

Lewis County Planning Commission

Public Meeting

In-Person & Virtual Meeting via Zoom

August 8, 2023 - Meeting Notes

Planning Commissioners Present: Lorie Spogen, District 1; Jason Alves, District 1; Bob Russell, District 2; Frank Corbin, District 3; Kathy Chastain, District 2; Gretchen Fritsch, District 3; Corbin Foster, AL

Staff Present: Mindy Brooks, Senior Long Range Planner; Megan Sathre, Office Assistant Senior; Lee Napier, Director; Karen Witherspoon; Senior Planner

Materials Used:

- Agenda
- Draft Meeting Notes – July 25, 2023
- Staff Presentation: Packwood Subarea Plan
- Staff Presentation: Packwood Housing Needs Assessment

1. Zoom Guidelines

The clerk dispensed with the Zoom Guidelines.

2. Call to Order

A. Determination of a Quorum

7 Commissioners were present; there was a quorum. *Commissioner Fritsch arrived after the roll call was complete.*

3. Approval of Agenda

The Chair entertained a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Chastain made the motion to approve the agenda; second by Commissioner Alves. The motion carried unanimously.

4. Approval of Meeting Notes

The Chair entertained a motion to approve the meeting notes from July 25, 2023. Commissioner Corbin made a motion to approve the notes as presented, second by Commissioner Chastain. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Public Comment

There were no members of the public who wished to provide public comment.

6. Workshop

A. Packwood Housing Needs Assessment

Sarah Lindsley, Livable Packwood consultant, gave a presentation on Packwood's Housing Needs Assessment (*see presentation for details*). The following questions & conversation occurred throughout the presentation.

Commissioner Corbin asked why the affordability rate for housing is calculated at less than 30% of the individual's income when some loans look at up to 40% of a person's income. Corbin asked who determines that affordability threshold. Sarah responded the figure she's presenting originally came from HUD. There is a lot of debate around this number. If a person's income is higher, they can often pay more for housing and pay a higher percentage of their income towards that housing. For someone who has a low income, if they are paying more than 30% of their income on housing, they may not have enough left over for other essential needs. The 30% threshold makes the most sense when looking at moderate to low-income households.

Commissioner Corbin shared that the Lewis County Assessor just announced a new threshold for senior citizens to get assistance on their property tax rates and suggested that Sarah could factor that into her report in the future.

Teresa Fenn, Livable Packwood board member, shared that the numbers were not surprising, but the amount of homelessness in the school district was bothersome to everyone. Sarah added that the numbers they saw in 2022 were not unusual – the percentage was consistent with the trends of past years.

Commission Russell commended the Livable Packwood group on their work. It is encouraging to see the community activism. When making a decision, it is valuable to see a committed group. Russell echoed Teresa's comments on student homelessness.

Commissioner Spogen agreed with everything that Commissioner Russell and Commissioner Corbin said.

Commissioner Alves asked if the Livable Packwood group has an idea of how many of the students experiencing homelessness were from the area to begin with or moved into the area after experiencing homelessness. Van Anderson, Livable Packwood Chair and teacher with the White Pass School District, shared that through his experience as an educator with the district,

he observed a number of families moving into the school district who were not coming into secure housing, such as trailers and RVs. There's also the general churn of kids who get kicked out of the house or leave their homes for because of issues. Sarah added that the numbers are for the whole year so there could be students who experience homelessness for a few weeks while other experience it for a longer term.

B. Packwood Subarea Plan

Mindy Brooks, Senior Long Range Planner for Lewis County, gave a presentation on the Packwood Subarea Plan (*see presentation for details*). The following questions & conversation occurred throughout the presentation.

Commissioner Fritsch pointed out that the most developed neighborhoods in Packwood would be the lowest level of development in the Subarea Plan after the zoning is implemented. Mindy confirmed that the lowest density for an area is going to be 4 units per acre. The areas outside of the downtown core will remain at 4 units per acre, while the area within the downtown core will increase in density. Fritsch shared that she can't imagine feeling like a small down with this increase in density. Mindy responded that infrastructure would constrain how development happens and the rate it occurs. The sewer is only going to serve the downtown core and maybe the mill site. However, for Packwood to provide affordable housing and have an effective downtown core that has a sustainable tourism economy, it needs to have more housing and more development. The CAC has a lot of feelings and not everyone likes it, but the development is going to happen anyway (because sewer is coming) and without this level of planning it's going to result in a lot of extremely unaffordable single family residential. Fritsch added that she has observed houses that are two or three times the size of other houses going in on Willamette Street and Main Street and can see the correlation to affordable housing. Mindy responded that the County is likely not going to place size restrictions on building houses, but the structures will need to meet setbacks and other Lewis County Code requirements. The Subarea Plan will implement new zoning which will restrict certain types of development from occurring in areas so in the mixed-use area single family residences could be prohibited for the exact reason that Commissioner Fritsch mentioned, it's unaffordable and towers over everything else.

Commissioner Chastain asked if there is any way to control what is built in the current Small Town Mixed Use (STMU) zoning. Mindy responded that STMU allows for single family housing, multifamily housing, and commercial. The development is dependent on the infrastructure. Chastain asked if staff knew how many homes have been constructed this year. Mindy responded that she didn't know but could look up that information. Chastain continued, pointing out that even though Packwood is developing a vision for how they want things to look, there are still people who will continue to build what they want outside of that scope. Chastain asked if there is any way to control that. Mindy responded that it depends on how much planning an area has gone through and the types of decisions that have been made.

Commissioner Russell asked if the 12,000 sq ft lots with a group well will accommodate a house and a septic system. Karen Witherspoon, Senior Planner, shared that septic systems are typically on a half-acre but Packwood has good soil that sometimes allows them to go down to a quarter acre, which is the equivalent of 12,000 square feet.

Commissioner Corbin asked if the FFA has weighed in on the flight pattern considerations. Mindy responded the Airport Master Plan includes a large team with members from the state and federal government who have been considering the proposal and so far, are in favor of it.

Commissioner Corbin noted that the proposed Airport District policy in the Subarea Plan is another restriction on a person's ability to use their property in the way they would like. Corbin expressed concern about not allowing ADUs in the Airport District and asked if this is what the community wanted and whether it could be changed. Mindy responded that originally, the CAC thought there should be no residential development because it is incompatible with the Airport and the new zone should just allow commercial and small-scale manufacturing. From a compatibility standpoint, that makes the most sense, but that is a significant reduction in property value since single family residential is the highest valued property. This led the CAC to consider 1 acre lots with a single home per lot, it would allow people to retain property value but not significantly increase people living in the area. This is not set in stone. The Planning Commission gets to make the recommendation to the BOCC. Corbin asked if the Airport District could have percentage of lots that are ADU qualified so not to overburden the area and make it incompatible with surrounding uses. Mindy responded that it is a possibility, but it would then need to be tracked and enforced.

Commissioner Spogen asked if the Commercial Business District is usable and is without critical areas. Mindy responded that it is usable and does not have critical areas on it, although some of the lots are already development, such as Packwood Prospecting and a new RV Park.

Commissioner Russell noted that most pilots fly a left hand pattern. Russell also shared that he is not in favor of allowing any more houses near the airport. Mindy responded that most people that are coming in and out of the airport are flying the left handed pattern. It is also difficult to fly into the Packwood Airport so rookies typically are not flying in there anyways.

Commissioner Fritsch asked if the Mixed-Use zoning will be changes from discouraging single family residences to prohibiting single family residences. Mindy responded that it could change in Phase 2 when implementation occurs depending on how the community wants to turn the policies into regulation. The recommendation will come to the Planning Commission and then be recommended to the BOCC for final decision. Fritsch asked if the future land use table and definitions will all come before the Planning Commission during Phase 2: Implementation. Mindy responded the implementation of the Subarea Plan will come to the Planning Commission for review. Right now, the Planning Commission is recommending the language that is in the plan now and then defining what those things mean during implementation.

Commissioner Russell wondered if when the code was written if the state ever imagined that many septic systems in an area like Packwood. Is a 12,000 square foot lot with a septic at that density every anyone's plan for a town? Are there any towns like that? Mindy responded that the whole High Valley area that was build out in the 1970s and envisioned as a vacation community, so it was built out at that density. Spogen added that although she's not sure of the lot sizes, Tenino was on septic systems until just recently. Mindy said that it is possible that the state rules for septics could change over time and new development would have to meet those requirements.

Commissioner Spogen asked if high end condos will be allowed in the Mixed Use and Residential High density areas for those who want to live close to town and can afford that type of living. Mindy responded yes; condos would be allowed. Spogen followed up by asking if the CAC has considered what the consequences of this type of development may be based on what other similar tourist economies have done. Mindy responded that many places are making the same decisions about STRs and housing right now so it will still be a few years before we can see the impacts that it makes. The land use component of this plan is not about controlling whether an apartment or a condo it built, it is simply enabling more multifamily to be built. The STR policy is about making sure many multifamily developments are not used for short term rentals. The plan is aiming to increase supply of housing.

Commissioner Spogen asked staff to reiterate what happens after the Planning Commission decides to recommend the Subarea Plan to the BOCC. The BOCC will hold a hearing and hear more testimony. They will then make an adoption of the policies. The language of each policy may change, now with the Planning Commission, or later with the BOCC. After adoption is phase 2, which is implementation. Many of the policies will be turned into development regulations, which will come before the Planning Commission for review and then recommended to the BOCC for adoption.

Commissioner Fritsch shared that some community members have approached her and questioned the Mixed Use area because those who need affordable multifamily housing may want to live next to a bar or upstairs of a restaurant. Mindy responded that the reason multifamily is allowed there is because of sewer – multifamily development requires sewer. Mindy added that the Commissioners could change the wording of the policy to not include the zoning designations, but just say that any new multifamily housing cannot be used for short term rentals. That would apply anywhere in the Subarea Plan. However, it will only impact the area that has sewer because that is the only place that you can have multifamily. Fritsch asked how single family residences would be regulated for short term rentals and Mindy pointed back to the other STR policy about establishing an appropriate balance of residential housing and short term rentals.

Commissioner Fritsch expressed that the question of how much regulation are we willing to put on a landowner is going to come up again and again. At some point we must consider the greater good and the community needs, not just prioritize individual landowners and individual

property rights. Mindy responded that she appreciates Fritsch's statement and that short term rentals show that there is a need to have a conversation about property rights versus the community needs.

Mindy concluded her presentation with process and next steps.

Commissioner Corbin asked the group what they thought about the ADU proposal he brought up earlier in the meeting. Commissioner Spogen expressed some interest in the idea. Other commissioners shared that testimony coming at the public hearing will help them decide what should be done regarding ADUs in the Airport District. There were also some commissioners who agreed with the CACs findings that there should not be ADUs allowed in the Airport District. Mindy suggested that Commissioner Corbin, alone or with one other commissioner, create a proposal to bring back to the Planning Commission at the next meeting for consideration.

The commissioners discussed and decided that they are ready to move to a public hearing.

7. Good of the Order:

A. Staff

Mindy reminded the commissioners that the hearing for the Packwood Subarea Plan will take place in Packwood and commissioners are encouraged to carpool as long as there are no more than three commissioners per vehicle. Mindy also gave an update that the new building is projected to be done in early 2024.

B. Planning Commissioners

There were no items from the Planning Commissioners.

8. Calendar

The next meeting of the Planning Commission will occur on August 22, 2023, and the agenda item is a workshop on the Rural Housing Alternative.

The September 26th meeting will be at the courthouse with the Board of County Commissioners and asked that the commissioners make every effort to attend in person.

9. Adjourn

Commissioner Russell made a motion to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.