- **A table identifying changes** between the first draft and the current version. Page numbers are associated with the *full* markup version.
- **Revised draft with *full* markup** (i.e. full redline and comments). Unresolved comments and issues remain inserted in the document
- **Revised draft with *no* markup**. For readability’s sake, changes that had been suggested as redline are incorporated but are not underlined and shown. Comments are removed. Page numbers in this document differ from the full markup.

**DRAFT LAND USE CHAPTER CHANGES MADE: From Version for review at 26 January/9 February P&Z to 9 March P&Z**

*Map changes*

<b>PG</b>	<b>CHANGE</b>	<b>RATIONALE</b>
10	<b>Neighborhood Map</b> – Added neighborhoods	Requested by Mills
30	<b>Uptown Future Land Use Map:</b> - Corrected an imprecise multifamily label at 112-200 Meacham - Removed it as a Target Development Property - Reduced the amount of land illustrated with single- or two-family by eliminating along Courtland, Fairview, Garden, and Prairie	Outcome of public comment from 1/26 meeting; Director Brown suggested changes
38	<b>Dee Road Future Land Use Map:</b> - Corrected an omission for Target Development Property at 819 Busse; established an underlying land use that is not vacant or institutional - Changed the hatched orange-yellow to solid orange along NW Hwy, between Fortuna and Haberton, and segments of Oakton	-Corrects error/omission: nothing should be shown as vacant -Illustrates NW Hwy corridor
46	<b>Higgins Future Land Use Map:</b> - Solid red commercial at corners of Canfield & Higgins, as well as Cumberland and Higgins; changed from mixed-use symbol	-Corrects errors/omission: vacancy should not be shown -Two corner properties are unlikely to be mixed use, so changed to commercial
53	<b>South Park Future Land Use Map:</b> - Turned off parcel lines - Filled in vacancies - Marked 425 Devon as Target Development Property	Corrects error/omission (i.e. vacancies); responded to Argionis/Dallmeyer comment in draft
65	<b>Northwest by Northwest Future Land Use Map</b> - Corrected an error: Corridor intended to be shown in solid orange.	Corrects error/omission

**STILL TO COME:**

- Recoding Target Area Existing Land Use Maps with the plan’s defined categories – Pages 29, 38, 46, 52, 61, 64
- Citywide Future Land Use Map (will flow from the Target Area maps, once finalized) – Page 68

**DRAFT LAND USE CHAPTER CHANGES MADE: From Version for review at 26 January/9 February P&Z to 9 March P&Z**

*Text changes*

<b>I. GUIDING PRINCIPLES</b>		
<b>PG</b>	<b>CHANGE</b>	<b>RATIONALE</b>
1-2	Accepted redline deletions/insertions on Guiding Principles, Points C., D., F.	Deleted comments for readability – no longer relevant
2	Accepted redline deletions/insertions to Vision	
<b>II. INTRODUCTION – NO CHANGES MADE</b>		
<b>III. PUBLIC INPUT</b>		
5	Removed Mills comment	It seemed the special use/Uptown discussion reached a consensus on 2/9.
<b>IV. EXISTING CONDITIONS</b>		
6-7	Wordsmithing: Deletions and small additions	Director Brown changes
10	Made additions to Neighborhood Map	Comm. Mills comment
14	Accepted simple deletions/insertions and removed various comments	Questions from commissioners answered; corrections made/suggestions addressed
<b>V. FUTURE LAND USE MAPS AND TARGET AREAS</b>		
16	Accepted simple deletions/insertions and removed various comments; Removed East of Hospital Target Area from list	-Suggestions from commissioners addressed -Director Brown changes
17-18-19-20	Land Use Category Table: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accepted various deletions/insertions in Single-Family</li> <li>- Under Two-Family, reworded the explanation for what “solid orange” means. The change is still tracked (i.e. not accepted).</li> <li>- Accepted various deletions/insertions in Commercial</li> </ul>	Better explanation and clear identification of where solid orange appears (only on NW Highway corridor)
21	-Removed 112-200 Meacham (Uptown) as a Target Development Property -inserted 425 Devon	Commissioner comments and Director Brown suggestion

**DRAFT LAND USE CHAPTER CHANGES MADE: From Version for review at 26 January/9 February P&Z to 9 March P&Z**

<b>UPTOWN</b>		
22-24	Accepted simple deletions/insertions	Commissioner changes
25	Removed comment about underutilized parking	Seemed to be resolved from 2/9 P&Z discussion
26	Changed "Character" to "Form"	Comm. Mills request: Changed on all target areas where there is a "character" subhed under existing conditions
27	Rejected the changes that remove Recommendation No. 1 (i.e. entertainment subdistrict, less special uses)  Re-inserted the recommendation into the draft, re-written (tracked).	P&Z consensus at 1/26 and 2/9 meeting; Director Brown wrote proposed new wording.
27	Added more to the recommendation on short-term (aka pop-up) retail. Changes tracked. There is some mixed opinion between Carlisle and Brown on the viability of this.	Chair Argionis request
27-28	Accepted various redline changes and removed corresponding comments	Commissioner suggestions
28	Retained the tracked change/proposed deletion for "Preserve multifamily." See comment in draft. While this "preserve" goal could be removed, the existing and future land use maps show a good amount of multifamily on the periphery of/leading into Uptown.  Deleted the "build up" strategy under the "...mixed-use..." recommendation.	Attempting to respond to commissioner input; Carlisle comment; Director Brown suggestion and comment
<b>DEE STATION AREA</b>		
31-32	Accepted simple deletions/insertions and removed various comments;	Suggestions from commissioners addressed

**DRAFT LAND USE CHAPTER CHANGES MADE: From Version for review at 26 January/9 February P&Z to 9 March P&Z**

35-36	Accepted simple deletions/insertions	Suggestions from commissioners addressed
<b>HIGGINS</b>		
40	Accepted deletions/insertions, with some additional suggested wordsmithing by Carlisle and Brown (tracked)	Chair Argionis tracked changes and 2/9 P&Z consensus about “emphasizing commercial.”
42	Accepted deletions/insertions, with some additional suggested wordsmithing by Carlisle (tracked)	Chair Argionis tracked changes and 2/9 P&Z consensus about “emphasizing commercial.”
44-45	Accepted deletions/insertions, with some additional suggested wordsmithing by Carlisle and Brown (tracked)	Chair Argionis tracked changes and 2/9 P&Z consensus about “emphasizing commercial.”
<b>SOUTH PARK</b>		
48-49	Accepted deletions/insertions, with some additional information and wordsmithing by Carlisle and Brown (tracked)	Chair Argionis tracked changes
50	Added photo of Spanish house	Chair Argionis suggestion
51	Accepted some – but not all – insertions and deletions.  Should re-visit and discuss further the idea to encourage existing multifamily on the periphery to become mixed-use  Deleted the parking recommendation entirely. Upon further review, this is probably a strategy involving <i>on-street</i> parking, more suited to the Transportation chapter – where it is discussed already – than the Land Use chapter.	Chair Argionis suggestions, Director Brown comments
<b>EAST OF THE HOSPITAL – Tracked changes show entire section <del>deleted</del> (Pages 54-57); Comm. Korovilas comments added on Pages 54-55.</b>		

**DRAFT LAND USE CHAPTER CHANGES MADE: From Version for review at 26 January/9 February P&Z to 9 March P&Z**

<b><i>DEMPSTER + UNINCORPORATED</i></b>		
58-60	Accepted small line edits	Chair Argionis and Comm. Dallmeyer
<b><i>NORTHWEST BY NORTHWEST</i></b> – NW Highway corridor in far NW part of the city		
63-64	Accepted a few small line edits, but most tracked changes and comments have been retained.	Director Brown comments inserted
<b>VI. OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS</b>		
66-67	Accepted changes; re-organizing the bullet list slightly; inserted some text to try to address commissioner comments, particularly the consensus about emphasizing commercial.	-Commissioner consensus from 2/9; Chair Argionis and Comm. Hutchinson comments; Director Brown comments inserted.
<b>VII. IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX – STILL TO COME, IS LARGELY A LIST OF ZONING/DEVELOPMENT RULES TO STUDY OR AMEND</b>		