

ONALASKA SUBAREA PLAN

Frequently Asked Questions

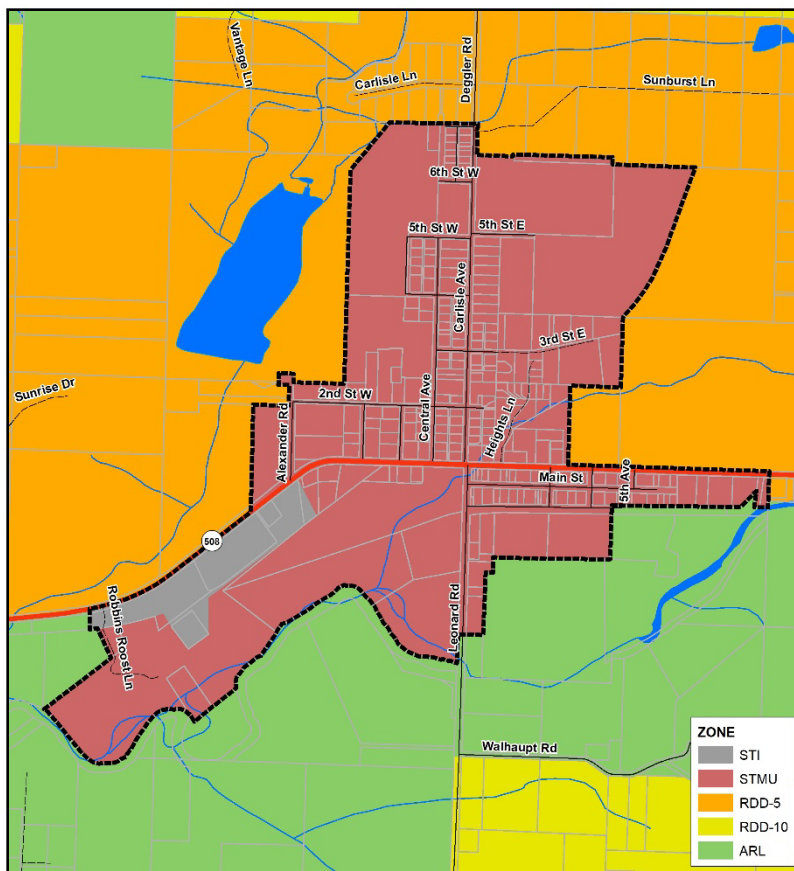
Below are questions that have been asked by the community during meetings, forums and via email. As additional questions are raised, this document will be update.

1. What is the zoning in Onalaska?

Today, Onalaska has two zones – Small Town Mixed Use (STMU) and Small Town Industrial (STI).

Below is a map of the zoning and an interactive map is available at

<https://gis.lewiscountywa.gov/webmap/>. Onalaska is unincorporated; therefore, Lewis County determines the zoning. The zoning must comply with the Lewis County Comprehensive Plan and the Washington State Growth Management Act. Lewis County can change the zoning and what is allowed in each zone as long as it remains in compliance with state law.



Onalaska Subarea Plan

Existing Zoning

Updated 6/07/2023

Planning Division, Community Development

- Onalaska Urban Growth Area
- SR 508
- Roads
- Parcels
- Waterbodies

0 0.075 0.15 0.3 Miles



This map was created by Lewis County Geographic Information System. The accuracy of the map has not been verified and should be used for informational purposes only. Any possible discrepancies should be brought to the attention of Lewis County GIS, State Plaza Washington South F119 4502, North American Datum 1983, North American Vertical Datum 1985 (Topography)

2. What is allowed in the Small Town Mixed Use (STMU) zone?

STMU is currently applied to most of Onalaska and allows a wide range of new development including commercial uses such as grocery stores, restaurants, hotels and professional offices, as well as residential use including single dwelling houses, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), duplexes and multifamily residential including triplexes, rowhouse and apartments. Industrial uses are not allowed in STMU. The type of development that can occur is typically based on how sewage will be disposed of and access to potable water. Please see the Land Use Summary table in Lewis County Code 17.42 for more information

<https://www.codepublishing.com/WA/LewisCounty/#!/LewisCounty17/LewisCounty1742.html#17.42>

3. What is allowed in the Small Town Industrial (STI) zone?

STI is currently applied to the old mill site and allows industrial uses only. Commercial uses can be allowed if directly associated with an industrial use, such as selling sheds that are manufactured on site. No new residential uses are allowed in a STI zone. Event centers, such as an amphitheater, can occur in the STI zone. Please see the Land Use Summary table in Lewis County Code 17.42 for information about allowed uses in the STI zone.

4. Can the zoning be changed?

Yes, the zoning can be changed. The two main ways zoning is changed is: 1) through a comprehensive planning process, such as the subarea plan, where the community is involved in changing the zoning; or 2) an individual property owner may request a rezone. In both cases, the change must be consistent with the Lewis County Comprehensive Plan and the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA). Outside of a comprehensive planning process, it is often difficult to demonstrate consistency for an individual rezone. For example, if someone wants to change Agricultural Resource Land (ARL) to Rural Development District (RDD), per GMA the property owner must demonstrate that the land *cannot* be used for agricultural purposes. If the land has been or is being used for agricultural purposes, then it likely cannot be rezoned.

5. Why is the Onalaska Subarea Plan being updated?

In 2017, Lewis County adopted the subarea plan, which included applying an Urban Growth Area (UGA) to Onalaska. The UGA supported increasing development opportunities in areas that could be served by the sewer system. However, the zoning designations and development regulations were not updated to conform to new UGA. This mismatch between the UGA and zoning makes it difficult for owners to develop or redevelop the property. The mismatch needs to be fixed. In addition, the 2017 subarea plan did not include community vision, goals and policies for Onalaska. Updating the subarea plan provides the community an opportunity to set the goals for the future.



6. If zoning changes, does development that isn't allowed have to leave?

No, existing development can persist. It is called "legal nonconforming" development or uses. For example, if there is a convenience store and the zone is changed to prohibit new convenience stores, the existing store can stay, be maintained and be replaced in the current footprint. It can also be sold to a new owner who can continue to operate it as a grocery store. If the owner wanted to change the structure to a different use, such as an auto repair shop, then they would have to comply with the new zoning regulations.

7. Can Onalaska incorporate as a city?

Not right now. State law requires that a town have a population of at least 1,500 inhabitants to incorporate. The Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) provides small area population estimates, which includes the Onalaska UGA. The 2022 OFM population estimate for Onalaska was 562 people.

8. How are property taxes calculated?

Property taxes are based on what the taxing districts in your area can budget for annually, which is constrained by several state laws. The budgets cannot increase more than 1% over last year's budget plus new construction and state assessed utility increases. However, some additional funds can be raised by levies voted on by the residents in a district.

Each November, taxing districts must turn in their budgets to the Assessor. The Assessor calculates the levy rate by dividing the property tax budget of the taxing district by the assessed value of all of the properties in that district. That computation sets the levy rate that is applied to each parcel in that taxing district, usually expressed as a figure in dollars per \$1000 of assessed value. The Lewis County Board of County Commissioners approves the budget. One result of the budget-based system is that each taxpayer contributes to the budget in proportion to the value of the property the taxpayer owns. So, if a taxpayer's value increases relative to others in the same district, he or she may pay proportionally more.

9. Why have the property taxes increased in Onalaska?

All regular taxing districts can ask for 1% more in their budgets than the previous year. This is added to the cost of new construction and state assessed utility increases. Also, voters may approve new or changed levies in some circumstances. Based on these things, the average taxpayer's bill may increase annually by 8-11%. For 2022 tax year, unless a homeowner made a significant change to their property, most people's taxes were similar to 2021. Some property owners saw an increase and others a decrease. To review tax history for any parcel in Lewis County, please visit <https://parcels.lewiscountywa.gov>.



10. What is the definition of *affordable housing*?

Affordable housing means that a person spends no more than 30% of their monthly income on rent or mortgage ([RCW 84.14.010 Definitions](#)). In 2022, for a single person making minimum wage of \$14.49 an hour, affordable rent is \$754 a month. Area Median Income (AMI) for a family of four is \$53,000 per year and affordable rent/mortgage is \$1,325 a month.

When Lewis County staff use the phrase “affordable housing,” they mean everyone making minimum wage or more can find housing that is affordable for them. To achieve that, there must be an adequate supply of a diversity of housing options – apartments, condos, mobile home parks, townhomes, duplexes, single family residences – either in rural areas or in the cities throughout the county. Currently there is a shortage in Lewis County of affordable housing options for people earning lower to middle income.

11. What can the County do to create more housing more affordable?

Housing affordability is impacted significantly by supply and demand. When there is high demand and low supply, housing prices go up. There is very low supply in Lewis County right now. According to a recent study there is only one month of houses for sale and the goal is to have four months of supply. In addition, there is only a 4.8% vacancy rate in rentals, which is also very low.

The three most common ways to stabilize housing prices are to: 1) enable the market to create more housing, 2) provide government interventions, and 3) develop subsidized housing. The first option typically includes updating zoning to allow a wider diversity of housing options at higher densities. The second option could include things like rent control on existing housing or property tax breaks for building certain types of new housing. (Keep in mind that providing tax breaks means the rest of the tax burden is spread out to other tax payers.) The third option could include a government entity or a non-profit organization purchasing or building housing that is provided at a lower-than-market-rate price.

12. Are hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts considered short term rental (STR)?

No, hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts are not STRs. Washington State defines short term rental as “a lodging use, that is not a hotel or motel or bed and breakfast, in which a dwelling unit, or portion thereof, that is offered or provided to a guest by a short-term rental operator for a fee for fewer than thirty consecutive nights.” ([RCW 64.37.020 Definitions](#))

Hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts are considered “transient accommodations.” Washington State defines transient accommodations as “any facility such as a hotel, motel, condominium, resort, or any other facility or place offering three or more lodging units to guests for periods of less than thirty days and may include food service operations. (WA Department of Health

<https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/Pubs//505019.pdf>)



13. What are the regulations for STR?

Because short term rentals (STRs) are a business, they are required to get a state business license and pay state business taxes. One of the state business taxes requires STR owners to send in a personal property listing form to the Lewis County Assessor's Office on an annual basis. Otherwise there are currently no additional regulations of STRs in Lewis County. Like most businesses, STRs are not required to get a local business license from Lewis County.

14. What can be done about derelict/junk vehicles abandoned on private property?

[Lewis County Code 8.05](#) states that remnants or remains of vehicles cannot be kept on private property unless within a completely enclosed building or fence. The vehicle remnants or remains must not be visible from a public right-of-way or from other private property. An exception is if the vehicle remnants or remains are associated with a licensed vehicle dealer, wrecking yard or junkyard.

15. Are there rules about structures that are abandoned or run down to the point of being uninhabitable?

Washington State, [RCW 35.80A.010](#), allows a county or city to condemn a property or structure that is a blight on the surrounding neighborhood. To be a blight, the structure must have been abandoned (no one lived there legally) for a period of at least one year; the structure is a threat to public health, safety or welfare as determined by the local jurisdiction; or the structure is or has been associated with illegal drug activity.

[Lewis County Code 15.05.020\(g\)](#) allows the County to address dangerous buildings. Typically, a property owner will be required to post information on the structure that it is dangerous and potentially board up access points. The County tries to work with the property owner to abate the issue rather than condemn the building.

16. How can someone report a code violation?

Anyone can report a code violation. Information about reporting a code violation can be found at <https://lewiscountywa.gov/departments/environmental-health/code-compliance/complaints/>

You may remain anonymous when reporting a code violation by:

- A. Filling out this [online form](#), putting "anonymous" in the name and leaving the email blank.
- B. Filling out this [paper form](#) and choosing "anonymous". Return to the Permit Center at 2025 NE Kresky Avenue, Chehalis.

However, be aware that without a witness to provide additional information, it can be very difficult to prove a code violation. Code enforcement staff need detailed information about the violation and without a witness they must rely on visual inspection from a right-of-way.

