



Planning Commission Minutes

Note: Anyone wishing to speak at any Planning Commission meeting is encouraged to do so. If you wish to speak, please rise and, after you have been recognized by the Chair, give your name and complete address for the record. You will then be allowed to speak. Please note the public testimony may be limited by the Chair.

July 22, 2025 SPECIAL MEETING Minutes

I. **CALL TO ORDER:**

Chair Verner called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. at the Civic Center Council Chambers, 1175 E. Main Street.

Commissioners Present:

Lisa Verner
Susan MacCracken Jain
Eric Herron
Russell Phillips

Staff Present:

Brandon Goldman, Community Development Director
Derek Severson, Planning Manager
Michael Sullivan, Executive Assistant

Absent Members:

John Maher
Kerry KenCairn

Council Liaison:

Jeff Dahle (absent)

II. **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

1. Staff Announcements:

Community Development Director Brandon Goldman made the following announcements:

- The Council passed first reading of an ordinance to adopt the SOU Master Plan on July 15th with amendments:
 - o Maximum height for solar installations was increased from 25 feet to 38 feet
 - o Heights for the SO zone were modified to allow 60-foot height outright and 70-foot height with a conditional use permit (*different from Planning Commission's recommendation of 50 feet with 60 feet for affordable housing with CUP*)
 - o Heights along the Ashland Street corridor adjacent to the Climate Friendly Area would follow the Planning Commission's recommendation of 50-foot height, 60-foot with affordable housing and higher (up to 110 feet) with a CUP.
 - o Second reading scheduled for August 5, 2025
- The Council also approved first reading of an ordinance amending the Hamilton Creek-Ashland modified floodplain, with second reading scheduled for August 5, 2025

Commissioner Phillips asked if the Council's amendments to the SOU Master Plan would affect the ability to develop a building on the corner of Walker and Ashland Street up to 110 feet. Director



Planning Commission Minutes

Goldman confirmed that there was no height cap proposed in the amendments for developments with a conditional use permit.

2. Advisory Committee Liaison Reports – None

III. CONSENT AGENDA

Approval of Minutes

1. June 24, 2025 Special Meeting Minutes

Commissioners MacCracken Jain/Phillips m/s to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Voice Vote: All AYES. Motion passed 4-0.

IV. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. Approval of Findings for PA-T2-2025-00056, 120 Westwood Street

Ex Parte Contact

No ex parte contact or site visits were disclosed.

Decision

Commissioners Phillips/MacCracken Jain m/s to approve the Findings as presented. Roll Call Vote: all AYES. Motion passed 4-0.

- B. Approval of Findings for PA-T3-2024-00011, 1511 Highway 99 North

Ex Parte Contact

No ex parte contact or site visits were disclosed.

Decision

Commissioners Herron/MacCracken Jain m/s to approve the Findings as presented. Roll Call Vote: all AYES. Motion passed 4-0.

V. TYPE II PUBLIC HEARING

SUBJECT PROPERTY:

Fern Street Public Right-of-Way north of 648 Roca Street

OWNER / APPLICANT:

City of Ashland/Public Works Department



Planning Commission Minutes

DESCRIPTION: The Planning Commission will consider a request to vacate a portion of the Fern Street right-of-way just north of 648 Roca Street and make a recommendation to the City Council. **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN DESIGNATION:** Southern Oregon University; **ZONING:** SO; **MAP & TAX LOT:** Public Right of Way

Staff Presentation

Planning Manager Derek Severson explained that the proposal was for vacation of a section of Fern Street right-of-way to the east of Roca Street. He noted that the existing right-of-way would never be extended through due to grade, the presence of a creek, and lots on the east side. The request was to vacate it to SOU, who owns the properties to the north and south.

Mr. Severson noted that the Comprehensive Plan seeks to retain public bicycle and pedestrian access when vacating public right-of-way. Mr. Severson explained that the area has been used by the public with numerous trails through it. SOU had improved it as an arboretum as intended in their last master plan and installed a frisbee golf course that is popular in the community, along with a trail system used by neighbors for recreation (see attachment #1).

Staff recommended that the Planning Commission forward a favorable recommendation to the City Council and ask that public pedestrian access and public utility easements be retained to provide a connection from Roca Street to Madrone Street, and to accommodate existing utilities in place within the segment of right-of-way to be vacated.

Questions of Staff

In response to questions from Commissioners, Severson clarified:

- An existing sewer line runs diagonally across lot 628 in the Roca Park subdivision and continues north to Ashland Street, but it already has an easement
- The land would be split equally between the abutting SOU properties
- The water resource protection zone extends 30 feet on either side of the creek, and severe constraint lands with slopes over 35% are considered unbuildable
- A pedestrian easement would likely be 8-10 feet wide but given the steep terrain, it would not be accessible to all users

Applicant Presentation

Alan Harper and Rob Patridge represented SOU. They reported investigating the trails and access to Roca Canyon since the last meeting. Harper stated that SOU's preference for the pedestrian easement would be to link it to the parking lot and go back up, noting that many people use the parking lot to access the trails (see attachment #2).

Mr. Harper and Mr. Patridge proposed gifting to the City the riparian corridor and steep slope areas where the trails are located, explaining that the University doesn't maintain these areas but they are



Planning Commission Minutes

used by the public. They showed photos of the area and explained that SOU would retain some access rights for maintaining equipment like a seismic monitoring device.

Public Comments

The following submitted public comments which highlighted the ecological and recreational importance of maintaining pedestrian access through a natural trail system in the Roca Canyon area, expressing concerns over potential impacts of the proposed right-of-way changes:

- Alison Laughlin
- Bruce Bergstrom (see attachment #3)
- Jeannine Grizzard (see attachment #4)
- Amy Swan

Chair Verner closed the Public Hearing and Public Record at 8:11 p.m.

Deliberations and Decision

The Commission discussed SOU's proposal to dedicate the riparian area to the City. Commissioner Phillips asked for clarification on where the dedication line would exist in relation to the creek, riparian setback, and unbuildable lands. SOU representatives confirmed it would encompass the riparian corridor and steep slope areas.

Commissioner Herron expressed concern about recommending vacation of the storm drain easement without confirmation from Public Works Director Scott Fleury about whether the infrastructure exists or is needed. Chair Verner questioned whether the Parks Department would want to accept the proposed riparian area, with Mr. Goldman noting that the City would need to consider maintenance costs, including wildfire and riparian mitigation.

Commissioners Herron/MacCracken Jain m/s to reopen the Public Record for written testimony to be accepted through August 26, 2025, and to continue the Public Hearing to August 26, 2025, at 7:00 PM to deliberate on the proposal. Roll Call Vote: Commissioners MacCracken Jain, Herron, and Verner: AYE. Commissioner Phillips: NAY. Motion passed 3-1.

VI. OPEN DISCUSSION - None

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

*Submitted by,
Michael Sullivan, Executive Assistant*



Planning Commission Public Hearing Right-of-Way Vacation – Fern Street

S. MOUNTAIN AV.

**Previously Vacated
Section of Fern St.**

ELKADER ST.

ROCA ST.

FERN ST

Staff-Recommended PPAE

Roca Park Subdivision

**FERN ST. R-o-W
Proposed for Vacation**

MADRONE ST.

LEONARD ST.



Better Together

Street Connectivity

Grades, Roca Creek corridor and the developed lots on the east side will not allow for an improved street to be extended in the R-o-W.

Pedestrian Connectivity

The Comp Plan (ACP 10.15.02.04) calls for pedestrian and bicycle access to be retained with vacations. City street standards (AMC 18.4.6.040.E.9) call for block lengths of 300-400 feet with maximum block perimeters of 1,200-1,600 feet. Due to the Roca Creek corridor and associated slopes, there is not an improved street extending east from Roca Street between the University Campus and the city limits nearly 2,500 feet to the south. With the proposed vacation, staff recommends that a pedestrian access easement between Roca Street and the unimproved west-end of Madrone Street be provided, as illustrated with a dashed line in the previous slide, to provide maintain a measure of connectivity in the area.

Utilities

Public Works has indicated that there is a storm drain line in place within the right-of-way proposed to be vacated. Staff recommends that a ten-foot public utility easement be retained to accommodate utilities.

Neighborhood Issues

This area of Fern Street R-o-W extends into lands identified in the 2010 SOU Master Plan as the Siskiyou Arboretum, which was to serve as an outdoor classroom to study native flora. The area also includes a well-used frisbee golf course & a trail system relied upon heavily by the surrounding neighborhood. Roca Creek corridor is identified for aspirational trail acquisition in the 2024 Parks, Trails & Open Space Map. Staff anticipate that a number of neighbors are likely to attend the hearing tonight to voice their concerns with the vacation, the sale of the University's properties along Roca Street anticipated in the current Master Plan application, and the eventual impacts to public use of these trails when the property transitions to private ownership.







S. MOUNTAIN AV.

**Previously Vacated
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Staff-Recommended PPAE

Roca Park Subdivision

**FERN ST. R-o-W
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MADRONE ST.

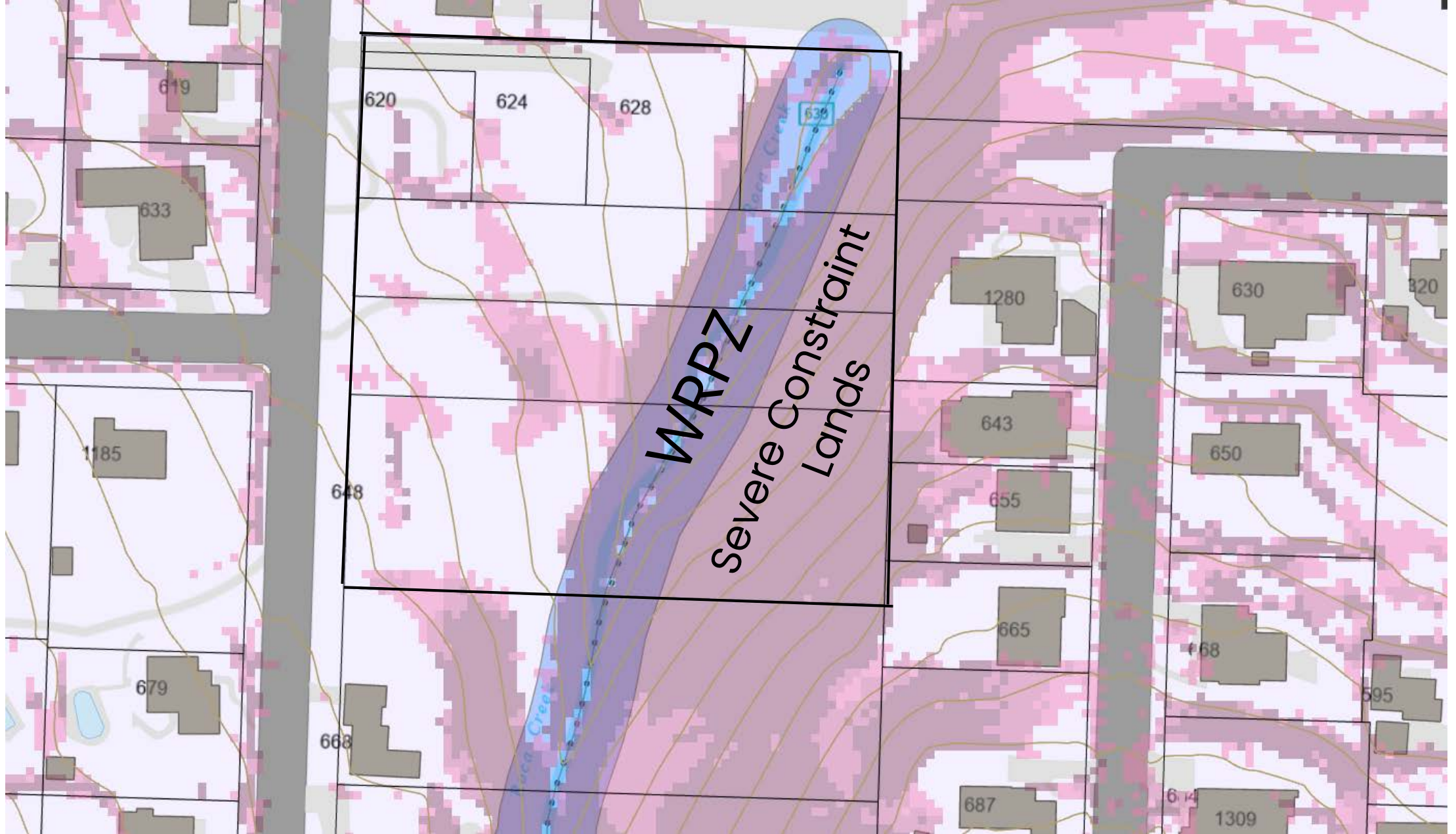
LEONARD ST.



Better Together







Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission forward a favorable recommendation to the City Council and ask that public pedestrian access and public utility easements be retained to provide a connection from Roca Street to Madrone Street, and to accommodate existing utilities in place within the segment of right-of-way to be vacated.



Any questions?...

Planning Commission Public Hearing Right-of-Way Vacation – Fern Street



Roca Street Properties Concept July 15, 2025



ROCA CANYON VIDEO

4,191

Roca Canyon
July 15, 2025

Roca Street Concept



Easement

Deed to City

Vacation to SOU



Questions?

Thank You!



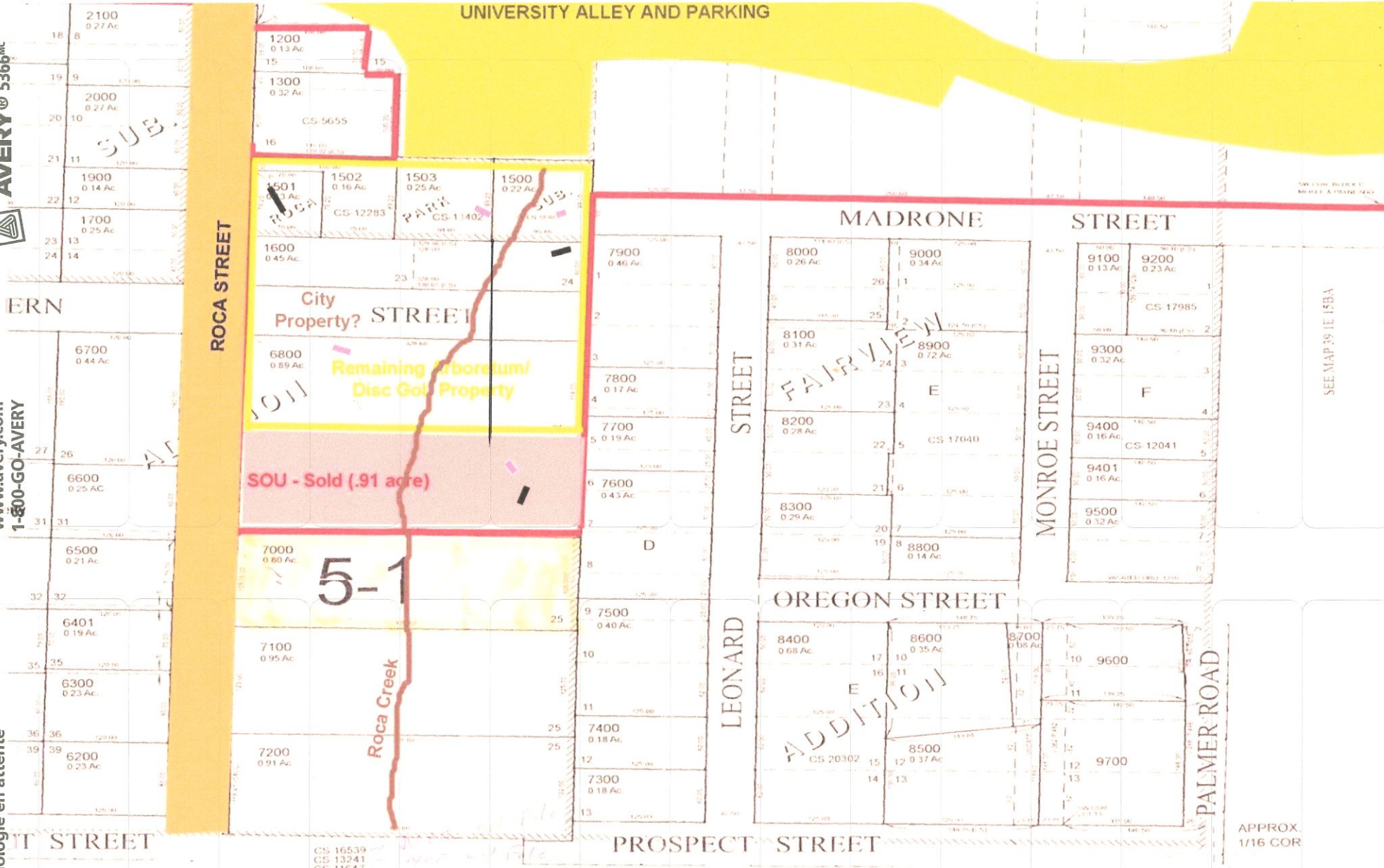
General Contact Information



541-552-8055



generalcounsel@sou.edu



July 22, 2025

Dear Ashland Planning Commissioners,

My name is Jeannine Grizzard and I have lived for 19 years at 698 Roca Street. I am artistic director of Ashland's community theatre, but for decades my livelihood has been residential real estate investment. It's why I made a bid on 668 Roca. I've walked plenty of empty land with my shopping hat on.

So on Monday July 21, I explored the length of the Canyon creek and took two dozen pictures documenting the wildlife created watering access points.

My take-away is the obvious: animals are going to do what they need to do and humans will follow in the paths they make. There is plenty of wildlife in the Canyon: raccoons, skunk, deer with new fawns, foxes, a bear who has cubs regularly—and every one of these creatures lives in my yard, at least part time. People traverse the Leonard Street side of my lot using the deer trails but we all co-exist. A few new houses coming into Roca Park will not shoo away the wildlife, and a planning premise counting on that is inconsistent with the peaceful animal/human coexistence goals of our special town.

In looking at Roca Park as a potential investor or home buyer, the topography presents numerous problems in securing a future home's footprint. What are all these animals and therefore people crossing my (imaginary) yard to the creek? Is the whole thing going to have to be contained in fencing like Trump's Border Wall? Fencing the new development would put tremendous pressure on my (actual) land at 698 and 668 next door to become the West to East crossing points. Not fencing it, would mean that wildlife and therefore people would traverse the yards of the new homes.

I would like to propose a solution: First, leave vacant as riparian area or sell to the Leonard Street homeowners, the land across the creek that is below (i.e. north of) the Fern Street right of way. Don't have responsibility for that land maintenance be part of the lot owners at the bottom of Roca Park. Have their lot lines stop at the riparian area before the creek. Next, do not vacate the Fern Street Right of Way. Animals, and therefore people, are going to flow down the Roca Park slope. Don't try to fight it. Give them a route to the riparian area to then move freely through the Canyon and make a proper crossing point for pedestrians to Madrone somewhere in the corner following on Alison Laughlin's suggestions.

Approval of the proposal to vacate without modification creates a future problem that savvy investors can see coming.

Respectfully,
Jeannine Grizzard
698 Roca Street