

MEETING SUMMARY | Housing Subcommittee Committee Meeting 4

April 25, 2019

The following is a summary of the fourth meeting of the Housing Subcommittee for Tuscaloosa's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code Update process. Attached to this summary are the meeting attendance sheet, agenda, and additional documents.

Welcome

During the welcome, Bill Wright volunteered to serve as the subcommittee's representative for a report to the Tuscaloosa City Council's Public Projects Committee regarding Student Housing and the multifamily moratorium.

Moratorium Update

Staff discussed the multifamily housing moratorium and its evolution since November 2018. Staff also reviewed the discussion topics of presentations for the City Council's Public Projects Committee since January 15, 2019.

Big Questions and Visual Preferences

Subcommittee members were given a large Big Questions worksheet to be completed and turned in at the end of the meeting. The back of the worksheet featured a map of the city so that the members could define the UAN and "Box."

Staff reviewed the Big Questions and asked that the members keep the questions in mind while reviewing the visual preference survey. While looking at the images, the members were asked to also think about density, design, character, and sub-grade parking.

Slides with different development were shown, and the subcommittee members were asked to answer the question, "What is it?" about each unidentified multifamily development. An aerial image followed, showing the number of beds, acreage, number of units, and whether there was sub-grade parking or not. The subcommittee members were asked to take notes about things they liked and disliked. After the images were reviewed, a handout was provided showing the beds per acre ratio for each development shown, ranked from lowest to highest density.

Mr. Rumsey asked if the architectural requirements put into code several years ago needed to be revisited.

Ms. Fortenberry said she liked the appearance of 2700 Capitol Park and Downtown Rock Point. Mr. Corder said that the city should not always require 100% brick facades – Ms. Coley agreed that it can look institutional. The subcommittee members debated whether “taste” can be legislated, noting that standards can be implemented that have been accepted by consensus. It was also noted that New Orleans has a consistent type of character to it that makes it an attractive destination for people to visit. Mr. Leopard pointed out that the UA campus has a very consistent feel and look that makes it attractive to students – consider doing that in the community.

Big Questions and Visual Preferences: Geography Themes and Zoning

Staff discussed the history of the University Area Neighborhood (UAN), dating back to 2004 when the downtown area was not as active as it is today. The intent at the time had been to center activity around the campus and stadium. Staff asked the subcommittee to think about whether it is still a “neighborhood” or if it needed a different name – does it need to be redefined, renamed, or redrawn?

Staff also discussed the number of services and activities in defined walk and drive times from Publix on campus, Steel City Pops downtown, and Shoppes at Legacy Park. Images from ArcGIS Business Analyst were used to show how accessible the commercial developments had become and what is within a reasonable distance for providing services to the campus area.

Staff discussed “the Box” and asked whether it needed to be retained for future discussions about the area.

The last Big Question about geography themes and zoning dealt with commercial zoning west of the stadium. Staff reviewed the 2004 UAN plan’s recommendations and showed what the commercial zoning was today. Mr. Corder said that he believed opportunities do exist – possibly along Frank Thomas. Mr. Wright noted that the PZC had wanted The Hub to incorporate commercial space and suggested that the side streets off of University and Bryant be considered.

The members discussed historic commercial development, especially that near the historic districts. Grocery stores or gourmet food stores would garner support next to the historic districts as long as they were limited in size/occupancy.

Committee members discussed the definition of downtown and what different boundaries might look like. Some expressed a desire to keep them as two distinct areas. The idea of expanding into the area south of University Blvd. and west of Lurleen B. Wallace might be a good place to attract young professionals.

Big Questions and Visual Preferences: Density

Staff put the 6 Big Questions about density on the screen and asked the members for feedback.

Ms. Coley said that 4-5 bedroom units need to be able to convert to alternative housing without a major expense; Mr. Rumsey agreed, saying many developers are selling their properties shortly after finishing them. Mr. Madison countered, saying that housing close to campus would likely always be student housing. A member suggested that we should allow a higher density downtown since property is so scarce and values are high. Mr. Leopard said that inside the Box, 4-5 bedroom units make sense; outside of the Box, community character should be maintained.

One member suggested that the box needs to shrink down from the current boundaries if we allow 4-5 unit apartments to continue in the area. It was suggested that the Box remain special with high property values to encourage density as long as the infrastructure can support it.

The committee discussed bonus height and whether the ability to achieve greater density through the bonus height provision and sub-grade parking was driving land values because they allow for more units to be built.

Big Questions and Visual Preferences: Safety

Ms. Coley asked if storm shelters could be considered in the safety requirements. Mr. Leopard said that lighting and CPTED standards should be required. Mr. Madison asked why we would not impose safety standards on all housing developments of large sizes – safety standards should not only apply to student housing.

Next Steps

The subcommittee wanted more time to respond to the big questions and to review the images. Staff will send around the Big Questions worksheet so that the members can respond via email. The target date for update to the Council's Public Projects Committee will be May 14.

The Council will review the same presentation and the Big Questions at their April 30 meeting. All the feedback will be compiled for Bill Wight to share with Council on May 14.

Public Comment

Warner Johnson:

1. We need commercial space near students; downtown is an entertainment district and not true commercial space. Downtown also does not work for office space due to parking constraints and handicapped accessibility. We need more speculative office space in Tuscaloosa.

Janine McGee:

1. Individual leases for bedrooms seems to be here to stay, but it is still done traditionally as well. The leases available by the entire apartment are chosen just as equally. Individual leases (by the bedroom) are a lower risk for the renter, but parents and students are still demanding that it be both ways.