



Planning Commission Minutes
Thursday, January 4, 2024 – 4:00 PM
City Hall Council Chambers, 520 E. Cascade Avenue, Sisters, OR 97759

Chairman: Jeff Seymour
Commissioners: Cris Converse, Art Blumenkron, Jeremy Dickman, Sarah McDougall, Rick Retzman
Absent: Tom Ries
City Staff: Scott Woodford, Community Development Director, Matt Martin, Principal Planner, Emme Shoup, Associate Planner
Recording Secretary: Emme Shoup, Recording Secretary

I. CALL TO ORDER / DETERMINATION OF QUORUM / ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Chairman Seymour called the workshop to order at 4:00 pm.

A quorum was established.

Adoption of Agenda – January 4, 2024.

Vice Chairman Converse made a motion to approve the Agenda for January 4, 2024, as proposed.

Commissioner Retzman seconded. Motion passes.

II. VISITOR COMMUNICATION – None

Chairman Seymour introduced and welcomed the newest member of the Planning Commission – Rick Retzman. Welcome Rick!

III. WORK SESSION

A. Wildfire Hazard Mitigation – Defensible Space and Building Hardening Code Update.

Planner Martin stated that this work session is to discuss defensible space and structural hardening standards to mitigate the impacts of wildfire and provide direction for associated Sisters City Code updates.

For the 2023-24 fiscal year, the City Council adopted several goals to accomplish in the coming year. One of those goals is to “Work toward updating defensible space and structural hardening requirements through the Development Code.” The Council identified this as a priority to address the risks and mitigate the impacts of wildfire in the city limits of Sisters. The purpose of this work session is to provide an overview of: Defensive Space and Structural Hardening. Existing City of Sisters Standards Updated/Upcoming Statewide Standards. Other Examples of Best Practices.

Staff seeks input and recommended direction from the Planning Commission regarding potential next steps regarding evaluation of potential changes to Sisters City Code to address defensible space and building hardening standards. To assist this process, the staff has identified several options for the Commission to consider. On November 29, 2023, staff met with the Council for a work session to present a similar overview of defensible space and building hardening strategies and receive input and direction from the Council. A summary of input and direction from the Council is provided at the end of the report.

Defensible Space:

Defensible space is the buffer created between buildings and the vegetated landscape that surrounds them that reduces the likelihood of embers or flames igniting the structure. Establishing and maintaining defensible space can make a significant difference during a wildfire. Creating a defensible space does not mean creating a moonscape. Examples of managing this defensible space include limbing and spacing trees, use of fire-resistant plants, removing vegetative byproducts such as needles and leaves, and keeping other combustibles separated from the buildings.

The study of wildfire behavior and mitigation best practices continues to evolve with a variety recommended actions to provide defensible space. To provide one example, staff looked to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) for guidance. Figure 1 below was created by NFPA to provide a visual example of defensible space. It is generally accepted that the requirements for an effective defensible space vary based on proximity to buildings. Figure 1. Defensible Space (Source: nfpa.org).

The NFPA identifies three (3) distinct areas of a defensible space: 1. Immediate Zone; 2. Intermediate Zone; and 3. Extended Zone. Table 1 describes each zone and the associated recommended actions to create and manage the zones. Staff recognizes that these are the recommendations of only one of many reputable organizations and that these recommendations may not be practicable or feasible for jurisdiction or individual property.

Immediate Zone, Description, Measures:

The home and the area *0-5 feet* from the furthest attached exterior point of the home; defined as a non-combustible area. Science tells us this is the most important zone to take immediate action on as it is the most vulnerable to embers. Start with the house itself then move into the landscaping section of the Immediate Zone.

Clean roofs, gutters, and vents of debris. • Replace or repair any loose or missing shingles or roof tiles. • Installing 1/8-inch metal mesh screening on vents and penetrations. • Repair or replace damaged or loose window screens and any broken windows • Screen or box-in areas below patios and decks with wire mesh. • Remove anything stored underneath decks or porches. • Move any flammable material away from wall exteriors – mulch, flammable plants, leaves, and needles, firewood piles.

Intermediate Zone:

5-30 feet from the furthest exterior point of the home. Landscaping/hardscaping employing careful landscaping or creating breaks that can help influence and decrease fire behavior.

Clear vegetation from under large stationary propane tanks. • Create fuel breaks with driveways, walkways/paths, patios, and decks. • Keep lawns and native grasses mowed to a height of four inches. • Remove ladder fuels (vegetation under trees) • Prune trees up to six to ten feet from the ground but not to exceed 1/3 of the overall height of shorter trees. • Space trees to have a minimum of eighteen feet between crowns with the distance increasing with the percentage of slope. • Tree placement should be planned to ensure the mature canopy is no closer than ten feet to the edge of the structure. • Tree and shrubs should be limited to small clusters of a few each to break up the continuity of the vegetation across the landscape.

Extended Zone:

30-100 feet, out to 200 feet. Landscaping – the goal here is not to eliminate fire but to interrupt fire’s path and keep flames smaller and on the ground.

Dispose of heavy accumulations of ground debris. • Remove small conifers growing between mature trees. • Remove vegetation adjacent to storage sheds or other outbuildings within this area. • Trees 30 to 60 feet from the home should have at least 12 feet between canopy tops. • Trees 60 to 100 feet from the home should have at least 6 feet between the canopy tops.

Structural Hardening:

Structural hardening (aka – building hardening, fire hardening) describes steps that can be taken to make a building more resistant to damage from a wildfire. This includes using materials for siding and/or roofing that resist ignition during a wildfire, installing fire resistant windows to protect openings, or using attic ventilation devices that help reduce ember intrusion. Structural hardening, along with creating defensible space, decreases the likelihood that a nearby fire will ignite a building, and it reduces the potential for damage. Structural hardening makes the community more resistant to the spread of wildfire. By slowing down a fire, it may create additional time and opportunity for emergency responders to protect life and property threatened by the fire. Figure 2 below (in the report) illustrates which building components are most vulnerable to ignition during a wildfire.

Building Components and Vulnerability:

Roof - Due to its large surface area, the roof is most susceptible to embers. Complicated roofs, such as those that meet vertical walls or include dormers, present additional vulnerabilities since they could accumulate debris and embers.

Vents – Traditional vents are vulnerable to embers and flame impingement. Embers passing through foundation, roof, and attic vents could ignite flammable materials inside the house.

Gutters - Debris can accumulate in the gutters and ignite with embers. This could directly expose the roof edges and the under-eave to flame contact.

Eave - Depending on design, the eave overhang can allow embers to enter through under-eave attic vents. With open-eave construction, gaps between the rafter tails and the blocking are vulnerable to ember entry.

Deck - Materials under and on top of a deck can ignite from embers or flame contact. Leaves and needles can accumulate in gaps between deck boards, creating ignition targets for

embers. If a deck burns, other parts of the house will be exposed to flames for a long period of time.

Windows - Flame contact and radiant heat could shatter the glass. Larger windows are more vulnerable than smaller windows. Vinyl windows could deform with radiant heat and create gaps in the window.

Fence - Debris or vegetation in contact with the fence could ignite it. If made of combustible materials, fences in contact with the house walls could expose the building to flame impingement.

Garage - Chemicals and flammable materials are often stored in a garage. Often garages are not insulated and could have air leaks or gaps where embers could land.

Siding - Siding is vulnerable when exposed to flames or radiant heat for extended periods. Gaps and joints in siding can create places where flame penetration can occur. Poorly maintained or degraded siding is also vulnerable to flame penetration.

Existing City of Sisters Standards:

The Sisters City Code does not explicitly use the terms “defensible space” or “structural hardening (or similar).” With that said, the Sisters Municipal Code (SMC) includes the following chapters that address vegetation management and building hardening that reduce the impacts of wildfire:

SMC Chapter 8.20 - Urban/Rural Interface (Attachment A) in the report.

SMC Chapter 8.20 addresses vegetation management in the city with the purpose “to incorporate “urban/rural interface” standards and criteria as a means of reducing the risk of the spread of wildfire.” The standards include establishment and maintenance of fuel breaks for any site within the city limits of Sisters that is designated as “extreme fire risk” property according to the fire risk map prepared by the Oregon Department of Forestry and referenced by exhibit in the chapter. Also included are requirements that all properties in the city limits of Sisters create clear space that is fuel free.

SMC Chapter 8.35 - Roofing Materials (Attachment B) in the report.

SMC Chapter 8.35 prohibits treated and untreated wood shingles and shake roofs. Instead, this code requires roofing to be asphalt shingles, slate shingles, metal roofing, tile, clay, or concrete shingles, and other approved roofing which is deemed to be equivalent to a minimum Class C rated roof covering.

Staff notes there are no standards in the Sisters Development Code (SDC) explicitly directed at defensible space or structural hardening. This, along with advancement in best practices for reducing the risk of the spread of wildfire, warrants consideration of updates to existing standards and adoption of others.

Updated/Upcoming Statewide Standards:

In 2021, the Governor signed into law Senate Bill 762 requiring action to reduce the risk to people and property from wildfire. Prominent elements of the legislation that coincides with this project include:

- Wildfire Risk Mapping

On Aug. 4, 2022, the Oregon Wildfire Risk Map that was released on June 30, was temporarily withdrawn for further refinement by the Oregon Department of Forestry. These refinements will incorporate feedback from more than 2,000 Oregonians received during the recent public engagement process from in-person and online sessions around the state. The department has not set a timetable for these revisions.

- Draft Defensible Space Standards:

The Oregon State Fire Marshal (OSFM) is mandated to adopt statewide minimum defensible space standards for high hazard zones. The OSFM, per the Senate Bill 762 mandate, has drafted said defensible space standards (Attachment C) using sections 603 and 604 of International Wildland-Urban Interface Code model language as a framework. Mandated implementation of these defensible space standards is tied to the adoption of the wildfire risk map.

- Update to Oregon Residential Specialty Code (ORSC) section R327 (Wildfire Hazard Mitigation). The Building Codes Division (BDC) is mandated to adopt fire hardening building code standards, based on existing wildfire mitigation provisions, which could be applied to new dwellings and the accessory structures of dwellings in areas of the state mapped as high hazard zones and that are in the wildland urban interface. The updated R327 code (Attachment D) would require dwellings and their accessory structures in the city limits of Sisters to incorporate certain types of materials and requirements for roofing, ventilation, exterior wall coverings, overhanging projections, decking surfaces, and glazing in windows/skylights and doors. The code also outlines a process for local implementation of these building code standards independent of state adoption of the wildfire risk map and/or applicability to high hazard zones identified on said map.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES:

In addition to those best practices identified by the State of Oregon and the NFPA previously discussed, there are other examples of measures adopted by other jurisdictions that can be evaluated for implementation in the City of Sisters. One example is the City of Ashland, Oregon. Ashland is often referred to as a leader in the State of Oregon regarding wildfire mitigation measures for land use development.

In 2018, the Ashland City Council adopted a Wildfire Safety Ordinance that, as stated on the portion of the City's website dedicated to this topic², is "One piece of an overall strategy to better protect our community from wildfire..." The ordinance amended both the land use code (Attachment E) and municipal code (Attachment F) incorporating standards for the following types of development projects: • Fences • Installing New Landscaping • Building a Deck, Addition, or Accessory Structure • New Construction on a Single, Vacant Lot • Fire Prevention and Control Plan for Subdivisions, Multi-family Dwellings, Commercial Development, or Partitions.

These standards, and those of other jurisdictions, can be evaluated for applicability and implementation in the City of Sisters.

OPTIONS:

Staff seeks input and recommended direction from the Planning Commission on next steps to implement defensible space and structural hardening standards in the City of Sisters. Table 3 includes options Staff has identified for consideration.

OPTION 1:

Monitor Adoption of State Wildfire Risk Map.

Waiting until adoption of the map allows the City of Sisters to understand if the State of Oregon initiates a top- down approach related to fire-resistant building materials and defensible space. However, adoption of the Wildfire Risk Map and associated implementation of the defensible space and R327 building code provisions may not be adopted in a timely fashion or provide local governments with adequate funding for implementation.

OPTION 2:

Local Adoption of ORSC section R327 (Building Hardening).

Update the City of Sisters Code in accordance with the ORSC section R327 independent and/or ahead of Wildfire Risk Map adoption and implementation. If Council is interested in this option, Staff can schedule a follow-up meeting to discuss in greater detail the number of vacant properties that would be affected, and the cost estimates for implementing R327 including an updated breakdown based on the most recent building cost estimates.

OPTION 3:

Adopt Oregon State Fire Marshal Defensible Space Standards.

Update the City of Sisters Code using the OSFM draft defensible space standards as a guide. These standards can be evaluated to determine where (city limits, mapped risk areas, etc.) and what provisions should apply.

OPTION 4:

Adopt Alternative Defensible Space Standards

Update the City of Sisters Code using best practices that expand beyond those identified in the OSFM draft defensible space standards. This would involve a comprehensive evaluation of various standards to determine what is applicable and acceptable to the City of Sisters community.

OPTION 5:

Other

Other changes may be identified or emerge that warrant evaluation.

City Council Direction:

The Council discussed the options listed above and provided the following direction:

Don't Wait for Adoption of the Wildfire Risk Map:

There is currently no timeline for adoption of the Statewide Wildfire Risk Map. In addition, the outcome of the mapping is unknown. These factors further delay implementation of the

statewide building hardening and defensible space standards. For these reasons, the Council has directed staff to pursue local code amendments independent of the statewide map and associated building hardening and defensible space standards. In addition, the City Council expressed interest in applying updated building hardening and defensible space standards to the entirety of the city limits and not in relation to a risk map or other determining factors.

Local Adoption of ORSC section R327 (Building Hardening).

The Council directed staff to pursue local adoption of ORSC section R327. Further, the Council recognized that the update to R327 includes a local adoption process and standards that are not likely to warrant extensive analysis or development of specialized standards. For these reasons, the Council recommended pursuing these amendments independent of the defensible space standards that will be more comprehensive and require detailed policy analysis.

Develop Local Defensible Space Standards.

The Council directed staff to evaluate the draft OSFM defensible space standards and those of other communities to develop policies and standards for local adoption. This process will require detailed analysis of the various strategies and techniques of defensible space best practices to determine those applicable to and appropriate for the City of Sisters given the unique location, setting, and needs of the community.

Planner Martin stated that any building code standards and any more detailed landscape materials type of defensible criteria would not apply, but with that said, there are opportunities to implement the vegetation management side of things from removing vegetation, mowing it down, limbing trees up to reduce those risks of nuisances that are created by those. We cannot look back at the ones that have already been done and retroactively apply any of these spacing or material standards. The R327 is in place now, and in place for some time and was just updated this last year. Those building hardening standards only apply to the high risk and extreme areas where those jurisdictions have adopted the code already. We have not locally adopted any of those provisions except the roofing material standards. We cannot impose those standards today, but if we got ahead and adopted the R327 within the next couple of months, then any new construction in those subdivisions would be subject to that building hardening.

Planner Martin stated that most folks today do employ many of these strategies for building hardening because they recognize there is the value of longevity of the materials and value in investing above the minimum standards. There are a lot of applications of Hardie Plank siding of the asphalt composition roofs which makes you already ahead, etc. There are arguments that these standards will increase the cost of construction, but it is a nominal difference when you employ these building hardening standards.

The Commission discussed homes within Sisters complying with the Western Design Theme, the State dragging their feet on the wildfire map with places like Tollgate and Crossroads that do not have a label at all for extreme or high risks, mandate for the City with more access to fire protection resources and people are less protected in the areas where they need it the most in terms of policies that are implemented. Grants being available for communities to help with vegetation management, etc. A lot of money being available from the Department of Agriculture for fire mitigation, but they have strict requirements, etc.

Planner Martin stated that Federal and State non-profit local jurisdictions grant programs, but it comes down to the criteria that are applicable by individual property scale, size of property or size of neighborhood, what programs are already in place, some are only available to those with the Firewise designation, but if we adopt these standards that require some level of improvements that might create a pathway or open a door to some funding mechanisms. We always have our eyes on that not only here but with our partnering agencies.

Director Woodford stated that it is the intention to make sure that COBA is aware of these potential changes, so they are not surprised at the end of the process and are engaged and aware of what is going on.

Staff welcomes input from the Commission regarding these identified directives and others to consider. Based on the input and direction of the Council and Commission, staff will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the identified options. This process will likely require multiple workshops with both the Council and Commission to provide the necessary background, evaluation, and analysis of those standards under consideration prior to a formal ordinance review process. The City Council stated that they would like to explore or look for standards to apply city wide and not be associated with any risk categories or risk mapping since it seemed equitable and appropriate to be looking at all properties within the city limits and subject to these standards instead of potential pockets, or a controversy from one lot to another.

Planner Martin stated that this is a chance to promote some of our partners and one of these partners is Project Wildfire and are tasked with educating and employing programs to inform residents and provide mechanisms to address the risks of wildfires. They have funding to go into some of these neighborhoods and have community cleanup events where they come out and as a community, they have collective resources to hire contractors, rent the equipment for chippers or dumpsters, etc. and cleanup as a group.

Planner Martin stated that the Sisters Camp Sherman Fire District has their Fire Corp. which is another trained volunteer group that will go out and do a property assessment which is available to residents and will give recommendations on what you can do to make the property more defensible and make those improvements. Again, to mitigate those impacts of wildfire and there are a lot of people thinking about this and working on this from different perspectives.

Planner Martin stated that the next steps will be to circle back to the City Council and report back what we know and what was discussed here tonight, get more refined and defined direction on what aspects of the code provisions we should be changing – and then, we will come back to the Commission for the actual development of those standards.

Vice Chairman Converse asked Planner Martin if he wanted some input on the Options 1-5. She stated that she is in favor of Option 4 because it says to go beyond and customize, but to use it as a base.

Planner Martin stated that what they will be doing is providing those different categories of strategies and let others that have employed and see what is appropriate. It sounds like the Commission is wanting to move forward prior to adoption of the Statewide map to explore

these changes. Any waiting would be that mechanism that once the map is adopted then these standards would be in play and staying ahead of that trigger point. We are just looking for that informal feedback on what we should be considering and report it back to the City Council.

IV. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER BUSINESS

Director Woodford stated that the January 18, 2024, meeting will be cancelled. There are no items currently ready to go onto that agenda. We are not quite sure about the February meeting yet as well, but we will let the Commission know. We are continuing to process development code amendments and that is the primary work item going right now. There are some potential development applications coming through but will not be until around March or April. In the meantime, there will be work sessions and at some point, bringing these back for review at a public hearing.

Director Woodford stated that we are also putting out an RFP to get a consultant for the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) amendment and we are currently working on that. We will go through an interview process for perspective consultants, and hopefully have someone on board at the end of March 2024. We are also organizing an open house on January 22, 2024, from 4:30-6:30 where the Council will be doing some community input, etc.

Director Woodford stated that we have a new hire for a new position here in the city for a Deputy Recorder/Communications Manager. Rebecca Green is the new hire and was on the Urban Forestry Board (UFB) and will start on Monday, January 22, 2024. It will expand some of the communication efforts and she will spend more time on that getting our message out more effectively.

V. ADJOURN

Chairman Seymour adjourned the meeting at 5:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted.

Carol Jenkins, Recording Secretary.