

Lewis County Planning Commission

Public Meeting

In-Person & Virtual Meeting via Zoom

September 12, 2023 - Meeting Notes

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

Planning Commissioners Excused: Kathy Chastain, District 2

Staff Present: Mindy Brooks, Senior Long Range Planner; Megan Sathre, Office Assistant Senior; Lee Napier, Director; Barbara Russell, Prosecuting Attorney

Materials Used:

- Agenda
- Draft Meeting Notes – August 8, 2023
- Written Public Testimony

1. Zoom Guidelines

The clerk dispensed with the Zoom Guidelines.

2. Call to Order

A. Determination of a Quorum

6 Commissioners were present; there was a quorum.

3. Approval of Agenda

The Chair entertained a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Corbin 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 August 8, 2023. Commissioner Corbin made a motion to approve the notes as presented, second by Commissioner Alves. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Public Comment

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

6. Public Hearing – Packwood Subarea Plan

A. Chair Introduction

Chair Spogen asked if anyone in the audience believes the public was not notified in a timely manner. *There were no responses.*

Chair Spogen asked if any member of the Commission had a disclosure to make. *There were no responses.*

B. Staff Presentation

Mindy Brooks, Senior Long Range Planner with Community Development, went over the take home messages of the Packwood Subarea Plan.

The subarea plan does not drive growth, it manages and directs growth. Development is already occurring and has been at a fast rate for the past few years. This is because the existing zoning of Small Town Mixed Use (STMU) allows a lot of new uses and development. It is also because tourism has increased significantly since 2020. With sewer coming, multifamily can occur in downtown Packwood. All of this will happen with or without the plan. The plan is intended to manage and direct how that growth happens.

People who live and work in town need affordable housing. The price of a single family residence has gone up roughly 300% in Packwood (2012-2022). The price of single family residences are not likely to come down. What is needed are other housing options that are more affordable such as duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, rowhouses, ADUs, apartments, bunkhouses, etc. The plan will result in new guidance to allow more housing options and focusing higher density of housing in Downtown where there will be sewer and thus preserving rural areas surrounding Packwood.

Jobs, housing and quality education are needed for families to live in Packwood. When the mill and ranger station closed, good paying jobs left and so did families. Then the school closed. Roughly 1,000 people left many of those being families. To retain the families in Packwood and to encourage more families to come back, there needs to be jobs that pay a living wage, affordable housing options and educational opportunities. The plan includes goals to improve the local economy and create jobs, as well as support continuing education.

Services are needed to allow people to age in place. Packwood has a lot of residents that are over 60 years old. To continue to live in Packwood, people need services like doctor's office, pharmacy, affordable groceries, banking, etc. Driving a long distance to access those services

can become less safe and feasible as we age. The plan encourages new supportive services to be located in Packwood.

The local economy is now based on tourism. The primary economy in Packwood is tourism. There is no need to attract more tourists here. But when those tourists are in town, Packwood needs them to spend money at the local restaurants and shops. And other jobs are needed to support the businesses and residents including electricians, plumbers, roofers, carpenters, etc. The plan has goals for creating a sustainable retail sector and growing the skilled labor sector of the economy.

The plan is not increasing allowed density or uses. Currently the STMU zoning that applies to most of Packwood allows almost any use, except industrial. All the uses I've been talking about are allowed anywhere in the STMU zone. Single family and multifamily are both allowed in STMU. The only thing stopping multifamily is that there is no sewer. Once there is sewer, those parcels served can develop multifamily housing. Also, almost any commercial use is allowed in STMU – grocery store, hardware, brewery – plus event center, RV park, etc. The plan actually restricts where commercial uses are allowed keeping those uses near Highway 12 and not in the outer areas of Packwood. Overall, the plan is restricting allowed uses and density, not increasing it.

Highway 12 is not safe and needs improvements. The state highway needs many improvements to make it safer including traffic calming, designated on-street parking, lighting, crosswalks, etc. The improvements need to address peak tourism, but improvements also need to address local access. The plan includes concepts for Highway 12 that are supported by WSDOT. The plan doesn't include exactly what should be done – a future corridor plan is needed to determine how to calm traffic, how to best park cars. The plan sets the goals, next steps will determine the solutions.

The Packwood Subarea Plan is just Phase 1. Once the goals and policies of the plan are adopted, Phase 2 will be updating zoning and development regulations to implement the plan. Tonight you only recommending adoption of the goals and policies of the Packwood Subarea Plan. However, when the goals and policies are adopted staff are required by state law to implement them. This plan directs Phase 2.

Since your last hearing in March, what has changed is the future land use designations map and policies related to short term rentals. At your workshops on May 23, June 27 and August 8 you heard summaries of the changes that include adding a new Airport District to properties around the airport, modifying the mix of designations for the Historic Mill property and adding two new policies for short term rentals. Those workshops were open to the public in person and on Zoom, and the presentations and meeting minutes have been available online for the public. Staff also held an open house in May to provide the public another opportunity to review the plan, ask questions of staff and the CAC and to provide feedback. This was all in addition to

the three open houses, two online surveys and multiple businesses interviews that were conducted in 2022 and 2023.

And finally, remember that the Community Advisory Committee, 35 members of the Packwood community met for more than a year-and-a-half to create this plan. That have put a lot of work and effort into the goals and policies, maps and concepts. I'm so grateful that they were willing to reconvene to address the topics the Planning Commission remanded to them. A few of them were able to make it tonight – thank you!

C. Commission Questions for Staff

Commissioner Spogen asked who is responsible for the phase two implementation. Mindy responded that the planning commission is an advisory body who can recommend approval or denial of the Subarea Plan to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) who will hold another hearing before the final decision is made. Once the plan moves to phase two, staff will go back to community, inviting the advisory committee and anyone else who wants to participate in the work, to write the rules to implement the goals and policies of the plan. The written rules will come back to the Planning Commission at workshops and hearings. The Planning Commission will make a recommendation to the BOCC, who will make the final decision to adopt the rules. Mindy noted that everything in phase two must comply with the policies adopted in phase one. Spogen asked if something [policy] could be fixed if later on it was realized that there is an error in the vision. Mindy responded that an error can be fixed or minor changes made – nothing is ever set in stone.

Commissioner Fritsch asked how the Subarea Plan would be impacted if Packwood did not receive a sewer system. Mindy responded that the future Mixed Use (MU) zoning is the same as the current Small Town Mixed Use (STMU) zoning other than there are recommended design guidelines, parking requirements, etc. If sewer did not come, it would be a wash in those spaces from a use and density perspective – MU and STMU are the same. Without sewer, the density would be lower with either MU or STMU because there would need to be room for wells and septic systems.

Mindy reiterated what has changed since the first hearing – land uses around the airport and at the mill site, as well as policies on short term rentals.

Commissioner Corbin asked if the term airport district was referring to a governmental entity. Mindy responded no, it is referring to zoning designation only.

D. Public Testimony

The following individuals provided public testimony in favor of the Packwood Subarea Plan: Sarah Owen, Jon Anderson, Theresa Fenn, David Campos, Kim Pawlawksi, and Dennis Reibe.

E. Discussion & Deliberation

During testimony, Dennis asked if during phase two, if the regulations that are written are going to be specific to Packwood or implemented county wide. The Commissioners asked Mindy to answer this question. She responded that staff will write the codes that are appropriate to implement the Packwood Subarea Plan and will only apply to the subarea plan boundary. But some of that may be applicable to other communities. Other communities may need different types of regulations. We need to determine that through other subarea plans, like Onalaska, and through the Periodic Update. The regulations need to be understandable and able to be implemented so they need to be specific enough to know what we are doing, but not so complicated that it is ridiculous to implement.

Commissioner Russell noted that when looking at the subarea plan with its goals and policies, he came to the conclusion that the policies, while fairly directional, still leave some room to measure the code later on to make sure it matches the intent of what the community of Packwood wants. Mindy responded that Russell is correct and that is why staff will work with the community in phase two. Russell reiterated that this allows the opportunity to continue to look at the plan, implementation, and any possible unintended consequences. Mindy agreed that there will be opportunities to fix things and modify things as needed.

Commissioner Fritsch noted that Valerie's written testimony should be taken seriously regarding the fact that short term rentals are a small portion [14%] of the total housing stock in relation to the vacation and/or secondary homes. Mindy added that Valerie's points were important with regards to the housing stock in Packwood and how unique it is. Packwood is a gateway community and so comparatives don't exist here in Lewis County, they exist elsewhere. Vacation homes present a challenge that development regulations can't address, so staff will try to be creative in addressing the housing crisis in Packwood. This is also why nonprofits like Livable Packwood are important. We need nonprofits and developers who are willing to develop more affordable housing.

Commissioner Fritsch noted that Chris' written testimony said this isn't the right time or place for short term rental policies, but she feels like the short term rental policy needs to stay in the plan as a first step towards some kind of change. Mindy noted that during phase two, the short term rental piece will likely be the hardest thing to figure out. Fritsch responded that is very important because this will be the first time the county will be addressing it.

The commissioners and staff talked about affordable housing related to the housing stock in Packwood. Mindy reminded the commissioners that there are only three options to address affordable housing; subsidize housing, apply rent controls, or increase housing stock. We can place regulations on short term rentals, but those will only apply within the subarea plan boundary.

Commissioner Spogen expressed concern about the language used in HS1.5, which says "Ensure an appropriate balance of short term rentals and residential housing to support people living in Packwood." Spogen noted that most of the other language uses phrases like encourage,

support, work with, discourage, etc. This policy uses the word ensure, which is defined as making sure that something shall occur. However, it is agreed upon that we don't know what an appropriate balance is yet. Mindy responded that during phase one this is not known, but if the plan were adopted with this policy, staff and the community will determine what is an appropriate balance and how it is met and bring that back to the Planning Commissioners to consider. Commissioner Corbin asked if staff would be conducting market research on the topic and presenting it to the Planning Commission. Mindy responded that she has already been doing some of that research on short term rentals and she can share that with the Planning Commission if desired at a later date. Spogen noted that having short term rental regulations only in the subarea plan boundary could have unintended consequences for the housing just on the other side of the boundary line. Mindy agreed that that is a valid concern, but reminded the commissioners that during Periodic Update, which has begun, the rest of Lewis County can be addressed. There was continued conversation around the short term rental policy. The Commissioners concluded that there were no changes that they wanted to make to the proposed policy.

Commissioner Fritsch made a motion to approve the Packwood Subarea Plan as presented, seconded by Commissioner Corbin. The motion passed unanimously.

7. Good of the Order:

A. Staff

Mindy reminded the Commissioners that on the 26th of September there will be a joint workshop with the BOCC to work on scoping for the periodic update. This will be at the Historic Courthouse Hearing Room, in Chehalis, and it is encouraged that everyone attend in person if possible. The public is also welcome to attend – public comment will be moved to the end of the meeting so the public can react to the commissioners' discussion.

B. Planning Commissioners

Commissioner Corbin shared that he will be out of town for the September 26th meeting, but will join the meeting via Zoom.

Commissioner Spogen asked staff to make time at a future meeting to go over the short term rental information shared earlier in the meeting. Mindy responded that staff would add the topic to the schedule.

8. Calendar

The next meeting of the Planning Commission will occur on September 26, 2023, and the agenda item is a joint workshop with the Board of County Commissioners on the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update.

9. Adjourn

Commissioner Russell made a motion to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 7:26 p.m.

DRAFT