

Lewis County Planning Commission

Public Meeting

In-Person & Virtual Meeting via Zoom

May 27, 2025 - Meeting Notes

Planning Commissioners Present: Jason Alves, District 1; Jeff Skutley, District 2; Frank Corbin, District 3; Roger Moore, At-Large; Gretchen Fritsch, District 3; Bob Russell, District 2

Staff Present: Mindy Brooks, Director of Community Development; Guilherme Motta, Senior Long-Range Planner; Megan Sathre, Administrative Assistant;

Materials Used:

- Agenda
- Draft Meeting Notes – May 13, 2025
- Staff Report: UGA Small Towns and Master Planned Resort Regulations

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 for May 27, 2025. Commissioner Russell made the motion to approve the agenda; seconded by Commissioner Alves. The motion carried unanimously.

4. Approval of Meeting Notes

The Chair entertained a motion to approve the meeting notes for May 13, 2025. Commissioner Russell made the motion to approve the agenda; seconded by Commissioner Alves. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Public Comment

Shirley Lewis provided public comment on the proposed change of consolidating the Rural Residential Center zoning in the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update. Mindy responded to the public comment that the Planning Commission decided on May 13th to not recommend moving forward with the Rural Residential Centers zoning change.

6. Workshop - Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update – Development Regulations, Small Town UGAs and Master Planned Resorts

Mindy Brooks, Director of Lewis County Community Development, gave a presentation on Packwood and Onalaska Urban Growth Areas and Packwood Master Planned Resort. See *presentation for details*. The following questions occurred throughout the presentation.

Zoning

Commissioner Skutley asked about the zoning of the Mill Property. Mindy responded that part of the property is in Commercial Business District (CBZ), but there are also areas of Residential High (RH), Residential Medium (RM), and Residential Low (RL) zoning. Skutley asked about applying a Master Plan to that area. Mindy responded that Master Plan standards will be applied to properties that are over 3 acres in size.

Commissioner Skutley asked if ADUs can be added to properties with existing Single-Family Residences in the Residential High (RH) areas. Mindy said she would need to double-check what the advisory committee's recommendation was and would provide that information.

Commissioner Corbin asked about the requirements for rebuilding a non-conforming SFR in the Residential High (RH) area. Mindy responded that the home would need to be rebuilt in the same footprint and completed within 3 years. If not completed within 3 years, they would lose the right to have that SFR. However, extensions can be granted if there is progress being made.

Commissioner Corbin asked about the 35-foot height cap. Mindy said that has been the height limit in Lewis County for a long time and she was not sure what the original reason, but the communities of Onalaska and Packwood expressed not wanting any buildings over 3 stories. If in the future someone wanted to build over 3 stories, a code change would be required.

Commissioner Russell asked Mindy to explain the theory behind having the Residential High (RH), Residential Medium (RM), and Residential Low (RL) zone densities. Mindy responded that RH only allows multifamily housing, RL prohibits multifamily housing, and RM is everything in between.

Design Standards

Commissioner Alves noted his experience with chains, stating that even in places where there are design standards, chains will still come. Mindy responded that the advisory committee is aware that design standards won't stop chains, but had a higher focus on maintaining a cohesive look with a side benefit of discouraging chains that brand themselves with architecture and signage.

Short Term Rentals (STRs)

Commissioner Skutley asked who monitors STRs. Mindy responded that in order to be able to monitor STRs, permitting is going to be required. Only then can enforcement take place.

Commissioner Alves asked why owner-occupied renting no more than 3 rooms is listed as an exemption. Mindy responded that it allows people to make income for themselves while still living in their house. Alves followed up asking if this exemption was a suggestion from the Packwood Advisory Committee. Mindy responded that this did not come from the Advisory Committee. Rather, it is suggested because many other communities do this and there have been public comments from Packwood residents at the Board of County Commissioner (BOCC) meetings on this topic.

Alves asked if there has been consensus about wanting STR regulations. Mindy responded that STR regulations have been continually discussed over the past 3 years. There's been general support for having some regulation, but the question is how much regulation people want.

Commissioner Russell asked if STR regulations could target specific areas outside of the Urban Growth Areas, and how that would work. Mindy responded yes, you can target the zones within the areas in which we want to apply to. For example, STR regulations could be applied to Rural Residential Center (RRC) zoning which would capture some of the areas of Packwood outside of the Urban Growth Area such as High Valley and Timberline. STR regulation could start in UGAs and then expand from there, or it could start over a larger portion of the county.

Commissioner Skutley asked about the impact of STRs on the assessment of properties. Mindy responded that she is not able to answer that question because of the complexity of property assessment. The Planning Commissioners discussed concerns about the effect of STRs on assessment values and taxes and how to adequately track that information. Commissioner Fritsch asked what the appropriate avenue is to address the Assessor's Office and these topics. Mindy responded that providing public comment at the Board of County Commissioner meetings. Commissioner Corbin asked if the Assessor could come do a workshop with the planning commission. Mindy responded that she could inquire with the Assessor.

Commissioner Fritsch discussed that the Assessor's Department uses Granicus to identify Short Term Rentals through online sources such as Airbnb and VRBO and are taxing those properties differently. With more people paying higher taxes, Fritsch wonders why others are not paying less. Rather, everyone's has increased. Fritsch noted that using the home as a normal residence or a STR can change throughout months or years and it may not be captured as such. She suggested that there should be an annual process to renew the STR permits. The Commissioners discussed requiring STRs to obtain a license. Mindy responded that requiring STRs to apply for a permit could help them to be taxed appropriately – if the structure is not permitted as an STR then it shouldn't be taxed as a STR.

Commissioner Alves noted that almost all businesses are required to identify themselves with a

license and STRs should also be required to do so.

Commissioner Fritsch noted that although STRs are businesses, they are allowed in all residential zones. Mindy responded she does not believe there would be support for banning STRs in residential zones.

Commissioner Russell noted that it is not necessary for everything to be figured out to make a change. Change can come and adjustments can be made afterwards. Mindy responded that she agrees - we will not let perfection get in the way of making progress.

Alves asked where the multifamily STR equation came from. Mindy responded that she witnessed this approach for Portland's downtown core to require affordable housing units. However, this approach came directly from the owner of the property behind Peter's Inn in Packwood. He requested to do ground floor commercial and second level apartments with some of them used as STRs in exchange for providing more affordable long term rentals. Alves asked how this penciled out in Portland and whether developers would be interested. Mindy responded that it was not a choice in Portland - it was required - but the equation was developed to make sure that property owners were still making money. That said, downtown Portland is not the same market as Packwood, so that information doesn't transfer. Alves asked how often you can review and make changes to get the desired results. Mindy responded that typically the county would wait 5 years but could intervene earlier if necessary.

Commissioner Alves asked if an annual home inspection can be required if STRs are licensed. Mindy responded that it can be done, but it would require charging an inspector fee which would significantly increase the price of licensing. Mindy suggesting starting with an annual self-certification and renewal process.

Commissioner Fritsch stated that she would like to see occupancy limits based on the septic system design limit. Fritsch also would like there to be good neighbor agreements including a local contact to call for complaints or concerns.

Commissioner Fritsch brought up concern about availability of homes for permanent residence versus short term rentals.

Commissioner Russell shared that he is in favor of limiting the number of STRs and spreading them out throughout Packwood.

The Planning Commissioners took an informal straw poll and agreed that they would like staff to add the following items to the development regulations before taking them to public hearing; require an occupancy limit, make sure local neighbors have a contact number for the STR owner, require a business permit, include Rural Residential Centers in STR regulations, require a cap on the number of STRs allowed in Packwood, permits can be lost based on complaints, and require annual inspections or self-certification.

Master Planned Resorts

The Commissioners asked questions regarding whether employee housing needed to be supplied within the Master Planned Resort overlay. Mindy responded that the minimum size a MPR overlay could be is 200 acres, which would allow adequate space to provide employee housing. If the owners of the MPR wanted to purchase land nearby, but apart from the MPR, there could be a development agreement to allow that. This would be part of the Binding Site Plan process.

7. Good of the Order:

A. Staff

Mindy reminded the commissioners to get comments about the materials for the next meeting to staff as soon as possible.

B. Planning Commissioners

Commissioner Corbin will be attending the June 24th meeting via Zoom. Commissioner Russell will be absent on June 24th.

8. Calendar:

The next Planning Commission meeting will be on June 10, 2025, and the agenda item will be a workshop on the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update – Development Regulations, Energy Code.

9. Adjourn

Commissioner Alves made a motion to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 7:56 pm.