

# Lewis County Planning Commission

## Public Meeting

In-Person & Virtual Meeting via Zoom

**October 10, 2023 - Meeting Notes**

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

**Staff Present:** Mindy Brooks, Senior Long Range Planner; Megan Sathre, Office Assistant Senior; Barbara Russell, Prosecuting Attorney; Geoff Soderquist, County Engineer

### Materials Used:

- Agenda
- Draft Meeting Notes – September 26, 2023
- Staff Presentation: Transportation Improvement Program
- Staff Presentation: Rural Housing Alternative
- Staff Report: Rural Housing Alternative Public Participation Industry Stakeholder Group Results

### 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 Russell 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 September 26, 2023. Commissioner Russell 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. Workshop

### A. Transportation Plan Update

Geoff Soderquist, Engineer with Lewis County Public Works, gave a presentation on the Transportation Plan Update (*see presentation for details*). The following questions and comments were made at the conclusion of the presentation.

Commissioner Russell shared his appreciation for the Ceres Hill Road guardrail, stating that it will save a life. Russell also praised Ann Weckback for the work she does in Public Works regarding culverts and grant writing. He also gave an anecdote of when members of Public Works gave their time and energy to help when Russell was helping a client to build a road in a steep area. Geoff thanked Russell for his statements.

Commissioner Russell asked Geoff to educate the public about salmon movement in streams in the Chehalis Basin.

Commissioner Corbin noted that the Flood Retention Facility that is being proposed will go hand in hand with the aquatic species restoration, and expressed concern about stream restoration, culvert replacements, etc. Corbin asked if there is a list of priorities when it comes to culvert replacements in conjunction with the Chehalis Basin Board and the Flood Control Zone District. Russell answered that Ann works off a list that she has helped develop with the Chehalis Basin that has every culvert that has to be replaced in Lewis County and its level of priority. Geoff confirmed that Ann has a map of every culvert that has been replaced, which is prioritized based on the habitat upstream, downstream, and what the blockages are. Ann is constantly reaching out to the adjacent landowners to figure out if they're on board with the project, because that can often be another hurdle. Many of the funding sources require property owner support. However, some of the federal funding opportunities allow a different approach. In regard to maintenance, there is aging infrastructure that must also get replaced. Ann works on these different projects within the Chehalis Basin and the Cowlitz Basin. The Cowlitz Basin is much more competitive to receive funding due to the adjacent agencies that feed into the Columbia River.

Commissioner Corbin asked if there is an updated total of how much is being spent on culvert replacement. Geoff responded that he does not have that number on hand.

Commissioner Corbin asked if there are staff available to pursue state money for culvert replacement if it suddenly becomes available in regard to the Flood Retention Facility and Aquatic Species Restoration plan. Geoff responded no; Public Works does not have available

staff. Public Works staff is currently maxed out managing ten consultants in addition to the list of things Public Works is completing internally. Staffing is an issue statewide and nationwide.

Commissioner Corbin asked if Highway 12 is under the state jurisdiction or the county. Geoff responded that it is under state and Federal jurisdiction. Corbin shared his concern about the quality of Highway 12.

Commissioner Corbin asked if Lewis County has any ability to request a third lane on I-5 through Lewis County to reduce the bottlenecks. Geoff responded that Public Works meets with the state annually and his repeated ask has been improvements to Rush Road and a third lane. However, these requests are estimated to be addressed sometime after 2039.

Commissioner Spogen asked how the trucks affect county roads when the freeway stops or backs up. Geoff responded that roads can sometimes have restrictions for trucks if there is significant damage, but for the most part they are all public roads that are open to everyone.

Commissioner Spogen asked if Public Works ever asks for an increased budget to retain well trained employees who leave to get paid better elsewhere. Geoff responded that they do have conversations about that, and they are sensitive discussions.

## **B. Rural Housing Alternative**

Eric Eisenberg, Housing & Infrastructure Specialist for Lewis County, gave a presentation on the Mandatory Updates Summary (*see presentation for details*). The following questions/comments were made throughout the presentation.

Commissioner Corbin asked if the RDD-5 zoning designation would go away because multiple smaller units are allowed on a five-acre lot or if there would still be restrictions of one residential unit on five acres. Eric responded that if the RHA was implemented, it would not change zoning designations. In order to comply with the Growth Management Act, only conforming lots of 5, 10 or 20 acres would be able to apply to RHA. There will not be the option to subdivide the lot into smaller units than what the zoning allows. Mindy suggested that in order to understand the concept, you have to decouple minimum lot size from the number of residential units per lot. The RHA is a form-based approach that allows any number of units in RDD-5, RDD-10, and RDD-20, so long as development is under 3600 square feet, is contained to one-and-a-quarter acre of the parcel, has one shared driveway, and uses a group well and on-site septic. The RHA will not prevent someone from building a traditional single-family residence of any size and an ADU as the regulations currently allow.

Commissioner Alves shared that he does not see the RHA as something that will be widely desired or executed. He shared concerns about how the land would be owned with multiple residences shared on it. He noted that the most likely scenario would be the family compound approach. Alves shared his appreciation of the work put into the RHA, but overall does not see it coming to fruition. Commissioner Spogen asked what Alves thought of the eight tiny homes on

a five-acre parcel scenario. Alves responded that it does not seem as though that is in line with rural character. Mindy asked why it does not meet rural character and what bothers the commissioners about the scenario. Alves responded that there could be significant traffic impacts that are not consistent with rural character. Alves also noted that the visual impact of eight tiny homes on a five-acre parcel does not seem consistent with rural character, but that could be mitigated with screening and buffering. Spogen added that the visual aspect was one of her concerns because for those who need affordable housing, they likely cannot afford a shop or garage which means that there often is stuff around the house and in the yard that can be an eye sore. Spogen also noted that if there were multiple units would mean they would need a private road instead of a driveway. Eric responded that the RHA model would not require a private road. To keep the impacts the same as a single-family residence, it would have one driveway.

Commissioner Russell asked if the RHA is an effort to meet the county population and housing allocations. Mindy responded that it is not directly in response to housing allocations. The concept was started in advance of the population and housing allocation work. Eric shared that before the pandemic, the county was struggling due to rising housing costs. The strategic plan directed work on finding out ways to increase the availability and affordability of housing countywide. Then, the pandemic happened and there was trouble with housing everywhere. House Bill 1220 was a reaction to that and there was a strong effort to require that counties plan for all income segments. The county had already witnessed over the preceding 10 years that the options for affordable living in the rural area were dwindling as single-family residences became expensive. Thus, the Rural Housing Alternative concept was explored to solve this issue.

Commissioner Russell expressed that he does not think that everybody ought to be able to live wherever they want regardless of income. Mindy responded that it is not necessarily about the choice of getting to live rural, rather this is about living close to where a person works. In the county, there are many people working in rural areas on agricultural land and forest land. If there are no affordable housing options in rural areas, those people are forced to commute, which adds even more cost burden. Russell responded that Mindy has a good point but countered that perhaps eight tiny homes on a five acre lot should be constrained to a certain distance within an existing UGA or LAMIRD. Mindy responded that the question of geography should be explored and determined whether additional constraints should be in place.

Commissioner Russell expressed concern that the county is looking at the Rural Housing Alternative in areas touched by floodplains rather than looking for ways to move to higher ground where the cities can continue to grow to accommodate the increasing populations.

Eric shared that another thing worth thinking about is homelessness prevention. A huge driver of homelessness across the state is the lack of affordable housing, and Lewis County has an increasing homeless population probably driven by those same forces, maybe others as well. If you have all the affordable housing somewhere other than where people live now or grew up, and you make them move an hour and a half away to get there, you disconnect them from their

social connections that could help them in a time of crisis. That's a real effect that Public Health and Social Services sees. And so there can be some actual benefit to all the county from trying to figure out a way to provide affordable housing options in locations where people already have roots and connections.

Since many of the commissioners expressed concern about the tiny home scenario, Mindy shared that if the commissioners want to move forward with the RHA they can do so and add guardrails to prevent certain scenarios. Mindy included that because this isn't something many people will do, it won't lead to runaway development. Mindy concluded that they should have more conversation about what geography makes the most sense to implement the RHA. Eric added that in terms of geography there needs to be a balance between putting something near a UGA and making sure not to box in the UGA where it then cannot properly expand as needed.

Commissioner Spogen asked why the county doesn't allow a Mobile Home Park if someone could put in eight tiny homes on five acres. Eric responded that the county does allow Mobile Home Parks as long as it meets density regulations. The Growth Management Act prefers single family residences on large lots in rural areas for many reasons. It also allows innovative land uses designed to make the most of it. The RHA is an attempt to follow that allowance, to come up with the form that is meant to mimic single family residences impacts and therefore allows more units. If you do a traditional mobile Home Park that has subdivided spaces then you've just divided up the five acres into small parcels, which is exactly what they don't want you to do. This at least preserves the large parcels.

Commissioner Fritsch shared that from an East County perspective, she believes there are many people living on large lots that would love the opportunity to build a couple of extra homes for aging parents or supporting others in need, as well as businesses who may want to house employees. People in the east need options in order to live and work there. Fritsch emphasized that there is a real housing crisis that is heartbreaking, and she would hate to see this idea turned away because it may not make sense in some areas of the county. Eric responded that Packwood has a long history of small, inadequate housing options for people doing service industry work. Packwood has a different view of what rural housing ought to look like compared to most places. Commissioner Russell added that he appreciates Fritsch's input and does not disagree that there is a need in the Packwood community. Russell reemphasized that the idea of guardrails relating to geography should be addressed.

Commissioner Corbin said, I think we need to talk more about guardrails. I'm not in favor of 8 units. On the other hand we have a problem that we need to address. We have unique problems in different parts of the county and so I think we need to talk about all of the different options we have for guardrails, whether it's geography or some other formula that you can come up with that can give us options. I think we need to really think in terms of guardrails.

Mindy suggested they wrap up the conversation for tonight and allow her and Eric to take the points the commissioners shared and develop a proposal with options for them to consider. She

encouraged all the commissioners to share any other concerns or ideas they have with her and Eric over the next month.

Commissioner Spogen asked for a summary of what happens next. Mindy responded that her and Eric will develop a proposal with options to share with them. There will be another workshop to discuss and decide on a single proposal. Staff would then notice a public hearing so the community can provide their opinions. Planning Commission would make a recommendation to the BOCC and the BOCC would hold another hearing before voting on the proposal.

## **7. Good of the Order:**

### **A. Staff**

Mindy shared that we are setting 4 dates for public meetings for the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update. The first one will be on October 23<sup>rd</sup> at the Adna Grange at 5:30pm. The commissioners are invited and encouraged to attend the meetings.

### **B. Planning Commissioners**

There were no items from the planning commissioners for the good of the order.

## **8. Calendar**

The next meeting of the Planning Commission will occur on October 24, 2023, and the agenda item is a training session that will be in the Kresky Building and zoom for those commissioners who can't make it to Chehalis. Both meetings in November are cancelled. The first meeting in December will be on the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and the last meeting in December is cancelled.

## **9. Adjourn**

Commissioner Corbin made a motion to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 8:18 p.m.