

City of Ashton Minutes Planning and Zoning Commission

Thursday, April 17, 2025
7:00 p.m.

In Attendance: Rosie Owens, Trena Howell, Audrey Tibbitts and Dallas Hill.

Also, in Attendance: Administrator Aaron Denney, Deputy Clerk Jan Warnke, Assistant Morgan Lenz and zone change applicant Tyler Teske.

Chairman Owens opened the meeting at 7:01 pm. She announced that the first item would be to amend the agenda for the request for zone change. The agenda needs to add parcels 161 Pacific Avenue, Lots 7 - 10 on Block 25 and 51 N 5th St to 82 N 5th St on item # 3, Request for Zone Change.

1. Amend Agenda – Request for Zone Change, add 161 Pacific Avenue, Lots 7 – 10 on Block 25 and 51 N 5th St. ACTION ITEM

Commissioner Hill made a motion to amend the agenda as specified. Commissioner Tibbitts seconded the motion. The motion passed.

2. Approve Minutes from March 27, 2025: ACTION ITEM

Commissioner Owens made a motion to approve the minutes. Commissioner Howell seconded the motion. The motion passed.

3. Public Hearing – Request for Zone Change, 82 N 7th St, 161 Pacific Avenue, Lots 7 – 10 on Block 25 and 51 N 5th St.: ACTION ITEM

Chairman Owens, the hearing officer, began the hearing. The purpose of this hearing is so that the Commission may receive public comments and testimony concerning an amendment to the city of Ashton official zoning map at these locations, 51 N 5th St, 87 N 5th St., Lots 7-10 of Block 25 and 161 Pacific Avenue. She then asked Deputy Clerk Warnke if the hearing notice was published. Next, she asked the Commission if they had a conflict of interest. Commissioner Hill was the only commissioner who had a conflict due to him being one of the property owners.

Chairman Owens asked Administrator Denney to present his report on the proposed changes. Administrator Denney gave his report as follows. The proposed project sits between the transition from community core to lower density residential just north of Main Street, according to the code, lower density residential is to provide protection of neighborhoods, or protect neighborhoods of one- and two-family dwellings. Some of the parcels on the application are currently zoned as community core and some are zoned as lower density residential. The application is looking to rezone all the parcels to higher density. So again, some of them are currently community core and some are lower density. The application is to rezone all of them to higher density residential. After looking at the comprehensive plan, he doesn't see any issues with rezoning to higher density residential. He thinks, based on the comprehensive plan, this rezone would fit in with kind of transitioning from community core, providing some higher density and then moving to lower density residential. It is close to Main Street and is anywhere from zero to three-minute walk to Main, so it is close. It makes sense to have higher density there. The Comprehensive Plan also talks about the need for logical, complementary and predictable land use patterns. He thinks having that transition would make sense. Of course, zone changes don't have to follow the comprehensive plan exactly, but from what he was able to study, he thinks that it is in accordance with the comprehensive plan.

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He doesn't see any negative effects of any public services on the application. He is not worried about this being considered spot zoning, as it doesn't change the character of the surrounding neighborhood with it being so close to Main Street. The last thing that he mentioned, is that the application strongly supports the comprehensive plans goal, to quote, assure that new development is organized as neighborhoods as and is integrated with the existing neighborhoods, and to quote, facilitate redevelopment of existing developed land when appropriate, and encourage infill development on vacant or undeveloped land within the city which the applicant indicates what their plan is to do. He ended by asking the commission if they had any questions for him. There were none and the time was turned over to one of the applicants Tyler Teske.

Mr. Teske informed the commission that he owned the property at 87 N 5th St. and 51 N 5th St. The two properties are currently zoned community core, and he wants to change to a high density residential. He told the commission that there are old warehouses there where they store a few boats and things. It is not very much of use and the buildings are starting to fall. He owns multiple rentals in Ashton. He has a few one Bed, one bath apartments on Main Street, next to the flea market, and he owns a town home. Long term rentals are a big need in Ashton right now. He has had one short-term rental that he recently switched from a short-term rental to a long-term rental, just for the need in the area. When he posted that he was switching my vacation rental to a long-term rental, he had 30 applicants for that one rental. He knows there's a need for it. He thinks the problem with Ashton, is there is not very much developable land, not empty, lots. Most lots all have houses on them. For Ashton to be able to grow, we need people to move here. People need to be able to afford somewhere to live here. Right now, it is a hard time to buy a house with interest rates and things that way, so more people are moving towards rentals. With no rentals in this area, it makes it hard for people to move here and to work here. For example, he owns Dan's plumbing, and houses two of his own employees, just so they can be here and work for me. He has also spoken with a banker who said that his number one loan was for business owners buying property and housing to house their employees, just because it's hard to get people to live here in Ashton when there's nowhere to live. Business owners, including himself, have bought properties to help with employee housing, to keep employees here, to keep them happy, and to keep them close. If employers don't, their employees stay in Rexburg and then there's no point in driving to Ashton. By changing the zone to high density, he would be able to bring more people to a smaller space, where there's limited space in the area. He is not planning on building tall, big, giant apartment buildings. He handed the commission a sketch plan of what he was intending to do. Administrator Denney informed Mr. Teske that whatever he handed to the commission would become a public record. Mr. Teske was fine with it becoming a public record. He explained to the commission that he would like to build apartments with two beds, one bath and three beds, two baths that people are going to be able to afford. He feels keeping things affordable, a little smaller, but affordable is the best decision for him. He believes it's needed, and he can make good use of the space. He wants Ashton to stay how it is, but he also doesn't want Ashton to die. He wants to keep the younger generation coming back. He ended his presentation by saying that he feels that his addition to the area will fit in with the bigger buildings around the area and he thinks it's going to help with the needs of Ashton and just overall beautify the area.

Chairman Owens asked the commission if they had any questions for the applicant. The commission asked the applicant how many units each building would have and how many floors the apartments would be. Mr. Teske replied that for now he planned to start with one single level four-unit apartment building.

The next applicant to speak is Dallas Hill. He told the commission that the only issue that he wanted to address was his small triangle size lot at 161 Pacific Ave. He was concerned that changing the zone for his property also changed the setback allowance. With changing the zone from low density to high density, the setback changes from 15 feet to 20 feet. This would create sizable changes in the buildable area of the lot. He said that he wanted his comments on the record because of a conversation that he said he had with the prior administrator. He said that she had told him that due to the shape of his lot and how much the lot borders the road, that it would be a scenario where a variance could apply with keeping a 15-foot instead of a 20-foot setback. He stated that his comments at that time were for the record in the future to use a variance to use as most of the small lot as he can. As for the future, his plans are to have 2 units on the lot. Plans may change when the comprehensive plan gets updated. He feels that there is benefit in changing his property to high density with the caveat that he can

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ask for a variance. He said that if anyone in the room felt reluctant about granting a variance, then he would prefer the lot to be removed from the application.

Administrator Denney clarified to the commission that they shouldn't be considering a variance at any point. He then told the commission that when they make their decision, don't keep in mind anything about a variance. There is no promise of a variance or anything like that right now.

Mr. Hill uttered that apparently there's no promise but that is something that the commission may see him in the future about. He then stated that he thought that rezoning it to higher density residential will fit in with the future of Ashton.

The commission had no questions for Mr. Hill.

Chairman Ownes then stated that this is a reminder to all those present that the city request that comments address the changes being proposed to the city code. Each speaker will be given three minutes to speak and must state their full name and physical address. She called on Sheryl Hill who had signed up to testify for the zone change.

My name is Sheryl Hill, and my mailing address is PO Box 449, my residence is 308 Highland. She explained that she had given a lot of thought to this proposed zone change. She is very encouraged that there are people in Ashton like Tyler, Dallas and Chris Reinke who are willing to invest and we definitely need more housing. However, that's not a consideration when deciding whether to rezone. She is very supportive of what they're trying to do, and the real considerations are at 17.4 4.010 specification standards for zoning districts, and that provides the minimum lot size, minimum lot frontage, as Dallas mentioned. His lot may not be large enough to do what he wants to do, and this is where those specifications can be found. And that's really going to take some time to sit down and really go through this and think about it. She wanted to mention that the purpose of zoning is to keep various activities separate. She is concerned about the grain elevators. They're very noisy when they're drying grain. Ashton grew up around the railroad and around the grain elevators. The building that was torn down on the lot that Chris owns was a livery stable or horseshoeing place. The higher density residential zoning district provides a mix of housing types and densities but is protected from conflict with commercial and industrial uses. She feels that these lots can't be protected from industrial use because they are across the street. She is concerned about the chaff, the noise and the activity from the trucks. Perhaps those things can be addressed when an actual building application comes forward. It may be possible to do retaining walls, or something to give more privacy so that these are desirable places for people to live.

Next on the list was Ridge Maupin to testify neutral.

Ridge Maupin, 660 Butterfly Drive Idaho Falls. Ridge is the current owner of 74 N 5th, just across the street. He stated that he would like to change his testimony to being for it. As the previous owner that sold the lots to Chris Rinke, they're kind of an eyesore, and he is glad to see something change. He is also in the process of renovating and getting plans to redo the old parts store right next to the grain elevators. He wants to put a business and an apartment into his building, and he wants to move back to Ashton. He is very excited to see it change because for so long, it was a dumpy little area that was an eyesore that was a missed opportunity, so he is all for it. His only concern was parking. Being the landowner adjacent with a potential business going in, he worries about where everyone will park. Other than his one concern he is all for it and super excited to see Ashton get back on its feet.

There was no one else that wanted to testify so Chairman Owens asked applicant Teske if he wanted to give any rebuttal statements or to clarify anything. Mr. Teske already has parking on the property for other tenants that he has and he plans to have adequate parking for his new apartments as well. Applicant Hill added that all the applicants plan to develop within the code and comply with all the requirements. Commissioner Tibbitts asked Mr. Hill about already being able to have two units on his property what his concern was about the setback. Deputy Clerk Warnke reminded the commission that the hearing was about changing the zone and nothing else. Mr. Hill interjected and replied that as of now he can have two units on his lot, so he doesn't have to rezone to have two units. He is concerned that if Ashton re made their comprehensive plan, and in the future, the opportunity to put two dwellings on a city lot changed so that it was only able to do it. If your lot was X amount of square feet, then this lot may not be able to do it at that time. Some future changes could affect that. So, at this date, yes, but when he is ready to do it financially that today's laws may not apply to tomorrow. If they change to a higher density residential then that would pretty much lock in their ability to do it in the future.

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Chairman Owens closed the hearing and called for discussion from the commission. She informed the commission that they may offer changes to the proposal as the administrator and applicants presented it, but a decision is not required now. They can take up to sixty days to make their decision. Commissioner Howell acknowledged what Sheryl Hill said about the dust and odor around the granary. She frequently walks by that area and sees that the grain sits in the water. Those are things that need to be considered. There was no more discussion. Chairman Owens asked the commission if they were ready to vote on the hearing. Commissioner Tibbitts would like to wait for Commissioner Liebert to be present. Okay, so we would like to revisit this at the next meeting. Chairman Owens asked the commission if they would be ready to decide by the next meeting on May 15, 2025. She asked Administrator Denney if he would add the zone change discussion to the May 15, 2025, meeting and thanked everyone for coming to the hearing. Deputy Clerk Warnke told the commission that where Commissioner Liebert was not at the hearing, she would not be able to take part in the vote, therefore it would be only the three commissioners present at the hearing that could make the decision. Administrator Denney asked, if Commissioner Liebert is not able to participate, if they still wanted to wait to deliberate. The commission all agreed that they wanted more time to think about it.

4. Comprehensive Plan Discussion

a. Open House

Chairman Owens invited Commissioner Hill to rejoin the commission. Commissioner Hill thought the open house went well and he appreciated Great West Engineering (GWE) for doing all the posters and gathering the public comments. He asked Administrator Denney if he had received any response from GWE about the open house. Administrator Denney will email the commission on what GWE had just sent him. He told them that GWE sent a summary document, PDF of the public open house. It's going to be included in the appendix of the final comprehensive plan document. It just showed some pictures of the feedback that was received on the boards. There were 21 community members that attended. Some of the items that were noted on the boards with the dot stickers that were either indifferent or in disagreement or promoting sustainable agricultural programs and education goals and objectives should minimize city responsibility to provide various things for individuals, and we should limit fiscal practices or encourage fiscal practices. There are some questions about Ashton small town development and growth. Some of the comments that were made on the map board were keeping open areas, encouraging recreational options, like bike trails, Rails to Trails, encouraging affordable housing. I think that was specifically housing that people could afford, not necessarily government subsidized housing, but some transportation comments, limits on building height and density, which we already have. He wasn't sure exactly what that meant, but another person said they want to see more high density residential for more incoming properties, more parks. A few other comments in the comment box talked about minimizing urban sprawl, historic preservation and comments on commercial and residential allowed uses. Commissioner Hill stated that the previous administrator would have emailed that information out prior to the meeting so they could discuss the information at the meeting. The administrator replied that he had just received the email, so he had not had a chance to send it on to the commission. The administrator went on to say that he thought the open house went well and he thought it was a good turnout. The largest number of comments from the consultant's documents were made about making sure development didn't affect natural resources, maintaining a safe and well-designed community, supporting existing businesses, facilitating new opportunities, and ensuring that the community is designed for residents to age in place. GWE will take the feedback from the open house and start designing some actual policy recommendations in the comprehensive plan.

• Schedule next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on May 15, 2025

Minutes respectfully submitted by Deputy Clerk Jan Warnke