

Subdivision Connectivity Roundtable

Draft - Meeting Minutes

1. Time and Location

The meeting was held in the Planning & Development Services (PDS) Conference Room on Wednesday, January 11, 2017, at 12:00 p.m.

2. Attendees

Guests present: Laurie Lara and John Zinsmeyer, KB Homes; Kevin Pape, DR Horton; Chris Fields, Buffington Land; Steven Ashlock, Pulte Homes; Matthew Scrivener, Meritage Homes; and Austin Evetts and Nancy Stroder from Taylor Morrison.

Staff present: PDS Director Brad Wiseman, Planning Manager Susan Brennan, Senior Planners Brad Dushkin and David Fowler, Development Facilitator Robin Vietz, and Planning Technician Veronica Chandler.

3. Purpose

Ms. Brennan briefly explained the purpose of the Development Code and stated the purpose of this meeting was to get input from the development community and to discuss the proposed subdivision connectivity requirements. She explained that the purpose of the connectivity requirements was to provide greater connectivity throughout the city, between subdivisions, and to arterials and collectors. She stated that the proposed connectivity requirements will only apply to new subdivisions.

Ms. Brennan introduced the City's new Development Facilitator, Robin Vietz. Ms. Vietz provided a summary of her duties and offered development assistance to the group.

Mr. Wiseman thanked everyone for coming and expressed gratitude for their time and their input. He explained that the involvement and perspective of the development community in the proposed connectivity requirements was essential.

4. Presentation

Mr. Fowler explained that the subdivision connectivity requirements were stimulated by recent complaints about poorly-designed subdivisions funneling all of their local traffic onto a single or few collector streets, resulting in unsafe or undesirable conditions for residents living along those collectors. Subdivision connectivity seeks to create closer-knit neighborhoods with greater walkability and has a direct connection to improving the health, safety, and general welfare of the public. Mr. Fowler continued by explaining that the connectivity requirements will only apply to new subdivisions which have not yet submitted a Preliminary Plat.

Mr. Fowler showed a comparison between a well-connected subdivision and a poorly connected subdivision. He explained that to determine connectivity, a connectivity ratio is determined by dividing the number of links by the number of nodes in the transportation network. A node is any intersection of any two segments, cul-de-sacs, or permanent turnarounds (stub street that does not connect to anything); a link is a connection between nodes.

Mr. Fowler stated that the connectivity index value range is between 1 and 2.5, where a score of 1 is poor and 2.5 represents a perfect grid. However, a connectivity ratio of 1.4 or greater is usually considered to be well connected by transportation and planning literature and is also the base value for encouraging growth of walkable pedestrian communities. He also showed connectivity ratio examples and explained that the connectivity ratio of 35 Round Rock neighborhoods had been evaluated. The neighborhood with the best connectivity had a ratio of 1.80, the lowest neighborhood scored 1.10, and the mean score of all neighborhoods measured was 1.36. He continued by discussing other tools used to enforce connectivity, including external connection requirements, stub street requirements, and block length requirements. He also compared the connectivity ratio requirements to other neighboring cities, and showed connectivity examples using local neighborhoods.

City staff proposed a 1.4 connectivity ratio requirement for all new single family and two family subdivisions; a minimum number of connections to existing streets and stubs to adjacent vacant properties based on the number of lots proposed; and limits to block length, with a requirement for pedestrian access easements on any longer blocks built.

Mr. Fowler finalized the presentation by explaining the proposed connectivity process. 1.) The applicant would include a connectivity analysis for a proposed subdivision in the Preliminary Plat phase for all new SF and TF subdivisions; 2.) The applicant may deviate from some connectivity requirements depending on site conditions and if approved by Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Commission; 3.) Staff would include in its recommendation to P&Z whether or not the site's constraints legitimately prevent strict compliance with connectivity requirements. Constraints that may be considered to permit a subdivision to vary from the subdivision connectivity requirements include natural features, important cultural or archeological features, incompatible adjacent land uses, and adjacent subdivisions that do not provide stubs.

5. Discussion

Mr. Wiseman stated that the Planning and Zoning Commission recommended the Development Code for City Council approval. Though the Commission recommended approval, some details within the Development Code could be edited before being presented to City Council in March. An updated presentation will be given to the P&Z Commission to apprise them of those edits.

The guests expressed the following concerns regarding the new connectivity requirements: cost increase to the developer which will likely be passed along to the eventual homeowner, loss of lots in a community, and increase street maintenance for the City. Also, concerns about creating a gridded neighborhoods were stated, and the connectivity indexes of 1.2 and 1.3 were recommended to be able to maintain curvature in the streets and add aesthetic to the neighborhood. Another point raised was that layouts with lower connectivity index, similar to one of the examples shown, were in high demand and well-liked by many residents because they did not have as much traffic in the streets, encouraged children to play outside, and generally felt safer.

The attendees had the following suggestions in considering the creation and enforcement of the connectivity requirements: 1) Provide an updated Transportation Master Plan to better understand what the plans are for some of the roads when planning a subdivision; 2) Reach out to local planners in the private sector and ask for their input.

Following a discussion, Mr. Wiseman summarized the points to be considered: 1) Add a pedestrian link as a credit; 2) Look at number of connections and stubs, particularly in larger communities; 3) Set the connectivity index at 1.35; 4) Links to and along collectors may need to have a higher value than an internal link on a local street; 5) Include connection values for pedestrians; and 6) Permit flexibility where intersection or driveway separation standards hinder the placement or number of connections to a public road.