



City of Homer

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Memorandum 22-117

TO: Mayor Castner and Homer City Council
FROM: Rob Dumouchel, City Manager
DATE: May 24, 2022
SUBJECT: Rezone of Properties Near Lower West Hill Road from RR to UR

In 2008, the City Council adopted a Comprehensive Plan that called for the rezoning of an area centered on lower West Hill. The rezone would convert rural residential (RR) parcels to urban residential (UR). The intent to rezone remained in the plan when it was refreshed in 2018. In 2022 the City Planner brought forward the rezoning of properties near lower West Hill to be considered by the Planning Commission. An appropriately noticed public hearing was held on April 20, 2022. There was strong opposition from the neighborhood on the west side of West Hill Road. The Planning Commission voted 4-2 to only recommend rezoning only the area to the east of West Hill Road. Administration believes that it is in the best interest of the City to consider rezoning the entirety of the original proposal as it is in alignment with both the existing Comprehensive Plan and the Council's goals for the future.

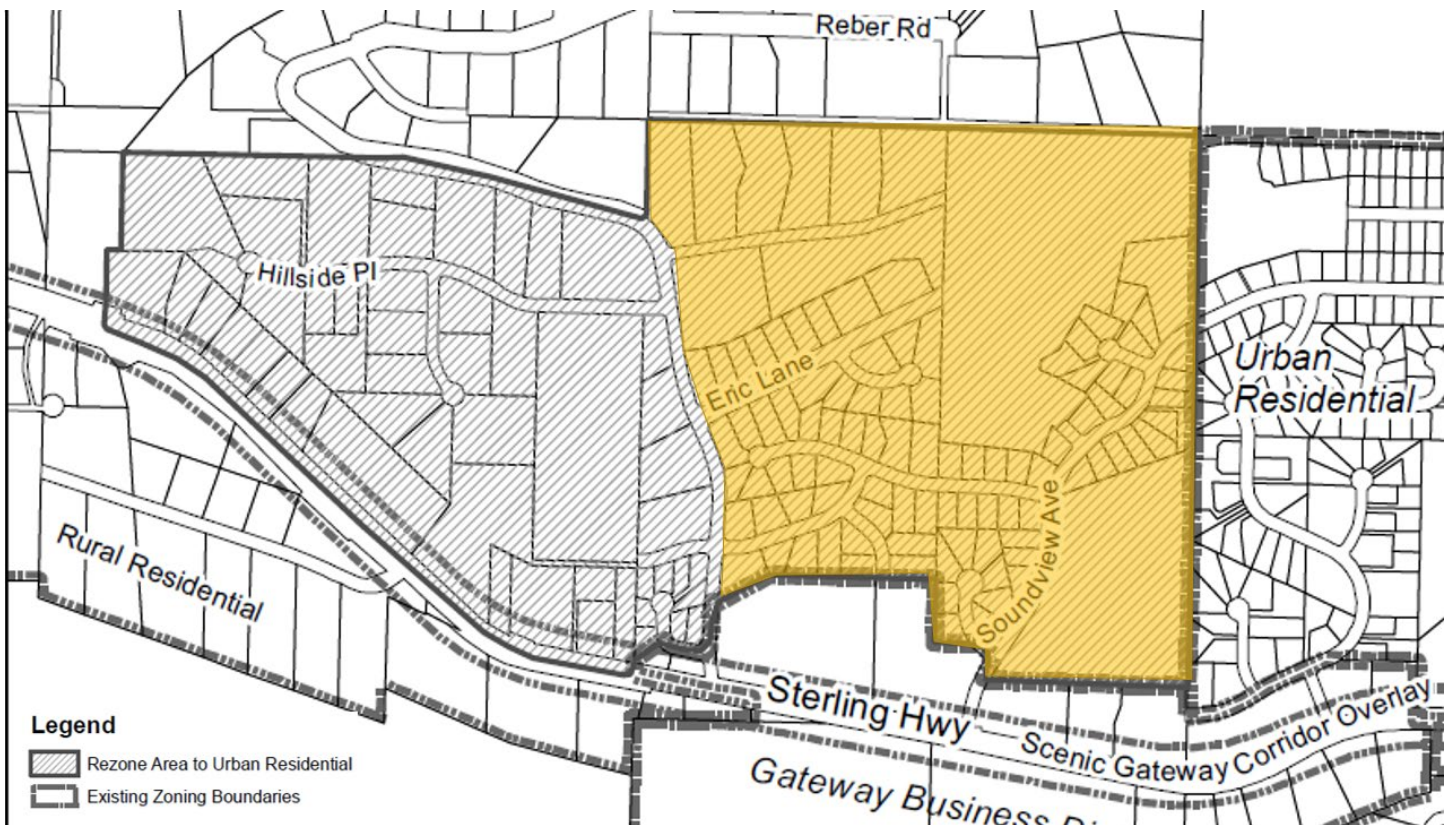


Figure 1: Map of Lower West Hill Rezone Area - Original proposal in shaded area, Planning Commission recommended area overlaid in yellow

There appears to be a high level of consensus that the area east of West Hill Road should be rezoned as proposed. The more contentious topic is the zoning of the west side of West Hill Road. A portion of that neighborhood has come out strongly against change. Many residents have indicated that they do not wish for their property to change and they desire the ability to continue living as they have been for however many years they have been present in the neighborhood. Under the RR to UR rezoning proposal, they do not lose that ability to continue their current lifestyle on their properties as currently configured¹. What could change, is how their neighbors choose to develop their own private property in the future. UR and RR zone districts are relatively similar. A handful of uncommon land uses are impacted by the change². From my perspective, the most valuable/impactful change is that UR allows for investment in denser housing³. The rezone does not force the development of denser housing, but it does make it possible for private property owners who wish to build it.

In March 2022, the City Council conducted a two-day visioning work session that identified a Comprehensive Plan update, Zoning Code modernization, and developing solutions to housing challenges as major priorities. In keeping with that vision, I recommend considering approval of a rezone of the originally proposed area that spans both sides of West Hill Road. Homer has a critical need for more housing over the coming decades, and upzoning neighborhoods is one way that the City can set itself up for success in the long-run by creating opportunity for future development.

Regarding the process thus far, the Planning Commission had the opportunity to review the entire rezoning application but made an advisory recommendation to reduce the rezone area rather than adopt the Administration's recommendation. As such, the rezone presented to the Council does not "materially differ" from the rezone presented but amended by the Planning Commission. Homer City Code 21.95.070 gives the Council legislative authority to adopt rezoning ordinances and states that "the City Council may adopt the amendment as submitted, or with amendments or reject the proposed amendment."

City Manager Recommendation: Consider and approve the originally proposed extent of the lower West Hill RR to UR rezone

¹ See HCC Chapter 21.61 for more on nonconforming uses, structures, and lots

² Change to UR would eliminate the availability of the following conditional uses: cemeteries, kennels, commercial greenhouses and tree nurseries offering sale of plants or trees grown on premises, mobile home parks, and public utility facilities and structures.

³ Lots in RR require a minimum of 10,000 square feet per dwelling unit. Lots in UR require a minimum 7,500 square feet for single-family or duplex dwellings and have the option to provide multi-family dwellings according to floor area and open area requirements