

News

Bend councilors tackle development, planning changes

Also set May charter vote, weigh in on footbridge

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Posted: Feb 08, 2018 01:09 AM PST

Updated: Feb 08, 2018 01:09 AM PST

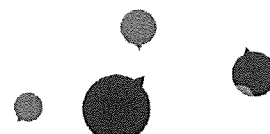
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City Council talks extensively on...

BEND, Ore. - Two maps to guide Bend development are not consistent with each other, causing development issues that was one of several topics city councilors discussed during a long meeting Wednesday that ended just before midnight.



Bend's comprehensive and zoning maps have been inconsistent for over 20 years. According to state law, they should match.

City staff presented the issues to city council at a work session Wednesday evening. The comprehensive plan is the controlling land use document for the city.

More than 2,600 acres of land, zoned for commercial, mixed, industrial, and residential use, need to be rezoned. Twelve percent of that is within the current city limits, the rest within the city's recently revised urban growth boundary.

Property owners who want to develop currently have to go through a zone-change process to align with the comprehensive plan. City staff says aligning with the maps will more clearly communicate what can be built and where.

It will also remove regulatory barriers and provide more land to build more affordable housing.

"The zoning map and zoning that's on those maps isn't what you have to build to," said city Planning Manager Colin Stephens. "It's the comprehensive plan that's the controlling document, so that's the plan we have to follow and we can't approve something that meets the zoning that's inconsistent with the zoning plan. So, that's why we want to bring all the zoning into conformance with the comprehensive plan. It makes it much easier for property owners to know what's going to be built and where."

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Councilors agreed to begin the rezoning process, but also will give property owners a chance to opt out. They also want the planning commission to craft a plan to gather extensive public input before the changes occur.

City planners also presented a long list of changes to Bend's development code. A big part of the change includes who has to add sidewalks. Up to now, property owners adding to a house or duplex, must build a sidewalk around the property and along the street, if another sidewalk is within 600 feet.

The code change will give them an option of paying a fee. The money will go into a special fund for future sidewalk construction or maintenance around the city.

Councilors were told by staff the fees likely won't add up to a substantial amount, but a majority of councilors said it's a better option than requiring a so-called "sidewalk to nowhere."

As for direct benefit, Councilor Barb Campbell put it this way: "I think we all benefit, whenever a child is not hit" by a car.

Other changes include accessory dwelling unit heights and sign code revisions. Portable signs could be allowed everywhere for up to 60 days a year. Signs that don't conform to current rules eventually will have to come down.

"A lot of code updates are to provide consistency and clarity," said Senior Planner Pauline Hardie. "It makes sure certain sections are consistent with each other."



Owners can choose to pay a fee instead of add a sidewalk if there are no adjacent sidewalks, no logical extension, or a big tree is in the way. The staff recommended a fee of \$8 a square foot, roughly midway between what a homeowner and the city would pay to put in a sidewalk.

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After going through proposed changes one by one, councilors voted 6-1 --with Nathan Boddie opposed -- for a first reading (initial approval) of the code changes, with a second reading and final vote to follow.

Councilors also discussed Bend's transportation system development charges, or SDCs. They are one-time fees paid by developers to help cover the cost of growth.

Bend has always kept transportation SDCs lower than a ceiling price of \$8,000, and 80 percent of SDC funds go to new growth. While no changes are happening immediately, staff proposed raising SDCs within existing cost projections, such as analyzing the ceiling price and raising the amount that is being charged.

Staff said this is due in part to rising construction costs, for both labor and material.

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Staff is currently modeling potential increases and outcomes and will have more information for councilors to review at their Feb. 21 meeting.

Councilors also formalized their earlier approval of proposed city charter changes that will be put before voters at the May 15 primary, including a directly elected mayor. Campbell proposed an "instant runoff" subsequent election, in case a large number of candidates means someone wins the post with less than a majority, but that move failed 5-2.

Mayor Casey Roats noted that the city does not have a "strong mayor" system -- the mayor is just "one of seven" who wields a gavel but has few added duties and little added authority.

On another matter, councilors voted 5-2 (with Campbell and Boddie opposed) to endorse a letter Mayor Pro-Tem Sally Russell will present at a Salem committee hearing Thursday opposing House Bill 4029, which would prohibit building a new bridge over the Deschutes in an area proposed for a pedestrian bridge by the Bend Parks and Recreation District.,

The letter says such decisions should be left to the local community,

and notes that the crossing has been on local government planning maps for some 30 years. Boddie said it was not an issue the city could "wade into." Roats noted that the Scenic Waterway Act doesn't prevent such a crossing, but adds administrative review requirements, as well as an environmental study of the impact.

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