

Planning Commission Workshop



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STAFF REPORT

RURAL HOUSING ALTERNATIVE

Date: December 1, 2023
Staff: Eric Eisenberg, Housing and Infrastructure Specialist
Mindy Brooks, Senior Long Range Planner
Attachments: A – Sandbox Development Regulations
B – Overview Handout

SUMMARY

There is a housing crisis in Washington State. There is not enough affordable housing for the population. Affordable housing means a person spends no more than 30% of their monthly income on rent or mortgage. What is affordable to someone making minimum wage is different than what is affordable to someone making Area Median Income. Lewis County has a goal of supporting a diversity of new housing that is affordable at all income levels, which means new apartments, rowhouses, triplexes, duplexes, accessory dwelling units, tiny home villages and single family residential.

While most housing is located in cities and the vast majority of new housing should continue to be in cities, people live and work in rural areas as well. Over 70% of Lewis County is working lands – timber, farms and tourist destinations (e.g. Mt Rainier National Park, White Pass Ski Area). Because Lewis County is very large, 93 miles west to east, it is important to provide housing options throughout the county so people don't have to drive 35-plus miles each way from their home to their job.

There are many strategies Lewis County is using to address the housing crisis. One of the strategies is to consider different housing options on rural lands while ensuring that new housing will still fit within the historic rural character of the county. Attachment B provides an overview of the Rural Housing Alternative Concept.

BACKGROUND

Beginning in September 2022, staff have evaluated a form-based approach to housing with the goal of encouraging creation of housing types that are typically more affordable than single family residential. Below is a list of Planning Commission meetings. The presentations and materials for each meeting are found on the webpage <https://lewiscountywa.gov/departments/community-development/rezones/comprehensive-plan-and-development-regulation-amendments/rural-housing-update/>

Planning Commission Meetings

- September 9, 2022 – Introduction to Rural Housing Alternative (RHA)
- January 24, 2023 – Existing Conditions and Draft RHA Proposal
- April 11, 2023 – Rural Character, Lot Size and Affordability
- July 25, 2023 – Industrial Stakeholder Group Progress Report 1
- August 22, 2023 – (memo only) Industrial Stakeholder Group Progress Report 2
- October 10, 2023 – Industrial Stakeholder Group Final Results

At the October meeting, commissioners directed staff to develop “sandbox regulations” that would provide an example of how RHA would be permitted and the constraints that would be placed on new development. That is the focus of this memo.

TOPICS

Attachment A is a very early draft example of what the development regulations could look like. Below is a summary of the main topics.

1. Zoning. The RHA would be allowed in the Rural Development District zones only (RDD-5, RDD-10 and RDD-20) and only on lots at least 5 acres in size. Substandard lots, less than 5 acres in size, would not be allowed to use the RHA option. RHA would not be allowed on resource lands (ARL, FRL or MRL).
2. Maximum Size. The cumulative size of housing may not exceed 3,600 square feet. This is based on the average size of a single family house plus access dwelling unit in Lewis County today.
3. Number of Dwelling Units. There is no maximum number of dwelling units. Provided that the standards are met, the property owner may determine how many dwelling units to create. Note, there are real financial constraints that further restrict the number of dwelling units beyond the standards provided in the code (see October 10, 2023 Industrial Stakeholder Group Final Results report.)
4. General Standards. The lot may not be subdivided; however, each dwelling unit may be owned separately. The dwelling units must be clustered within 1.25 acres of the property and share a common driveway. Maximum occupancy must meet water and septic capacity limitations and may not require urban services. At the time of development there must be adequate public facilities (e.g., fire, EMS, school), as determined by the service provider, to serve the new housing. The dwelling units may not be used as short term rental.
5. Private Roads. An RHA development will be treated like a single-family residence for purposes of driveway and private road standards.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will update the draft development regulations based on the recommendations from the Planning Commission as discussed on December 12, 2023. The updated draft development regulations will be

reviewed internally for consistency with other Lewis County Code requirements such as private roads, water systems and septic. The final draft development regulations will be presented to the Planning Commission at a workshop on January 23, 2024 prior to holding a public hearing in February.