

MEMO

To: City of Fargo, Planning & Development Department

From: Lisa Wise Consulting, Inc. (LWC)

Date: November 26, 2019

Subject: City of Fargo LDC Diagnostic - Open House Summary

On November 5, 2019, the City of Fargo's Department of Planning & Development and the LWC-led consulting team (including SRF Consulting Group, Inc.) conducted a public open house as part of the Land Development Code (LDC) Diagnostic project (Project). LWC initiated the open house with a brief presentation describing the Project, purpose of the LDC diagnostic, and next steps. The presentation was followed by an open house, where members of the public could talk to City staff or the consultant team about the Project and provide targeted feedback at any of five stations dedicated to key topics:

- Stations 1 & 2:** General Comments,
- Station 3:** Development Standards,
- Station 4:** Land Uses,
- Station 5:** Administration and Procedures.

In addition to speaking with the consultants or staff directly and providing feedback at the station, attendees could also complete a questionnaire, with the same questions posed at each of the five stations. The intent of the open house was to gather public comments on the LDC strengths and weaknesses which are intended to inform the next steps of the technical analysis. There were approximately 34 attendees at the open house and 16 completed written questionnaires were submitted. Generally, attendees were deferential to each other and the consultant team, open and generous with their feedback, appeared interested in the Project, and offered to answer additional questions and continue to participate in the Project. Below is a summary of the spoken and written feedback during the open house.

Summary of Comments

Preservation of Core Neighborhoods

Preservation of the North Dakota State University and downtown-adjacent neighborhoods, such as Hawthorne and Roosevelt, were highlighted as experiencing development pressure and new development that is out of character with the existing built environment. Direct comments include:

- The need for predictability of architecture and design of new developments.
- Protect the diversity of existing historic homes with tools such as the Historic District Overlay.
- Need greater support for historic preservation, either through financial incentives or greater enforcement authority.
- Walkability, mixed-use, and proximity to downtown are keys to why residents love these neighborhoods.
- If more infill development does occur here, it must be appropriate with the existing neighborhood character.
- The neighborhoods with existing Historic District Overlay standards are successfully maintaining quality and cohesion.

Beloved Downtown

In response to the most well-regarded place in the City and/or example of good development, nearly all respondents cited Downtown as their favorite.

- The density of destinations, access to recreational resources such as Red River, and the overall walkability are key aspects as to why residents love downtown.
- The Downtown Mixed-Use (DMU) zoning district was also cited as a success and should be replicated in more places, in a context-sensitive manner.

More Mixed-Use Development

The only zoning districts identified as successful were the Downtown Mixed-Use (DMU) district and the University Mixed-Use (UMU) district.

- Generally, the City needs to create more mixed-use neighborhoods outside of the DMU and UMU districts.
- The current regulations (outside the DMU and UMU) make it easier and more cost effective to keep/building single-family homes as opposed to mixed-use or multi-family developments.

More Public Spaces (Green and Paved)

Characterized as an ‘outdoor living room’ or just a place people want to be, there is an overall desire for more public spaces, such as plazas and neighborhood squares, in and around the downtown core.

- Examples given for the types of activities public spaces produce were the Red River Farmers Market and Streets Alive.
- Green space, generally, and better landscaping, specifically, were also called out as desired elements of new development.

Parking Standards

No one expressed a need for more parking either in downtown or the neighborhoods. Instead, the respondents generally felt that the City should study whether the existing parking requirements are producing the desired effect, particularly considering the “seas” of parking that exist today.

- There is a general understanding that more parking leads to less walkability. Given the importance of walkability in the City, there is a desire for a more thoughtful approach to new parking standards that focus on location, size, and design.
- Some proposed ideas included reduced parking requirements, project specific parking requirements, and parking maximums for all new developments.

Development Standards

Generally, respondents commented that setback standards for all uses (residential, commercial, industrial) are in need of revision. Particularly, side-yard setback standards for residential development and front-yard setbacks for commercial development as they relate to utility easements.

- City needs more context-sensitive design standards, particularly for the older neighborhoods in the city as well as the new buildings downtown. There is a concern with suburban-style development being built in older areas.
- Any infill project should be neighborhood oriented in design, should allow for at least two units of residential, and allowing accessory dwelling units should be considered.
- The landscaping requirements are difficult to interpret and could be improved.

The LDC and Go2030

Generally, respondents felt that it is difficult to find relevant information in the LDC.

- Not all ordinances are properly linked requiring users to dig through the rest of the City Code to find what the outside requirements are.
- More graphic representations of standards in the LDC would be helpful to understand exactly what is being required of an applicant.
- There is an overall sense that the LDC is lacking in consistency, reliability, and transparency in the development process.
- There is a general sentiment that the LDC does not help implement the Fargo Comprehensive Plan (*Go2030*). There is support for the goals laid out in *Go2030* but there are few mechanisms to implement them, particularly more mixed-use development and more walkability.
- There is a unanimous call for *Go2030* and the LDC work in concert with one another.

General Feedback on the LDC and LDC Update

- Most attendants of the Open House were residents that owned property and/or businesses in Fargo.
- A majority of participants who have experience using the LDC generally found the old PDF version easier to navigate rather than the online version.
- A majority were not involved in the *Go2030* Comprehensive Plan update.
- Most participants thought Fargo needs more control over building form and design.
- Participants were divided on the degree of change the LDC needed, some saying a lot, some saying only a little.
- Participants love that their neighborhoods are walkable, have a diversity of historic homes, mature trees, access to neighborhood amenities, and have a strong sense of community.
- Many felt that it was important for the City to address appropriate infill, historic preservation, mixed-use, parking requirements, approval processes, and sustainable long-term development.