THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE

STAFF REPORT

CIty Council Date: March 28, 2023

Subject: South Slope: A Southside Neighborhood Vision Plan

Staff Resource(s): Sasha Vrtunski, AICP, Urban Planner II

Action Requested: Adoption of a resolution adopting the South Slope: A Southside Neighborhood Vision Plan ("South Slope Vision Plan"), which includes a vision for the future planning and development of the South Slope study area, a part of the larger Southside area.

Background:

- Development of the South Slope Vision Plan was recommended in the 2009 Downtown Master Plan and was a 2018 City Council strategic priority.
- The Living Asheville Comprehensive Plan also identified the South Slope as an important future area of growth and economic development.
- The South Slope Vision Plan process was started prior to the Covid19 pandemic.
- There were numerous community meetings, a charette, focus group meetings and a temporary design studio on Coxe Avenue where community meetings and open office hours were held.
- A representative group of stakeholders participated on an Advisory Committee to provide feedback on the concepts and on the draft plan.
- The draft plan was released at the end of February 2022 and public comment was taken until April 8, 2022.
- The Public Input site received almost 5,000 comments from 275 participants.
- Many respondents live in or near the study area (43%).
- Much of the public comment received reinforces the plan's strategies.
- Common themes from public feedback included the community's desire for the area to be accessible through safe transportation modes, contain small local businesses, include trees and greenspace and that the history of the area is honored.
- The desire for a local grocery store was mentioned numerous times.
- Concerns about growth and tourism and the impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods were also reflected in the comments.
- Concerns about height were mentioned, which also reflects recommendations in the plan to lower heights from what is currently allowed in existing zoning.
- There were some minor edits made to the draft plan after the public comments.
- These included supporting electric vehicles, acknowledging the importance of the LGBTQ community, and map edits.

Plan Summary:

- The plan seeks to build on the existing assets, connect the adjacent neighborhoods and make it a great place that is welcoming to the entire community.
- The plan has five theme areas:
    1) Quality Built Environment
    2) Unique and Inclusive Sense of Place
    3) Strong Local Economy
    4) Multimodal Transportation
    5) Strategic Infrastructure and Natural Environment
- The plan also has 10 Key Initiatives, they are:
    1) Update Zoning and Design Guidelines to Achieve Community Goals

2) Create a Gateway at Biltmore and Southside Avenues
3) Honor African-American History
4) Weave Art Throughout the District
5) Develop City-Owned Property for Affordable Housing & Job Creation
6) Enact Equitable Development
7) Convert Banks & Buxton Avenues to Shared Streets
8) Connect Neighborhoods Via the Southside Greenway Connector
9) Make Coxe Avenue a Green Main Street
10) Develop Successful Incentives for Sustainability

Comprehensive Plan Consistency:

- The South Slope Vision Plan:A Southside Neighborhood Vision Plan is aligned with a number of goals in the Living Asheville Comprehensive Plan including:
    - **Encourage Responsible Growth** - by prioritizing growth and development within designated growth areas, and by prioritizing form-based codes or design guidelines in designated growth areas and other innovation districts (p. 131).
    - **Promote Great Architecture and Urban Design to Enhance Placemaking** - by reviewing and updating district design guidelines to elevate building and streetscape design and placemaking (p. 139).
    - **Celebrate the Unique Identity of Neighborhoods Through Creative Placemaking** - by supporting contextually appropriate infill development, protecting distinct neighborhood characteristics, and continuing to implement recommendations from the Downtown Master Plan (p. 153).
    - **Make Streets More Walkable, Comfortable and Connected** - by adding pedestrian infrastructure and eliminating gaps in the sidewalk network (p. 147).
    - **Increase Access to Safe Bicycling** - by continuing to maintain and expand bicycle facilities citywide (p. 151).
    - **Elevate the Arts and Cultural Sectors to Strengthen and Preserve Heritage and History** - by identifying strategies to honor history and contributions of the African American community in Asheville (p. 157).
    - **Increase and Diversify the Housing Supply** - by promoting zoning policies to encourage more housing and encouraging more affordable housing options (p. 179).
    - **Promote the Development and Availability of Affordable and Workforce Housing** - by locating affordable housing development within innovation districts, transit-supportive centers, and near parks and jobs (p. 184).
    - **Create and Promote the Infrastructure to Attract Jobs** - by collaborating with economic development organizations and stakeholders to ensure that the city's infrastructure, real estate, and development-ready sites are positioned to attract and/or retain major employers (p. 191).
    - **Promote Small and Independent Business, Entrepreneurship and the Maker Economy** - by supporting incentives for small businesses and to open and thrive (p. 195).
    - **Create a More Formal Neighborhood Planning Process** - by developing small area plans for identified transit-supportive corridors and adjacent neighborhoods to translate the ideas in Living Asheville into physical implementable solutions, establish neighborhood goals, and identify potential zoning and urban design changes (p. 269).

Alignment with the Downtown Master Plan (DMP)

- The South Slope Vision Plan: A Southside Neighborhood Vision Plan is aligned with the DMP, specifically five of the seven chapters of the plan:
    - Enhance the Downtown Asheville experience by cultivating its creative, cultural and historic character.
    - Expand convenient choices for Downtown access and mobility
    - Inaugurate an urban design framework to extend Downtown's sense of place and community.
    - Shape building form to promote quality of place.
    - Update Downtown design guidelines.

Summary of Recent Changes to the Plan

- In late Summer 2022, several adjacent neighborhoods registered concerns with several aspects of the plan.
- Staff has been in touch with the neighborhoods since last Summer, although because of staff capacity, it has taken longer to work through the process.
- One set of concerns centered around potential heights on the edges of the study area and how potential rezonings were being described.
- There was also a concern that the plan was committing the City and community to future rezonings to particular districts.
- This was not the intent of the plan and language has been revised to describe potential changes more clearly.
- New zoning designations have not been chosen, nor are future height restrictions required by this plan.
- A second concern was how the map showed surrounding neighborhoods, and that it looked like a part of the East End Valley Street neighborhood was being renamed to South Slope, which was not the intention of the plan.
- Staff revised the maps showing neighborhoods to clarify these boundaries and added text about the plan's boundaries, which are a study area, not a new neighborhood boundary.
- South French Broad, East End Valley Street and Oakhurst have all expressed satisfaction with the changes.
- Staff has worked with leadership of these organizations, who have in turn been in touch with their larger neighborhoods.
- Staff reviewed the plan and explained the recent map changes with the Southside United Neighborhood Association in March 2023.

Council Goal(s):

- An Equitable and Diverse Community
- Thriving Local Economy
- A Clean and Healthy Environment
- Transportation and Accessibility
- A Well Planned and Livable Community
- Quality Affordable Housing

Committee(s):

- Planning and Economic Development - April 11, 2022
- Downtown Commission - June 10,2022 - recommended the plan for adoption with a vote of 9-0. The Downtown Commission recommended that the plan include buffer areas next to neighborhoods to protect the integrity of adjacent neighborhoods.
- Planning & Zoning Commission - August 3, 2022 - recommended the plan for adoption with a vote of 7-0.

Pro(s):

- Provides direction for future city projects and partnerships

Con(s):

- None

Fiscal Impact:

- None. The plan suggests potential future city investments, but plan adoption does not constitute a commitment to specific capital projects or investments.
- Those will be considered on an individual basis as appropriate in the future.

Suggested Motion:

- Move to adopt the South Slope: A Southside Neighborhood Vision Plan and find that the request is reasonable, is in the public interest, is consistent with the city's comprehensive plan and other adopted plans, and meets the needs of the community in that the plan: 1) builds on the existing assets and history of the study area as a part of the larger Southside community; 2) creates a vision that values equity and inclusion and equitable development so that growth benefits the whole community; 3) provides a framework for future development of buildings and transportation infrastructure; and, 4) calls for the support of local businesses and the development of affordable housing.

Attachment(s):

- Revised Draft South Slope: A Southside Neighborhood Vision Plan
- Recommendation form from Planning & Zoning Commission
- Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. 23-_____

RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE SOUTH SLOPE: A SOUTHSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD VISION PLAN FOR THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE.

WHEREAS, the Asheville Downtown Master Plan called for the development of small neighborhood plans within its study area and the Living Asheville Comprehensive Plan identified the South Slope as a important area of future growth; and

WHEREAS, Asheville City Council identified the creation of a plan for the South Slope neighborhood as a Strategic Priority in 2018; and

WHEREAS, the NC General Statutes empower cities to create small area plans in Sec 160D-501; and

WHEREAS, the plan, titled “South Slope: A Southside Neighborhood Vision Plan” (“Plan”) was developed over a three-year period that included an extensive public engagement process that included an Advisory Committee, a temporary design studio on Coxe Avenue, community meetings, a charrette and focus group meetings; and

WHEREAS, the Asheville Planning and Zoning Commission held a public hearing on August 3, 2022 and voted 7-0 to recommend adoption of the Plan based upon the oral and written comments presented before and at the hearing, as well as the Plan’s compliance with the Living Asheville Comprehensive Plan (“Living Asheville”) and other adopted city plans; and

WHEREAS, the Asheville Planning and Zoning Commission prepared a report in which it found that the plan:

A. Builds on the existing assets and history of the study area as a part of the larger Southside community;
B. Creates a vision that values equity and inclusion and equitable development so that growth benefits the whole community;
C. Provides a framework for future development of buildings and transportation infrastructure; and
D. Calls for the support of local businesses and the development of affordable housing.

WHEREAS, the Plan aligns with the 2036 Council Vision in the area of “A Well Planned and Livable Community”, and its adoption will satisfy Goal #9 of the 2018-19 Council Strategic Priorities;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE THAT:

The South Slope: A Southside Neighborhood Vision Plan is hereby adopted based upon the oral and written comments presented before and at the hearing and the factors set forth in UDO Section 7-4-2.

Read, approved and adopted this 28th day of March, 2023.

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City Clerk Mayor

Approved as to form:

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City Attorney