

Staying Ahead of the Curve:

Lindon City (Utah) Planning Commission

The Lindon Heritage Trail on Center Street will preserve the rural character that is still found in a large portion of the residential neighborhoods within Lindon. To be constructed in the spring of 2008 is a 10-foot-wide trail that will provide a continuous trail connection from Utah Lake to the Mt. Timpanogos foothills.

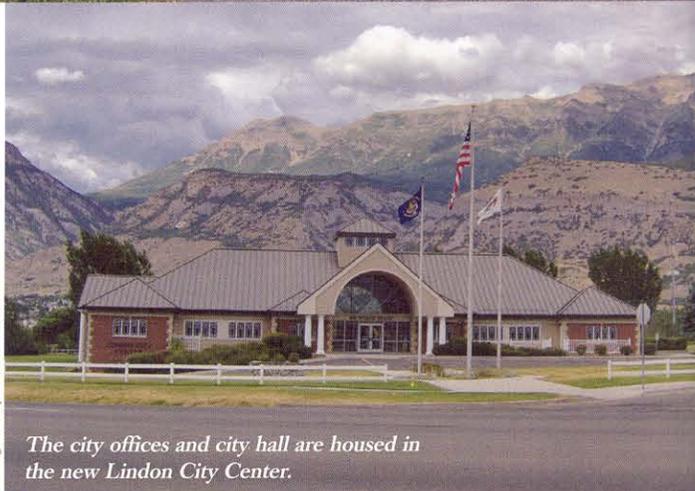


Largely immune from the rapid development in the Salt Lake City-Provo, Utah, corridor, Lindon City sees growth coming. “We are in the enviable position of being able to anticipate, rather than react to, development,” says Gary Godfrey, vice chair of the Lindon City Planning Commission. “Unlike other cities where development happened over a long period of time, we have a unique opportunity to create an identity for our city, to structure what we want development to be like and look like.”

A combination of factors—a proposed Interstate interchange and road, the opening of a Wal-Mart, and light-rail line—convinced the planning commission the time was ripe to control Lindon’s destiny. “We saw where things were going to start hopping,” says commission chair Jim Peters, “so we took the initiative.” For close to five years, commissioners have worked on a variety of projects to ensure the city retains “a little bit of country”—Lindon’s motto—as it grows.

To that end, the seven-member commission has focused on creating commercial architectural design guidelines and updating the city’s sign ordinance, in addition to its ongoing reviews of subdivision proposals and requests for conditional uses and zoning changes. “We also issue a new city general plan every five years,” says Godfrey. “It takes some time to review state legislative law changes and judicial interpretations and incorporate them into our plan.”

The planning commission meets twice a month. “We may be a small community, but there’s a lot to do,” says Adam Cowie, planning and economic development director. “We are positioned between several larger communities—Orem City to the



The city offices and city hall are housed in the new Lindon City Center.

All images this spread Adam Cowie

south has over 100,000 people—and there’s enough activity within Utah County and the region that Lindon, with 10,500 residents, functions as a larger city, especially given our industrial and commercial base.”

Commissioners spend more than 12 hours a month at or preparing for meetings, according to Godfrey. In addition to reviewing meeting documents, Godfrey spends time in the field. “I try to go by all of the sites that are on the agenda. I drive by, take notes, and come prepared with questions that are site specific,” he says.

There are few requirements for or restrictions on planning commission service. Commissioners are appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the city council. Terms are for two years and there is no term limit. “The mayor tries to get a cross section of the city,” says Jim Peters. “Our two residential zones—R12 and R20—

Looking to the Future with an Eye on the Past

"We are a pioneer-based community and some of the buildings we most appreciate in our community are historic, built around the turn of the century," says Jim Peters. "With our new design guidelines, we're after a particular architectural character. We're not asking that the whole town look the same, just that there be a local flavor—an identity that says, 'This is Lindon.'"

Established in 1861, Lindon originally was known as Stringtown because homes were built along a single road, State Street. Although as the city grew and several historic homes were converted to commercial use, Lindon never developed a traditional downtown core.

When Wal-Mart came to Lindon nearly five years ago—and with major roadway and transit projects in the offing—the planning commission worked with the community to ascertain those characteristics that were important to preserve and promote. The design guidelines stress rustic architecture and note a preference among residents for "craftsman and alpine-type construction."

Adopted in August 2006, the guidelines were revised three months later. Adam Cowie anticipates some additional changes this spring. The guidelines cover areas zoned General Commercial, primarily State Street and the 700 North corridor.

The proposed extension of light rail from the Salt Lake Valley will encourage development, commissioners agree. Over the next 22 years, communities in Utah County are expected to add another 200,000 residents. Lindon—bounded by the Wasatch Mountains to the east, Utah Lake to the west, and communities to both the north and south—is unlikely to be able to accommodate more than 6,500 new residents.

The need for housing—particularly affordable housing—for current and prospective residents has resulted in the development of an ordinance that integrates higher density units throughout the city. With just two residential zones, neither of which allow for multifamily units, the planning commission adopted an overlay zone to evenly dispense higher density development in all parts of the city.

The R2 overlay sets a limit on the number of multifamily units allowed in each district and the number built annually. It restricts the number of units in higher density buildings to four and prohibits construction of a multifamily building within a 750-foot radius of another such structure. "Each section of the city takes on the responsibility of providing this type of housing," says Gary Godfrey. "As a result, there is no stigma . . . or any of the issues that come with grouping this type of housing in one place. There will never be a project or ghetto in our city because the housing is integrated and neighbors embrace it."

The city also encourages accessory apartments in single-family houses, according to Peters. The accessory units, which must be in an owner-occupied home, do not count as multifamily structures and are not subject to the separation buffer or district restrictions. The city has several hundred accessory apartments that provide housing for a range of residents, including students at the nearby Utah Valley State College.

"We still have a ways to go when it comes to development in Lindon," says Peters, "but we've made progress and established criteria to guide growth. I think we have made it known that Lindon is a unique community and we want to keep it that way."



(From left to right) in back row: Ron Anderson, Mark Johnson, Ken Miller. In front row: Matt Bean, Jim Peters (chair). Not pictured: Julie Bryner, Gary Godfrey (vice chair).

Utah Lake is visible from the foothills of Mt. Timpanogos; the city of Lindon borders its eastern shore.



are represented and we have a variety of backgrounds—a dairy farmer, real estate agent, accountant, and someone in the computer industry."

Planning commissioners also attend training. "They participate in the APA Utah Chapter conference whenever possible," says Cowie. They recently took part in a program on ethics and legal issues designed for local government employees.

"I have attended more training lately than I did when I was new," says Godfrey. "The longer I serve, the more I realize how valuable the training opportunities from local associations are. I've been really impressed with the perspective they've given me and would encourage planning commissioners, especially those who are new, to take advantage of them. They make us much more effective."