

Planning Commission Workshop



Community Development • 2025 NE Kresky Ave, Chehalis, WA 98532 • Phone: (360) 740-1146

STAFF REPORT

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PERIODIC UPDATE

Date: February 2, 2024
Staff: Mindy Brooks, Senior Long Range Planner
Attachments: [Online Meeting Notes](#)

SUMMARY

The Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update kicked off in fall of 2023 with a series of public meetings to hear the community's priorities for the future of Lewis County. Meetings were held in:

- Adna, October 23, 2023 – no attendance
- Salkum, November 28, 2023 – 18 attendees
- Mineral, November 30, 2023 – 37 attendees
- South County, December 28, 2023 – 19 attendees
- Randle, January 29, 2023 – 12 attendees

The meetings began with an overview of the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and questions from the attendees. Then there was a facilitated workshop with the prompting question "What is your vision for Lewis County in 20-years?" Participants were asked to write 5-10 statements about what they hope Lewis County will be like in 2045, covering topics such as transportation, housing, land use, recreation, jobs, etc. Next, participants were asked to circle their top 3 priorities. The participants paired up and shared their top 3 priorities. Together, each team was asked to agree on a combined 3 and write each priority on a notecard. These were shared with the whole group and organized into topics. Meeting notes are available on the [Comprehensive Plan webpage](#) under Task 2 materials.

There were overarching themes across all meetings that could be considered the community's highest priorities:

1. Maintain Rural Character – encourage commercial development that is right-sized for rural areas, protect resource lands and grow the resource-based economy (i.e., forestry, farming and tourism), encourage large-scale commercial and industrial development near I5.
2. Increase Affordable Housing Options – support development of a diversity of housing types, consider options to reduce property tax burden and regulate short term rentals.
3. Expand Infrastructure and Services – ensure that infrastructure (e.g., roads, water, electricity, cellular, internet, etc.) and services (e.g., police, fire, EMS, schools, etc.) are expanded coincident with development.
4. Transportation – restore public transit options to East Lewis County, work with federal government to reduce congestion on Interstate 5.
5. Government Efficiencies – continue process improvement to related to permitting, increase code enforcement, particularly related to yards with many dilapidated junk cars and trash.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

There was considerable overlap between the priorities identified at the community meetings; however, there was some nuance largely tied to the location of the people participating. For example, more remote areas shared concerns over access to services that are largely absent from unincorporated small towns and little to no public transit options to access services in cities located 30 or more miles away. People living in remote areas are also concerned about short term rental impacts on housing; where as communities located closer to cities, while concerned about affordable housing, didn't mention short term rental impacts.

Below are the community priorities combined by topic from the meetings. There is no hierarchy to the information provided below and all items should be considered high priorities of the community.

Land Use

- Maintain rural character.
- Preserve forest and farm resource lands, no net loss.
- Work with the state and federal governments to properly manage forests for timber production and as wildlife habitat.
- Make sure small, unincorporated communities (LAMIRDS) that have existing neighborhoods and services like schools are sustainable long term.
- Ensure that high density housing is provided in cities and urban growth areas, protecting rural areas for lower density housing that matches rural character.
- Growth locally owned, small businesses in rural areas and keep large, big-box commercial development near Interstate 5.

Housing

- Increase housing options that meet the needs of the community.
- Provide low income (80% AMI) and senior housing options in East Lewis County.
- Encourage development of new affordable* housing options, including housing for seasonal workers at National Park and traveling health care workers. *Affordable means that a person spends no more than 30% of their monthly income on rent or mortgage.
- Consider capping property value for residential uses and provide housing tax relief for seniors and low-income families.
- Regulate short term rentals, which are taking the place of residential housing.
- Add services for homeless people living in East Lewis County.

Transportation

- Increase public transit services, more frequent service and extended serve to South and East Lewis County.
- Add center turn lanes to State Routes and County arterials as those roads pass through more densely developed areas.
- Provide transportation options for seniors, people with disabilities and others.
- Work with the Federal Department of Transportation to add a third land to Interstate 5.

Economic Development

- Maintain and grow the timber industry.
- Protect and grow working farms and remove barriers to maintaining agriculture-based businesses.
- Provide financial assistance to locally owned businesses in gateway communities, such as Mineral and Packwood, to create sustainable economies.
- Balance new jobs with rural character by ensuring that new employment centers are based on rural economies (e.g., farms, tourism) and scaled appropriately.
- Provide excellent broadband everywhere in Lewis County to support new jobs, particularly in East Lewis County.
- Enhance Highway 12 as a Scenic Byway to encourage development that creates a visually appealing drive and supports tourism.
- Ensure that new green energy facilities provide economic benefit to Lewis County residents.
- Consider forming a Port District.

Infrastructure and Services

- Ensure that public facilities (e.g., water, cellular, internet) and services (e.g. fire districts, EMS, school districts, etc.) plan for and can support new rural development.
- Support and grow rural schools and educational opportunities, including trades training.
- Increase police and sheriff services in East Lewis County.
- Add health care facilities throughout the county including urgent care and pharmacies and work with Centralia and Chehalis to support more comprehensive health care and specialty care facilities.
- Add services, such as work force training, and resources, such as a satellite location co-located with a senior center, for people living in poverty in East Lewis County.
- Expand recycling services throughout Lewis County and add plastic recycling.
- Provide more trash removal on county roads.

Environment

- Protect natural resources and maintain habitat for wildlife.
- Complete long-planned for flood control measures and increase flood protection and mitigation throughout the County.
- Plan for natural hazard emergencies and recovery.
- Protect and enhance unique natural amenities, like Mineral Lake.

Recreation

- Maintain and improve recreational facilities, particularly facilities like Riffe Lake that are critical to tourism and the local economy.
- Support and increase local events and festivals.
- Preserve Lewis County's history and support tourism related to history Create more public parks/open spaces with connected regional trail system.
- Provide more access to federal and state public lands.

NEXT STEPS

Community Development staff will be updating Planning Commission on the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update at workshops during 2024. Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan will be brought to the Planning Commission for a final workshop before they hold a public hearing. There is no date set for the final workshop or public hearing. Both will be announced via email and posted to the Community Development webpage. The public hearing will also be noticed in The Chronicle.

Following a public hearing, the Planning Commission will deliberate and vote to send a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). The BOCC will also be receiving updates during 2024. When the Planning Commission recommendation is finalized, it will be transmitted to BOCC, who will hold another public hearing before adopting the updated Comprehensive Plan.

The public is encouraged to sign up to receive [Lewis County Planning Announcements](#), which includes updates on the plan and dates of workshops and hearings, as well as public meetings and other ways to provide feedback on the plan.