Chapter Six

Housing Element

BACKGROUND

The Pullman housing market has fluctuated widely during the past twenty years, for both owner-occupied and renter-occupied dwelling units. The oversupply of housing stock in the early and mid-1980's resulted in a "buyer's" market, where housing costs remained relatively low. In subsequent years, population growth absorbed the housing supply and created a shortage that significantly raised housing costs. In 1999, there appears to be a greater balance between supply and demand, and costs, while higher than those in surrounding communities, are becoming more stable.

It is no surprise that the single greatest factor affecting the Pullman housing market is the WSU student population. Others contributing significantly to market demand for housing include staff and faculty from WSU, other professionals, business owners, laborers, and retirees.

WSU currently maintains an inventory of on-campus housing, consisting of dormitories, fraternities, sororities, and apartments. Also, the university requires freshmen to live on campus. Housing for WSU students (in the form of apartments or single family homes occupied by groups of students) makes up a substantial part of housing demand in Pullman. The spillover into adjacent neighborhoods has caused conflicts over parking and maintenance of single family homes. These conflicts may increase if WSU enrollment increases as expected over the next twenty years, unless care is taken to manage the growth. Where possible, new student housing construction should occur in areas where existing single family neighborhoods are not affected, adjacent to campus, and with easy access to bus service.

Neighborhood character and the sense of community that comes from it must be protected when the construction of large apartment complexes is allowed adjacent to single family neighborhoods. The appearance of newly constructed housing should complement or enhance the appearance of the neighborhood where it is located. Residents would like to see more attention paid to appearance and neighborhood compatibility in the design of new development.

Housing development affects the quality of life experienced in the city's neighborhoods, and should be undertaken only with a clear understanding of future impacts. Anticipating and mitigating the impacts resulting from new housing construction should become an integral component of every development proposal considered by the city.

The city's existing housing stock is an asset worth preserving. Thus, the neighborhoods created from this housing stock should be protected from development which does not complement neighborhood character. Rehabilitation of existing dwelling units (especially those which may have historical value) should be encouraged through public and

private programs. The city should commit a portion of its resources to providing or upgrading infrastructure in neighborhoods where significant private investment occurs.

Infill housing proposed within existing neighborhoods should, above all else, be of a size and scale to complement the character of the neighborhood. Housing development at higher densities may be possible, but only if such development is appropriately designed and buffered where it abuts lower densities. No new housing at any location within the city should rely on on-street parking.

City residents have a wide variety of incomes, family living situations and housing needs. Local housing policies should encourage the construction of a range of housing types suitable to meet these varied needs. Such policies may include more flexible regulations (including provisions for mixed-use developments), innovations in financing programs, streamlined permit processing, and other appropriate actions.

Land use policies should also reflect the need for a greater variety of housing types. Appropriate areas should be designated for higher-density housing development, where such development will not have an impact on existing neighborhoods. In designating these new areas, the city's ability to deliver and maintain cost-effective infrastructure should be a top consideration. The establishment of minimum, as well as maximum residential densities, would help to ensure a high return on infrastructure investment.

Land use policies outside city limits, but within the city's urban growth area, can affect the city's ability to achieve its goals. The city and county should enter into an agreement as to the use of land in adjacent areas to attempt to control inefficient development and clearly distinguish urban areas from adjacent farmland.

HOUSING GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL H1: Preserve and rehabilitate existing residential districts.

Policy H1.1: Coordinate the plans, programs, and policies of all city departments to protect neighborhood livability.

Policy H1.2: Provide infrastructure (streets, paths, parks, and community facilities) appropriate to the character of the neighborhood.

Policy H1.3: Support and participate in programs run by non-profit agencies that assist households in maintaining and upgrading their property.

Policy H1.4: Work to eliminate safety hazards in the existing housing stock. Thoroughly publicize the city's voluntary housing inspection program.

Policy H1.5: Reduce the supply of substandard housing units through code enforcement, rehabilitation, and new construction.

Policy H1.6: Encourage rehabilitation and preservation of historic housing.

Policy H1.7: Ensure that health and safety standards, as well as off-street parking requirements, are met when single family homes are converted to multi-family rental use.

Policy H1.8: In order to address the condition of rental housing, consider the use of a license issued on an annual basis to owners of rental residential property.

GOAL H2: Encourage housing in a range of types and prices suitable for all social and economic segments of Pullman.

Policy H2.1: Meet low- and moderate-income housing needs through the rehabilitation of existing housing and new construction of affordable units.

Policy H2.2: Minimize regulations and permit processing procedures to reduce the cost of new housing while protecting the public health, safety, and welfare.

Policy H2.3: Develop flexible regulations and departmental processing procedures to encourage experimental construction and financing techniques that reduce the cost of housing while maintaining or improving the residential character of the city.

Policy H2.4: Provide assistance programs for elderly, low-income residents and disabled persons.

Policy H2.5: Encourage new housing construction in a range of prices and rents to meet the projected housing demand.

Policy H2.6: Encourage housing types and programs which provide for home ownership.

Policy H2.7: Ensure that the housing needs of upper income households are satisfied by maintaining an ample supply of prime residentially zoned land, allowing flexibility in lot sizes, and supporting Whitman County in its efforts to permit carefully planned residential development in the unincorporated county area.

Policy H2.8: Monitor housing availability and vacancy to ensure that there is an adequate supply of housing in a range of prices.

Policy H2.9: Prevent discrimination in housing to assure that unrestricted access to housing is available to the community.

Policy H2.10: Encourage housing in upper stories downtown or as a part of new commercial development.

Policy H2.11: Disperse low- and moderate-income housing and special needs housing throughout the community so that these units are not concentrated in one particular area.

Policy H2.12: Encourage communication and cooperation between the city, WSU, and the private housing sector so that the housing needs of the WSU population can be met effectively.

Policy H2.13: Cooperate with WSU to meet the demand for additional affordable housing for students while minimizing the negative effects on Pullman's tax base.

Policy H2.14: Cooperate with Whitman County to conduct studies assessing the need for housing types which may be appropriate to establish in the unincorporated county area near Pullman.

GOAL H3: Provide sufficient land for new housing construction consistent with the city's ability to provide adequate infrastructure.

Policy H3.1: Utilize the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element to guide the location of new housing.

Policy H3.2: Establish criteria for the evaluation of the suitability of sites for non-market rate and special needs housing, including access to public transportation, shopping, health services, employment centers, schools, and surrounding land uses.

Policy H3.3: Promote efficient use of land by establishing minimum as well as maximum density requirements for high density residential areas.

Policy H3.4: Maintain a large enough urban growth area to avoid artificially constraining the supply of land and increasing housing cost.