

# MINUTES of the Vernal City PLANNING COMMISSION

Vernal City Council Chambers - 374 East Main Street, Vernal, Utah

June 17, 2014

6:00 pm

**Members Present:** Mike Drechsel and Samantha Scott

**Members Excused:** Ken Latham and Kathleen Gray

**Alternates Present:** Adam Ray, Rory Taylor and Kimball Glazier

**Staff Present:** Allen Parker, Assistant City Manager; Corey Coleman, Building Official; and Gay Lee Jeffs, Becky Richards, Administrative Clerk.

**WELCOME AND DESIGNATION OF CHAIR AND MEMBERS:** Chair Mike Drechsel welcomed everyone present to the meeting and noted that this meeting is a work session to discuss updating the general plan. No decisions will be made at this meeting.

**WORK SESSION ON THE VERNAL CITY GENERAL PLAN:** Allen Parker apologized to the commission for the condition of the maps as the plotter printer is broken. Plan maps were put around the room for those in attendance to look at or to draw on if needed. There are a few things on the general plan that are outside of the City limits. It was done that way to mesh with the County's general plan. The annexation boundaries are shown in the general plan so others who wish to annex into the City will have the same rules and regulations as the County for any annexations in the future. This creates harmony between the County and the City without entities trying to play the County and City against each other. He suggested using the maps to help guide the Commission as to whether or not areas need to be rezoned or annexed into the City or continue to stay the way they are at this time.

Mr. Parker gave an example of a request from the City Council to look at the northwest corner of the hospital property. Currently, the steel building that sits on that lot is used as a welding shop. The property owner wants to continue using the building as commercial. An application was submitted to rezone the lot from a R-3 residential zone to C-2 commercial zone; however, the request was turned down due to the general plan not supporting the rezone. The Mayor has asked that this issue be addressed again; therefore, this will be an item on the agenda at the next regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting. The Planning Commission and City Council will hold public hearings to amend the general plan, as well as a second request to rezone this property. Mr. Parker noted, this is a hot spot area in the City.

Mr. Parker pointed out other hot spot areas including the corners of 500 South, 500 East and 500 West. The areas around the stop signs are becoming more and more concentrated, and the general plan is not consistent right now for future development. Mr. Parker explained that the dotted lines on the map are considered mixed use areas in the general plan. If someone comes in with a rezone request, these areas can be considered for rezone based on the merits. We allow multiple zones within those areas for the purpose of creating mixed uses between commercial, retail and residential at higher concentrations in the area. The problem that the City continues to

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discuss is the fact that these commercial areas shown in pink, follow partial boundaries. Rather than giving general guidance as to which direction the City might want to go in that area, if it crosses over the City can consider it and say, well, it is a transition area between both, medium density residential and let us say commercial, if you are on the transition line, you can consider the merits of it as a legislative action as a reasonable request. What is being proposed would be an appropriate transition activity between these two areas. If you have a more general plan like this, you can consider the way one area transitions and fades into the other rather than have hard lines that choose property boundaries.

Chair, Mike Drechsel pointed out that the only thing different from the current zoning map is the pink dotted lines that indicate the mixed use areas. The general plan discussion should be more broadly based, rather than just within the City limits for direction and guidance for people in the future. The City does not intend to annex any property. The Planning Commission is not tasked with that responsibility, especially in this type of meeting.

Mr. Parker suggested identifying the target areas and figuring out what the City wants to do with them. Specifically, the downtown area and the west end of town commercial areas. Mr. Parker suggested the Commission start thinking about some of these questions. Does the City want these areas to be surrounded by high density residential or mixed use areas? Does the City extend the commercial area further than what is indicated, such as some of the side streets?

Mr. Drechsel pointed out that the places that are the easiest to talk about are technically outside of the Vernal City boundaries. Looking at North Vernal Avenue, the general plan map shows a new commercial center being built. This is just barely outside the City boundaries. Also, the area by the University has seen a lot of development. The question might be how can the City encourage, project, and give guidance to people wanting to move forward with their development in that area, when part of it is legitimately outside the City boundaries and part of it is inside? Those two regions in particular need cooperation of the County if the City is going to look at drastic development.

Mr. Parker explained that the County was highly involved in the preparation of these 2010 documents. The County provided their general plan, and the City blended it seamlessly outside of the City's boundaries. If the City was to revise the general plan significantly outside the City limits, it would be nice to have the input of the County. It is important to note that what the City is telling the public with this general plan is, what the City will allow or not allow them to do if they petition for annexation. The County and City general plans do not have to be mirror images; however, it was done for the sake of harmony.

Rory Taylor mentioned that he would like the City and County general plans to mesh. Mr. Taylor stated that he has been thinking about the Basin energy bypass. There will be a bypass built at some time, whether now or in the future. Therefore, either, the County, State or Federal Government will need to come in and straighten out Highway 40 or build a bypass around Highway 40. Mr. Taylor stated that a bypass like that becomes a magnet for development.

Mr. Parker stated that most of the land surrounding the bypass is BLM land. Some of the land is SITLA, but most of it is BLM. You cannot build on BLM land. The approved route for the

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bypass is far south starting at the corner 20 miles just before you enter the twist and goes south through part of the mountain biking area and comes out just north of the ridge then crosses over 45 and goes up into the industrial area. Mountain bikers would like to move the bypass further south so it will not cut through their paths. Further south is an area out on McCoy flats designated by GDS Engineers years ago as the only viable area for a new airport. However, they were not able to expand the current airport and the FAA will not support relocating the airport. It is on hold indefinitely.

Kimball Glazier is concerned that the bypass will be detrimental to the downtown area. He suggested focusing on the downtown area and revitalizing that area around south Vernal Avenue and 500 South. These areas stand out. If something is not done to revitalize this area, it could decay. Mr. Glazier stated that maybe the City could give incentives to bring in new development.

Mr. Parker reminded everyone about the general plan concerning the area surrounding the recreation area and the different options available. He posed the question: Do we want to change the zoning to R-4 from the center of town down to the Vernal Avenue corridor to the Recreation Center that connects the downtown area to the Recreation Center with higher density housing? Mr. Parker noted that this plan is not what the City wants to see next year, but in the future.

Mr. Drechsel stated that the City needs to ask themselves what are the problems with alternative two. How does this not accomplish what Vernal might be like in a good way in 20 years? In looking at the central areas, the City has mixed use areas. The City also has commercial sections which are well established. Mr. Drechsel stated that he believes it is the most established commercial corridor in the Basin coming in from the end of town until you get to the more established shops on Main Street. He indicated that those areas do not change too much, but the areas around it could be impacted the most by a change to the general plan.

Corey Coleman asked if the new conference center, fairgrounds and hotel were zoned fairgrounds. Mr. Parker answered the fairground zone transitions to commercial to central commercial. Central commercial has no setbacks in the front and/or landscaping required. Mr. Parker stated that he feels it is zoned properly, but the general plan does not reflect what kind of development the City wants to see on the periphery. He asked, how does the City want to see the development flow out from the convention center? Mr. Drechsel added that he thinks the Commission should be more forward thinking as the process for the convention center is already underway. There might be someone that comes to Vernal in five years and takes a look at the general plan and find that it is consistent with what they would like to do. The City needs to focus on the areas that have not been touched by that yet. The property at 500 West and 500 South down to Main Street, is zoned to look like a million different things. That corridor is really a place where a general plan that was well thought out would try to unify this, so there was a cohesive idea for the 500 South corridor straight through to Naples and what it could look like in 15 years. Mr. Glazier stated that he thinks 500 South is one of the biggest areas to look at for the general plan. The cross sections at Vernal Avenue and 500 South and 500 East are not developed areas.

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Adam Ray asked if this will be set up so that if someone buys a piece of property, and they do not want to build a shopping center there, but office buildings, is it going to prohibit them from doing that? Maybe we should worry about making the roads wide enough, so they can handle anything that is going to go through there.

Mr. Parker stated that just east of the Northeastern Counseling building are established residences. The City needs to protect that to a certain extent by not designating that as commercial, because it has already established itself. Mr. Drechsel reminded the Commission that the City does not want to make too drastic of a change to the general plan to avoid undermining, a lot of people's property value. Mr. Parker gave different scenarios for property zoning around the Northeastern Counseling building and around the recreation center. Mr. Glazier added that he was not sure if some of the development around the recreation center was legal or not, but noted that the area is chaotic. Mr. Drechsel suggested the reason for the chaos in this area is because there was no general plan in the past to help guide and direct.

Mr. Parker commented that it is somewhat disrespectful when people make an investment in a property, and someone comes in and destroys what they have invested in. If a lot of money has been invested in a shopping center, the City needs to make sure that it is zoned correctly, so as not to undermine the viability of that shopping center. Mr. Drechsel added that the City's other obligation is to remember that the whole City cannot revolve around money and who has money, so how can the City accommodate people that do have a lot of money to invest, because part of the City is having open space and preserving the character of the town. Vernal is a unique place and to characterize it as every other City does a disservice to the people who have chosen to live here. Be careful in amending the general plan, so that it preserves the uniqueness of the City.

Mr. Ray asked if the Commission wants Vernal City to be all high density housing or builders building single family homes on ½ acre lots that the owners are going to need to go to Lowes and Milt's and other businesses to purchase parts to make repairs to their homes. Or is the City trying to get so much high density housing crammed in that there will not be the more rural open feel, but more congested. Mr. Parker remarked that the City has some nice established neighborhoods and the City does not want to tear up the character of those neighborhoods, but expand those neighborhoods. The City wants to preserve the low density areas. This is the opinions right now; however, the whole point of the meeting is for each Commissioner to bring out their vision for the City. No one is right or wrong. Mr. Parker stated that it would be appropriate to group commercial and industrial areas together. Other areas could have some retail on it.

Mr. Drechsel asked if the airport could be in the way of some commercial development in that area. Mr. Parker explained that the City has an airport approach zone, but it expands out from there. Some development is restricted and it is very specific in the Code.

Mr. Coleman asked if industrial could go by the airport. He suggested that would be a good area for a mixed use campus area such as education, medical, industrial and then the zoning can fade back to particular zones. Mr. Parker indicated we should not get too aggressive right now with the area around the hospital. Some other things might be happening there. Mr. Drechsel stated the area around the hospital is pretty well defined. There is a lot going on in that area right now,

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and there is not a lot the City can do with that area anyway. Broadly speaking, there are other areas that need attention. Mr. Drechsel asked what do they meant by urban infill. Mr. Parker explained that it is higher density residential with some limited offices.

Mr. Drechsel asked what the problem is with those areas in the general plan. It seems that the City is moving to high density anyway. Mr. Parker reminded everyone that the City is not rezoning the areas at this time, but giving ideas of how it could be rezoned for the future. Mr. Drechsel agreed that a rezone request could be consistent or inconsistent with what the City has in the general plan. He suggested that high density and field areas need to transition to something more harmonious on 500 West, which is the area known as Haven Estates.

Mr. Glazier stated there is beginning to be a natural R-1 to RA-1 buffer in other areas, and the City needs to start getting a softer buffer at 500 South, such as an R-1 or R-2.

Mr. Coleman reported areas like Wasatch Boulevard that have had requests to tear down homes and rebuild, but with the setbacks that are required and other ordinances that are in place now, it is not possible. If someone's home burns down, they are able to rebuild with no problem, but if they would like to tear down their existing home to build a new home, they would not be able to do so. He would like to see redevelopment districts to help with this situation, so residents can have the home they would like. Mr. Parker talked to the City attorney, and he indicated that property owners would forfeit their right to rebuild if they tore down their home for non-conforming use. Mr. Parker does not want to make people merge lots just to build a new home. He would like people to be able to have nicer homes if they choose to, and clean those areas up.

Mr. Drechsel commented that the reality is that the south and somewhat west of Western Park is one of the oldest parts of Vernal. It is really one street of high residential between that and crossing over to new development that is really high density. It fits well in an urban setting which is connected well with the downtown areas. He added that then you have older homes in the same area. The general plan should take a look at where the older neighborhoods are and where development is going to have to move forward in the City. Mr. Parker pointed out that the City is already doing that. The City is identifying neighborhoods and thinking about the long term character of those neighborhoods. The Wasatch Boulevard neighborhood is a neighborhood, so the City needs to decide how to address it. The neighborhood is unique.

Mr. Drechsel asked what other areas within the City are of concern. The Basin Clinic area was mentioned, and it was decided that the area is an important corridor. He asked how is it going to connect in the future with 500 North. Vernal Avenue to 500 North are mostly single family residential. Mr. Drechsel asked if it makes sense to have the road itself define the zone. That is an area that is inconsistent with what the City currently has and wants. Mr. Parker stated that was a good example of how much a corridor is likely to change over the years. The route to the dump could become a big industrial manufacturing park someday, and it could drive traffic patterns in the City because of that. It would change the character of the area. There was a general discussion on a signal light located by the pink dinosaur.

Mr. Parker suggested printing a map without color and having only the road map. That way the Commission can start coloring on the map. This would help with clarifying areas. Mr. Coleman

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asked if a map with the locations of all the businesses in town would be helpful. Mr. Drechsel stated that it would be nice if the staff could do a map electronically and was able to turn layers on and off and layer them over each other. He added that so much of this hinges on what the City Council is going to do as far as taking action on it. The Commission could provide beautiful maps with color, but ultimately the Commission does not make the final decisions on what is implemented. Mr. Parker reported that the City Council wants the Planning Commission to come up with a starting point. The City Council wants the map to be something that they can look at and modify if necessary. The City Council does not want to have to create the map. The Planning Commission needs to design the map to present to the City Council.

Mr. Drechsel asked about the area from Main Street by the post office and down to the bull. Mr. Glazier stated that area will be the next hot spot after the Vernal Towne Center is completed. Mr. Parker explained that the County would like that area to be developed next. It should be an institutional corridor. The general plan says the southeast corridor by the bull has to be residential.

Mr. Parker stated that the County owns the whole north side of the road from the bull to the west, and explained that it is zoned commercial not high density residential. South of that is high density residential. Mr. Parker explained that this is not the best concept, but the City can do something better with their side. The University will be starting a master planning initiative for its campus. There is going to be a lot of design work for the development of the campus. Mr. Parker gave the Commission some questions to think about for this area. What goes with the University? What could go south of the University? He gave an example of research being done at USU in Logan. Does the City want to have an area where businesses are dependent on the research component? Is single family dwellings more appropriate or should the City look at something else? These are the kind of things Mr. Parker is talking about around the University. The County would love it if the City was into their corridor up there too. Mr. Parker stated that the Commission should be able to take these corridors and make them workable for something the City Council can work with.

Mr. Ray suggested keeping commercial on main thorough fares and homes in subdivisions, so residential is not on the main roads. He asked how the City can tell someone that they have to relocate, so the roads can be widened. Mr. Glazier reminded the Commission that they are not rezoning, but are giving guide lines. Mr. Parker explained that the City needs to give the residents guidelines, not change things for them. Anytime you get a lot of people close together in a concentrated area like in the City, instead of in the County, the uses start to conflict more and more with each other. The rights of the property owner's land starts to be more limited by what the neighbors are doing. People want to be able to do their own thing with their property, but it is also a community. Mr. Parker explained that what the City is trying to do is to come up with guidelines and rules that are broad enough to allow a lot of different things to be done with the property without allowing things that would be most incompatible and most out of character with everything that is happening in the area.

Mr. Glazier asked how the general plan affects the thorough fares and if the roads are part of the general plan? Mr. Parker informed the Commission that they are only looking at one page of the general plan out of about 200 pages. The general plan itself explains all the concepts. He

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explained that they are looking at the map that applies to that text. The general plan contains quite a few sections on different topics for the City. To revisit the general plan is very time consuming. Mr. Drechsel added that the plan was a very expensive investment for the City and the County. Mr. Parker explained that in 2009 when the general plan was being written, no one had any really good starting points. The company hired had to do things on their own. They did the best they could with what they had, but the authors of the general plan did not live here and know what the neighborhoods were like. Mr. Drechsel added that a lot of times in rural communities when they want to develop they do it however they like. There is some value in having people come from out of the area and look at Vernal with a fresh view and say this is what Vernal could be in the future. Mr. Taylor stated that one of the big things to talk about is what type of roads the City will build. Is the City tying roads in to keep downtown alive? Does the City want four lane roads, or two lane roads with pedestrian and bike access? Mr. Parker explained that these things are already identified in the general plan.

Mr. Taylor pointed out that the success of downtown will be if people are coming out of town to go to the convention center, and they can park easily to get to businesses and around town.

Mr. Parker reported that the mandate from the State is to look at all modes of transportation. The State has put billions of dollars into the Basin. The State compiled a study that said the Basin is losing \$30-\$50 billion of economic activity because of their inadequate transportation and infrastructure. This figure was not based on new activity, but existing. This study came from a reputable firm. The State is looking into different modes of transportation for the Basin. This is the first time the State has done a project like this.

Due to the printer not working, Mr. Drechsel summed up the meeting and asked to be adjourned.

After a brief discussion, it was decided to schedule another general plan work session on July 15, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. Mr. Parker will have black and white maps available. The meeting was adjourned.

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Mike Drechsel, Planning Commission Chair