

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CONSISTENCY ANALYSIS

ZONE CHANGE - A-80 to A-20

SAGE DRIVE, CRANSTON, RI

ASSESSOR'S PLAT 35 - LOT 2



Prepared for: John Casale

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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

John Casale ("Petitioner") has engaged the professional land use planning and zoning consulting services of Pimentel Consulting, Inc. ("Consultant"), in order to evaluate the proposed rezoning of property located at the end of Sage Drive - presently zoned Residential 'A-80' District to be rezoned to Residential 'A-20' District. The referenced development will necessitate a recommendation from the Planning Commission, prior to proceeding onto the City Council for formal review and approval. The referenced zone change is to realize appropriate residential development of the subject property and further the goals and objectives of the City's Comprehensive Plan, in particular rendering compliance with the City's Future Land Use Map as required by Rhode Island General Law ("RIGL"), specifically the recently amended statute that became effective 1 March 2024 - RIGL 45-22.2-6(b)(11).

(11) Land use - *"In conjunction with the future land use map as required in subsection (b)(2) (ii) of this section, the plan must contain a land use component that designates the proposed general distribution and general location and interrelationships of land uses including, but not limited to: residential, commercial, industrial, open space, agriculture, recreation facilities, and other categories of public and private uses of land. The land use component shall be based upon the required plan content as stated in this section. It shall relate the proposed standards of population density and building intensity to the capacity of the land and available or planned facilities and services. The land use component must contain an analysis of the inconsistency of existing zoning districts, if any, with planned future land use. The land use component shall specify the process and schedule by which the zoning ordinance and zoning map shall be amended to conform to the comprehensive plan and shall be included as part of the implementation program, but **in no event shall it take longer than eighteen (18) months for a zoning map to be brought into compliance with the future land use map. The future land use map in a valid comprehensive plan updated in accordance with this chapter shall govern all local municipal land use decisions.**"*

In light of the stated proposal, I have thoroughly reviewed the subject zone change submission, City of Cranston, RI, Comprehensive Plan 2010 - June 2012 Amendment [hereinafter 'Comprehensive Plan'], as well as having conducted a thorough analysis of the general 'Alpine Estates' neighborhood, said analysis including all properties within a several-block radius, for purpose of concluding appropriate neighborhood density. My analysis entails rendering a determination as to the appropriateness of the proposed zone change, given the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan, specifically the Land Use and Housing Elements as well as the Future Lane Use map.

PRESENT CONDITIONS

The subject property, situated at the very end of Sage Drive, otherwise designated Assessor's Plat 35, Lot 2, and containing approximately 9.67-acres (421,225 square feet), is presently unimproved. The subject property is presently zoned Residential 'A-80' District [hereinafter 'A-80 District'], defined pursuant to Section 17.08.010 'Zoning Districts', of the Zoning Ordinance, in the following manner:

A-80 District - "Single-family dwellings on lots of minimum areas of eighty-thousand (80,000) square feet."

Albeit, zoned in such a manner as to reflect more-so low-density residential development, the property is in fact classified medium-density, or 'Single-Family Residential 3.63 to 1 Unit Per Acre', pursuant to the Comprehensive Plan - Future Land Use map - illustrated below [Credit: City of Cranston GIS].



Therefore, as a matter-of-law and maintaining Comprehensive Plan consistency, the permissible density ranges from 9.67 to 35.1 units of residential housing.

The property is surrounded by the following land use classifications: similar medium-density to the north and east; open space to the south, and low-density to the west. The property is stated amidst the 'Alpine Estates' development, all of which are zoned, classified, and improved in a medium-density fashion. It is unclear why the subject parcel maintains a low-density zoning designation. The only conclusion that can be reached by this professional land use consultant, is that respective zoning and land use classification reflects the piece-meal manner in which the area has developed - zoning designation and corresponding land use classification being amended as development progressed throughout Alpine Estates. However, the amended statute effective 1 March 2024, unequivocally states the following:

RIGL 45-22.2-6(b)(11) - *"The land use component shall specify the process and schedule by which the zoning ordinance and zoning map shall be amended to conform to the comprehensive plan and shall be included as part of the implementation program, but in no event shall it take longer than eighteen (18) months for a zoning map to be brought into compliance with the future land use map. The future land use map in a valid comprehensive plan updated in accordance with this chapter shall govern all local municipal land use decisions."*

The subject property should therefore be properly zoned A-20 District, in accordance with the manner in which the vast surrounding residential neighborhood is presently zoned and consequently improved. The Residential 'A-20' District [hereinafter 'A-20 District'], is defined pursuant to Section 17.08.010 'Zoning Districts', of the Zoning Ordinance, in the following manner:

A-20 District - *"Single-family dwellings on lots of minimum areas of twenty-thousand (20,000) square feet."*

It must be reemphasized that the stated A-20 District designation is corroborated by the Comprehensive Plan - Future Land Use map, which illustrates that the subject property is classified '**Single Family Residential 3.63 to 1 Unit Per Acre**' - or medium-density land use classification. Further documenting the inappropriateness of the present A-80 District zoning designation - or low-density land use classification.

PROPOSED ZONE CHANGE

The present proposal entails rezoning the subject property from the present inconsistent A-80 District designation (inconsistency documented pursuant to the present Future Land Use map land use classification) and rezoning to a more appropriate and consistent A-20 District designation. Consistency is not only generally corroborated by the Future Land Use map, but

also 'expressly' corroborated by the appendices to the Comprehensive Plan - Appendix A 'Zoning Consistency Analysis', which outlines in great detail those specific properties in which the present zoning designation is in 'error', or inconsistent, with what is otherwise anticipated from a density perspective pursuant to the Comprehensive Plan - Future Land Use map.

Appendix A - Zoning Consistency Analysis

Assessor's Plat 35, Lot 2 - 0 Sage Drive Land Use Classification - SFR 3.63 to 1 Unit Per Acre

Existing Zoning - A-80 District Proposed Zoning District - A-20 District

The vast present land use is single-family residential on lots approximating medium-density. This is an extremely important point because it not only reflects the appropriateness of residential development, but also acknowledges that there are no constraints (environmental or otherwise) to residential development on lots that are on average one-half acre in area. This is corroborated below by the results of the independently prepared 'Neighborhood Analysis'. Typically, the manner in which a property is zoned, is both well-supported by the corresponding land use classification and anticipated usage. For example, the Comprehensive Plan well documents that there are sections of Western Cranston that have experienced their share of appropriate residential growth, and that said density should be maintained.

LAND USE PLAN ELEMENT

Key Challenges - *"Cranston's land use practices and policies to manage growth must continue to be programmed to respond to changing markets and patterns of development. Over the past ten years, moderate residential growth in western Cranston, reuse of the State land at the Pastore Center, and new development in both industrial parks and other large land parcels have required adjustments to the City's land use policies. Challenges for the future include."* [Page 21]

- **Differentiating Neighborhoods** – *"The City has new residential development and has preserved more open space in western Cranston, while large and small redevelopment projects are occurring in eastern Cranston. Neighborhoods are being formed in western Cranston, while neighborhoods are reaffirming themselves in the East. This Plan proposes to recognize those differences with varying approaches to growth management while protecting existing neighborhoods."*

Land Use Principles - *"During the comprehensive planning process, it was determined that there were common themes among many of the ideas, suggestions, and issues regarding land use that also affected the other elements. These themes support the following land use principles and provide a basis for actions proposed in this plan."* [Page 34]

Principle 4: *"Protect and stabilize existing residential neighborhoods by basing land use decisions on neighborhood needs and quality of life."*

"Protect the natural, historic and visual resources that define the neighborhoods. In addition, support the existing residential development patterns in order to stabilize the residential blocks and neighborhoods." [Page 34]

Therefore, the Comprehensive Plan acknowledges that additional growth is anticipated - directing future development towards those areas that can accommodate intensification that is reflective of present densities. Considering medium-density residential development is being well-supported throughout the 'Alpine Estates' neighborhood, there is no 'Reasonable Purpose' for maintaining the present A-80 zoning designation.

NEIGHBORHOOD ANALYSIS

Rezoning the subject property to A-20 District is without question, in the professional opinion of this land use consultant, not only appropriate but also legally necessary to realize consistency with the Future Land Use map. A thorough neighborhood analysis was prepared to further document the appropriateness of the proposed zone change. The parameters of the referenced neighborhood analysis include all properties located along Alpine Estates Drive, Cranberry Terrace, Caraway Drive, Thyme Drive, Sage Drive, Belle-Isle Way, Basil Crossing, Dove Court, Raven Circle, Marjoram Drive and Pepper Mill Lane. In total, 191-lots were analyzed, exclusive of the subject property. Although, certain parcels appear to have the requisite acreage to accommodate further subdivision, they were treated as being fully built-out regardless of the excessive associated acreage. All researched parcels appear to have been already residentially improved, to further evidence the appropriateness of residential development at the density level requested.

The resulting lot density, even without considering the subdivision of properties that appear to have excessive acreage, is one-unit per 19,794 square feet - in-line with the A-20 District designation. Clearly, corroborating the medium-density classification of the surrounding neighborhood and manner in which said neighborhood has long been improved. The results of the 'Neighborhood Analysis,' evidences a predominantly medium-density residential presence. Therefore, it is the professional opinion of this land use consultant, given present neighborhood conditions, that the subject property is appropriately suited for greater residential development.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ANALYSIS

The primary assurance that a development is consistent with the needs of a community is when it can be shown to be consistent with the goals, objectives and policies of the Comprehensive Plan. The following language confirms that the subject development does indeed further the intent and purpose of the Comprehensive Plan.

LAND USE PLAN ELEMENT

Key Challenges - *“Cranston’s land use practices and policies to manage growth must continue to be programmed to respond to changing markets and patterns of development. Over the past ten years, moderate residential growth in western Cranston, reuse of the State land at the Pastore Center, and new development in both industrial parks and other large land parcels have required adjustments to the City’s land use policies. Challenges for the future include.”* [Page 21]

- **Build An Even Better Cranston – Neither western nor eastern Cranston has been ‘built out’ according to current zoning regulations. There are many opportunities for new residential development in western Cranston** as well as redevelopment and infill opportunities in eastern Cranston, based on recent land use data. Guidelines for development will protect community character and channel development potential in ways that will maintain the local environment and quality of life.”

Housing Element

Key Challenges - *“While Cranston approaches build-out of residential development and while some neighborhoods are ‘aging’, this Element focuses on ways to improve existing neighborhoods and proposes more efficient ways of utilizing the remaining land.”* [Page 57]

- o *“Existing residential neighborhoods, in both eastern and western Cranston, are stable and well maintained. Wholesale redevelopment of existing residential blocks would be disruptive and undesirable in most areas. Instead, the regulatory environment and city programs should support the existing neighborhoods in terms of maintaining their character.”*
- o **Overall growth is comparatively slow, except in western Cranston where undeveloped land is still available for new housing development.** However, development of this land is constrained by environmental and other regulatory restrictions, and the public’s desire for open space preservation. This makes it even more crucial to plan how the remaining land in western Cranston is developed, preserved, or improved.”

The applicant’s proposal is clearly consistent with the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan, specifically the Land Use and Housing Elements, as well as in keeping with the character of the surrounding neighborhood. The Comprehensive Plan acknowledges that density should mirror neighborhood characteristics.

ZONE CHANGE APPROPRIATENESS

As has been well documented throughout this report, a zone change is quite appropriate given the present vast surrounding medium-density residential character and reflective consistent land use classification pursuant to the Future Land Use map. Further evidence of this appropriateness is provided for by past zone change requests within the proximate neighborhood for very similar density modifications. There is a rather extensive list of such requests documented within the Comprehensive Plan [Pages 43 - 44] that have already been incorporated into the Future Land Use map.

Finally, and perhaps an even more important point, is in regard to the zone change and corresponding density-level requested. The applicant seeks the least dense zoning designation that realizes consistency with the Future Land Use map. There are several zoning designations that would realize consistency with the Future Land Use map, and therefore deemed appropriate as a matter-of-law. Nevertheless, that is not what the applicants desire - greater neighborhood inappropriate density - but a zoning designation that reflect a density that is quite on point with the surrounding character. This point is well corroborated by the Comprehensive Plan [Pages 42 - 43], as evidenced by the following:

Future Land Use Map - *"The Future Land Use Map shows the proposed future land use citywide. There are several new plan components depicted on this map that were not shown on the 1992 Future Land Use Plan. These changes include:"* [Page 42]

Residential Land Use Designations

"The Future Land Use Plan creates residential land use categories based on intensity and use so that the residential land uses can be linked to specific zoning classifications. The following table presents the residential land use classifications with their appropriate zoning classifications:" [Page 43]

Land Use Classifications

Zone

Single Family Residential - Less Than One-Unit Per Acre

A-80 District

Single Family Residential - 3.63 to One-Unit Per Acre

A-12 and A-20 Districts

Therefore, whereas the resulting A-20 District will permit a greater density than otherwise permitted by the current zoning designation, the A-12 District would permit an even greater density.

ZONE CHANGE: RESIDENTIAL 'A-80' DISTRICT to RESIDENTIAL 'A-20' DISTRICT

The results of both the 'Comprehensive Plan' and 'Neighborhood Analysis' clearly acknowledge support for the proposed zone change, and corresponding residential intensification. The referenced zone change will be more in-line with the character of the surrounding neighborhood as well as render consistency with the goals and objectives of the overall Comprehensive Plan, specifically the Land Use and Housing Elements.

The applicant is required by law to evidence consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, and more importantly the "Future Land Use" map. R.I.G.L. 45-24-50 – "Consistency with Comprehensive Plan", specifically grants local communities the authority to amend their Ordinances, when it is done so for the purpose of promoting the public health, safety, morals and general welfare. An Ordinance amendment, including change to the official zoning map, must first evidence consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. The above-referenced 'Comprehensive Plan - Consistency Analysis', has clearly concluded the appropriateness of the proposed zone change. Said conclusion resulted from a comparative analysis of the surrounding property and neighborhood characteristics and Comprehensive Plan objectives that will be achieved.

The final, and most salient point, is consistency with the "Future Land Use" map, which reflects, "...the preferred or acceptable patterns of land use..." Evidence of this consistency must be satisfied, otherwise RIGL mandates a Comprehensive Plan amendment. It is abundantly clear that the Future Land Use map classifies the subject property for '**Single Family Residential 3.63 to 1 Unit Per Acre**' - or medium-density land use classification - thereby fully supporting the proposed zone change to an A-20 District. Although, regulations typically mandate that a community render their official zoning map consistent with their Future Land Use map within a reasonable period of time, this is not typically followed for a variety of reasons. A community would prefer to have a property owner engage in such action, thereby providing an avenue for regulating development - determining whether the resulting zone change / usage of the property is in accordance with the overall goals and objectives of the community. This land use planning consultant reiterates that the community specifically directs a private property owner to seek a zone change when necessary to realize consistency with the Comprehensive Plan

CONCLUSION

In summary, this planning consultant professionally believes that the Planning Commission should not have any reservation in forwarding a positive recommendation, followed by affirmative City Council action. The proposed A-20 District zoning designation is purely for the purpose of realizing consistency with the character of the surrounding neighborhood and permit the property owner appropriate usage of his property. The potential development that may result does not even approach present density levels, and therefore quite appropriate given the medium-density residential character of the surrounding neighborhood. Furthermore, the purpose for the zone change is to realize consistency with the comprehensive plan, as mandated by law.

It is the professional opinion of this planning consultant that the following language excerpted from the Comprehensive Plan - Housing Element, illustrates clear support for the proposed redevelopment.

Housing Action Program - Conserve Existing Housing Resources

HA-6 - "Review zoning in existing residential neighborhoods to ensure the zoning matches, as closely as possible, what has already been built."