



memo

to James Cleavenger, Oakridge City Administrator
Rick Zylstra, City of Oakridge
Laura Buhl, DLCD

from Darci Rudzinski, AICP and Emma-Quin Smith, MIG | APG

re Oakridge Code Evaluation & Update – Stakeholder Interview Summary

date November 28, 2022

Introduction

The City seeks to address several identified challenges through a planning project titled the Code Evaluation and Update for the City of Oakridge. The project will result in recommendations related to urban design, housing, and transportation policy and development requirements to help the City remove barriers to creating a vibrant community. The City requested and received a Transportation and Growth Management (TGM) Code Assistance grant to assist with this work. Key principles of the TGM Program¹ include, but are not limited to:

- Create communities composed of vibrant neighborhoods and lively centers linked by accessible transportation.
- Save public and private costs with compact land development patterns and well-connected transportation networks.
- Provide transportation choices to support communities with the balanced and interconnected transportation networks necessary for mobility, equity, and economic growth.

The Code Evaluation and Update Project objectives are consistent with these principles.

The purpose of this memo is to summarize findings of stakeholder interviews completed as part of Phase 1 of the Oakridge Code Evaluation and Update project. The purpose of the interviews was to gather input on the general direction and priorities for potential amendments to the Zoning and Land Division ordinances (code), and to help identify how code requirements can support the City's growth and development goals.

The interviews were facilitated by the project consultants, Darci Rudzinski and Emma-Quin Smith, and provided an opportunity to hear from participants about what is valued and important to preserve and improve in the City of Oakridge. The conversations highlighted and discussed initial observations from the revised Draft Evaluation Memorandum (November 14, 2022 draft) related to the City's policy and regulatory requirements. The interviews were centered around questions focusing on the following four topics:

1. Uptown (Old Town Design Subdistrict)

¹ To learn more about the program's mission, goals, and objectives, see <https://www.oregon.gov/lcd/TGM/Documents/mission-goals-objectives.pdf>.

2. Housing
3. Multimodal Transportation
4. Short Term Rentals (STRs)

Stakeholders also shared other issues of concern and areas of potential improvement.

The stakeholders invited to participate represent a subset of the population of Oakridge that included residents, property owners, business owners, and individuals who are involved in the community in various capacities. The interviews were conducted in three, approximately one-hour sessions with 14 stakeholders participating in total. The following project stakeholders participated:

- Sarah Altemus-Pope (via Zoom) – South Willamette Solutions
- Jason Nehmer – Willamette Mountain Mercantile
- Bev McCully – Upper Willamette Community Development Corporations
- Bob Obermeyer – Local Walking Individual
- Matt Burney – Artist/Business Owner/New Resident
- Bobby Whitney – Senior and Disabled Services
- Norine “Tink” Blankenship (via Zoom) – Unhoused community activist, retired RN
- Susan Hardy – School Board Representative
- Lynda Kamerrer – Parks and Community Services
- Robeart Chrisman - Public Works Maintenance Supervisor
- Priscilla Davidson - Realtor
- Rick Yarbrough & Lindsey Compton (joined via phone) – Property & Business Owner in the C-2 District
- Michelle Emmons – Oakridge/Westfir Chamber of Commerce

The following anonymized summary highlights key themes that emerged from the interview conversations.

Interview Topics & Summary

Key themes and findings that were revealed through the interviews are summarized in this section. In general, the stakeholders were enthusiastic about the goals and potential outcomes of the project and held relatively similar views on the types of code amendments that would advance the City’s goals for new development and redevelopment.

Uptown (Old Town Design Subdistrict)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How can the City provide more opportunities for multi-dwelling and middle housing (e.g., duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, cottage clusters)?
- Where should multifamily residential development be encouraged?
- Should standalone multifamily (development that does not include a commercial or office use) be allowed in the Central Commercial (C-2) zone?

- Would you support prohibiting new single family housing development in the Medium Density Residential (R-2), Central Commercial (C-2), or Highway Commercial (C-3) zones to allow that land to be reserved for other, potentially smaller, and more affordable, housing types?
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One of the most apparent interview takeaways was that the Old Town Design Subdistrict in the code was not recognized by the stakeholders. Informally and in other community contexts (e.g., economic development, community planning, etc.) the area is known as “Uptown.” Additionally, the stakeholders suggested removing the “Oakridge Frontier Style” architectural design standards from the code and requiring something simpler and more reflective of the modern Oakridge community. Facilitators noted that at this stage of the project we can explore different, more community-reflective design standards for Uptown. It is important to have design standards that are rightsized for the Uptown district in order to promote a safe, active, and attractive district.

Stakeholders identified several barriers to development in Uptown:

- Onerous design standards: Oakridge Frontier Style creates too many cost barriers for developers. Business owners want more flexibility to do what they feel will work best for their property and express their business’s brand.
- Lack of demand: not enough density in Uptown to support existing or new shops. Single dwelling housing in the central area of Uptown may not be appropriate for future development, multi dwelling residential infill on the periphery of Uptown may be a good solution to needed housing.
- Investment risk: large investors are not interested in developing here due to lack of design control, aging infrastructure, and lack of workforce.

Overall, the stakeholders were supportive of the removal of off-street parking minimums in Uptown. One stakeholder observed, “Oakridge is in a little valley and people are fighting over having a place to live, not a place to park.” Utilizing existing parking lots and on-street parking by adding new municipal signage to direct people to parking was suggested by another stakeholder to help more efficiently use the existing parking supply in Uptown.

Housing

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How can the City provide more opportunities for multi-dwelling and middle housing (e.g., duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, cottage clusters)?
 - Where should multifamily residential development be encouraged?
 - Should standalone multifamily (development that does not include a commercial or office use) be allowed in the Central Commercial (C-2) zone?
 - Would you support prohibiting new single family housing development in the Medium Density Residential (R-2), Central Commercial (C-2), or Highway Commercial (C-3) zones to allow that land to be reserved for other, potentially smaller and more affordable, housing types?
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Stakeholders noted that “homeownership feels out of reach for a lot of people in Oakridge” and were generally supportive of developing more affordable housing in Oakridge. “Plexes” (duplex, triplex, quadplex), cottage cluster housing, and second-story residential in Uptown were solutions suggested by

stakeholders to increase the stock of safe and attractive affordable housing. This project can help address some of these ideas through code amendments. Stakeholders identified the following housing needs in Oakridge:

- Senior housing
- Accessible housing
- Transitional housing for currently houseless community members
- Workforce housing, particularly housing for teachers

Cottage clusters, Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), or tiny homes were identified as housing types that could be good options for senior and transitional housing. According to stakeholders, current senior living apartments have long wait lists and lots of applicants.

Mobile home parks are a source of deeply affordable housing in Oakridge and there is concern about them being purchased and redeveloped. However, Oregon state laws carefully regulate how mobile home parks can be developed. Stakeholders noted that many current concerns with the safety and maintenance of mobile home parks are code compliance issues and could be solved with more code enforcement. It was acknowledged that enforcement could present an equity issue. One stakeholder noted that some mobile home parks are in prime locations for housing - close to services, commercial areas, and transit. Overall, stakeholders felt the community needs more information on mobile home parks and wants to take action on code enforcement. Facilitators noted that enforcement is outside the scope of this code audit project, but the project can provide more information and guide preliminary discussions on the topic.

Stakeholders also identified opportunities for partnerships to develop more affordable housing through Homes for Good and St. Vincent's. These conversations are also important to have as part of the concurrently running Housing Needs Analysis (HNA) project.

Multimodal Transportation

A goal of this project is to enhance connectivity for all modes of transportation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are your ideas related to how people can safely and efficiently access their homes, goods and services, parks, etc.?
- How could the City improve access and make it easier for bicyclists, pedestrians, and people who use mobility devices?
- How do you see vehicular and bicycle parking supporting residents, businesses, and travelers and visitors to the City?
- Are you familiar with the recent Transportation System Plan update and recommendations to reconfigure parking in Uptown? Do you have suggestions regarding parking needs in Uptown?

Stakeholders identified several opportunities to improve multimodal connectivity in Oakridge to make it safer and more convenient for people to walk, roll, and bike around the community. The main area of concern for stakeholders was bike and pedestrian safety along Highway 58. Stakeholders mentioned several recent fatalities that may have been prevented with safer crossings and connections for

pedestrians. Stakeholders acknowledged the contentious past of redesigning Highway 58, but repeatedly noted the great need for a bike path, continuous sidewalks, and safer crossings.

Another need identified by stakeholders is ADA accessible sidewalks with curb cuts and ramps, and smooth paving that doesn't pose a tripping hazard. Many residential streets lack sidewalks and have cracked or buckled pavement that creates tripping hazards for pedestrians. Cars parked on the shoulders of residential streets that lack sidewalks forces pedestrians to walk in the car travel lane and poses an additional safety concern.

In addition to the need for a bike path along Highway 58, stakeholders discussed the opportunity for more trail connections around town. The proposed trestle trail was discussed, as well as bike connections between Westfir and Oakridge. The need for safer connections to the school was also discussed.

Stakeholders supported removing off-street parking requirements in the Uptown district, as well as reviewing off-street parking requirements for housing. While stakeholders were generally in support of more bike parking in order to make the community more bikeable, some were concerned with pushing the cost of providing bike parking onto developers. One suggestion was to provide consolidated (centrally located) bike parking in the Uptown district that would be provided by the city.

Short Term Rentals (STRs)

As of October 2022, there are 35 listings on Airbnb within Oakridge city limits that are being used for temporary lodging or short-term rentals (STRs). Several more Airbnb listings are outside city limits, but considered part of the Oakridge community. These uses have not been identified as an immediate concern. However, the City can benefit from new and updated standards to help prepare for future challenges that the uses may present. Specifically, tourism growth in Oakridge could make preserving housing for residents a pressing issue. One of the key objectives of this project is to recommend amendments that will enable visitors to find lodging in walkable and bikeable areas, while at the same time recognizing affordable housing in those same locations.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Should short term rentals be allowed? In what parts of town should they be permitted?
 - How should the City regulate STRs?
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Several stakeholders currently own property within or just outside of Oakridge city limits that they rent out through Airbnb. While stakeholders acknowledged the potential for STRs to negatively impact the affordable housing stock, most agreed that STRs were an important component of the Oakridge economy. For some, they provide an additional source of income that helps homeowners afford to continue living in the community. Overall, stakeholders overwhelmingly supported allowing STRs in residential zones in Oakridge, and favored a low-barrier permitting system (that favors local property owner, if possible) to track STRs in the City.

Stakeholders expressed community concern for absentee property owners or transient visitors in short term rentals bringing strangers into the community. One stakeholder noted that providing locals priority to participate in the STR market would keep outside investors from purchasing property and their

drastically raising housing or rental costs. Local priority would also cut down on absentee property owners and houses (with out-of-town owners) sitting empty.

Stakeholders noted that STRs fill an important gap in the tourism economy. Hotels alone do not provide families with kids or pets a place to stay, a reportedly common demographic that visits Oakridge. One stakeholder suggested that STRs also have the potential to meet the need for tourism beds in the community; currently the supply does not meet the demand. ADUs rented as STRs could also be part of the solution for tourism needs. While there is a high need for housing in the community, the STR market is not currently viewed by stakeholders as a cause of that demand. Comments suggested that there are not enough STRs in the market to have an impact on housing supply - as one stakeholder said, "Oakridge isn't there yet."

Other Topics

Stakeholders were invited to share any additional thoughts on topics not covered in the interview questions. Resilience and green infrastructure were both topics raised during these conversations. With the recent wildfires and their impact on Oakridge top of mind, wildfire preparedness and community resilience will be important to incorporate into potential code amendments. Stakeholders suggested looking into resilient building standards or a program like Firewise for hardening the community against future fires.