

Staff Report

STAFF REPORT ON INFILL DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS, INCLUDING POCKET NEIGHBORHOODS AND TOWNHOME DWELLING TYPE

June 11, 2024

BACKGROUND:

On March 21, 2023, a workshop was held regarding infill opportunities as an implementation measure of Ames Plan 2040. The workshop included a review of a wide range of aesthetic, orientation, and size issues related to infill housing diversity and compatibility. At that meeting, the City Council provided direction on specific issues and requested more information related to infill opportunities for neighborhoods across the City. Subsequently, City Council included implementation steps within the Planning and Housing Department Workplan to address housing priorities by:

- creating Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) standards for single-family home properties (completed)
- creating duplexes standards for all single-family zoning districts (completed)
- reviewing Redirection Areas to prioritize sub-area planning (completed)
- to consider use of surplus land for infill housing at Harrison and Welbeck (in progress)
- creating a new "townhome" building type for infill,
- researching "pocket neighborhood" , aka as cottage housing, standards for infill development of small, clustered housing around open space.

This report addresses the final two tasks with a discussion of a new Townhome Dwelling zoning standard and Pocket Neighborhoods as a PUD Overlay use.

OPTIONS:

POCKET NEIGHBORHOOD:

The Pocket Neighborhood concept was introduced in 1996 by Ross Chapin, an architect based in Washington State, to promote an alternative, smaller-scaled housing form that, through appropriate design, could exist within established neighborhoods, close to jobs and transportation. The concept appears to have niche market because of the design priorities that go along with the concept, but it can be a desirable development option.

Pocket neighborhoods are small clusters of cottage-style homes built around a shared common area. The defining element of the design is an orientation of all homes to a common open space. Housing clusters of four to twelve dwellings with minimal private lot area that front onto the shared common space is the defined ideal, which allows for more density, multiple owners benefiting from shared landscaping and open space treatments, and the small scale and layout encourage neighbors to socialize due to interactive space at the front of each home.

Due to the design intent of a pocket neighborhood of using open space to organize the development, it

will also have smaller home sizes and placement of parking on the perimeter of the development site. Staff included a site diagram example, a picture of a built project to help illustrate the intent, and some links to other examples as Attachment A.

Standard zoning does not accommodate Pocket Neighborhood design due to minimum lot sizes, street frontage, and setback requirements. **The best option to allow Pocket Neighborhood design within Ames is to modify our PUD Overlay ordinance to address unique qualities of a Pocket Neighborhood.** The PUD Overlay already allows for many of the traits needed for a successful Pocket Neighborhood.

If this option is pursued, Staff proposes that City Council initiate an amendment to the PUD Overlay to specifically identify a development type of a Pocket Neighborhood with design principles that address the following:

1. Home placement organized around a defined common open space, requirement for 10% of the site to be devoted to common open space focused on area at the front of the homes.
2. Use layers of landscaping, walkways, and building features, including small fencing to create the defined areas.
3. Private lot area is minimal around the home with requirement to abut the front common area.
4. Project design range of typically 4-12 dwelling units.
5. Density must be consistent with the underlying zoning district maximum, plus one unit. (*i.e. 7.26 units per acre in RL, plus 1 unit, a one-acre development site could have 8 homes*)
6. Allow a PUD Overlay for infill sites of less than 2 acres (*currently 2-acre minimum unless rezoned by City Council for predefined reasons*)
7. No minimum lot size or setbacks as already allowed within a PUD
8. Include front entry features, including porches or front patio areas, along the front common area.
9. Connect all homes to walkways leading to the street at the front of the home.
10. Allow for parking offsite from home and allow for up to 50 % of homes to provide only 1 parking space based upon smaller home areas.
11. Architectural and site design features applied at a fine grain that define the private space and architectural interest and privacy of the building design in response to the tight-knit layout.

TOWNHOME DWELLING TYPE:

The Zoning Ordinance currently has four basic dwelling classifications that relate to specific lot development standards and parking requirements. These include single family detached dwellings, single family attached dwellings (on their own lot with no dwelling above or below), two-family dwelling (two units on one lot), and apartments (3 or more attached dwellings all on one lot).

The term "townhome" is not in the Zoning Ordinance and used loosely to represent either single-family attached dwellings or apartments designed to have the appearance of a row of individual homes. **Creating a new Townhome Dwelling type will support infill options with defined design requirements and an allowance for reduced parking rates compared to apartments.**

The Townhome Dwelling type would be allowed on individual lots the same as single-family attached homes or as multiple units on a single lot. This means it could be a for sale development or rental development option for infill sites.

Staff believes a combination of features are needed to facilitate this new building type and to ensure compatibility as infill. Staff proposes the following as features to incorporate into a new

zoning text amendment.

1. For units with 3 or less bedrooms and a covered parking space, require only two parking spaces. Additional guest parking may be needed based upon site design.
2. Applies to only buildings with a maximum of five units, larger projects would have to meet regular single-family attached or apartment requirements.
3. Allow for setback reductions for units fronting along the street like row houses.
4. Require the end unit, if the building is perpendicular to the street, to have a front entry and windows to the street to avoid blank walls. (*previously discussed with Infill Workshop referencing Denver design issues with "slot homes"*)
5. Additional design criteria related to single family compatibility similar to duplex standards, if the building is in a single-family area.

Staff believes the best option is to move forward with defining this new building type as described above and to determine whether to allow it in all zoning districts or only in medium and high-density areas at the time of approval of the final design requirements. Staff does not believe a PUD Overlay is needed and the building can be allowed through a Site Development Plan Review.

STAFF COMMENTS:

Both of the described development types will add options for additional housing diversity. Pocket Neighborhoods are likely a niche development type, but it would seem to be desirable and marketable in Ames with the number of people interested in nature, greenspaces, environmental sustainability, and smaller houses.

Staff believes the Townhome Dwelling type will be a fairly common infill option for the planned Redirections Areas, particularly west and south of campus on individual lots that may currently have only one dwelling. The South Lincoln Mixed Use District has some existing examples that are architecturally similar to this concept, but these sites have more parking and were accessible from alleys. Staff believes it is important to reduce the parking requirement for this building type for it to succeed as a medium density infill strategy and to include required design characteristics similar to how the new duplex standards were created.

Staff recommends that City Council initiate the following two separate text amendments for additional housing diversity options within the City.

1. A motion to modify the PUD Overlay to allow infill development on sites less than two acres and to create a new Pocket Neighborhood option with the general characteristics listed above.
2. A second is a motion to create a new Townhome Dwelling type designed as an infill housing option with design standards and reduced parking when covered parking is provided and to determine which zoning districts to allow this new dwelling type before the final text amendment is approved.

If City Council initiates either or both of these recommendations, Planning Staff will begin drafting zoning text amendments for these changes this summer and proceed to the Planning and Zoning Commission for a recommendation and then return to City Council for approval of an ordinance. Staff does not anticipate any specific public outreach meetings to make these amendments.

ATTACHMENT(S):

Attachment A -Pocket or Cottage Neighborhood Examples