

Planning Commission Workshop



Community Development • 125 NW Chehalis Avenue, Chehalis, WA 98532 • Phone: (360) 740-1146

STAFF REPORT

Date: June 13, 2025

Staff: Mindy Brooks, Director

Attachments: [A – Lewis County Code Amendments](#) (online only)

BACKGROUND

On May 13, 2025, the Planning Commission voted on the Lewis County Comprehensive Plan and zoning designations. The next step in the Periodic Update process is to review and hold a public hearing on proposed amendments to the Lewis County Code development regulations. The development regulations will be presented to the Planning Commission at workshops as follows:

- May 27 – Small Town Urban Growth Areas & Master Planned Resort workshop
- June 10 – Energy Production, Storage and Distribution workshop
- June 24 – All Other Development Regulations workshop
- July 08 – Public Hearing

Please note, the code amendments are available on the webpage and a hard copy are available upon request.

SUMMARY

Prior to each Planning Commission meeting, a staff report with attachments that will be sent to the commissioners and posted online. The attached code amendments contain significantly more information than can be reasonably summarized in the staff report. Staff request that commissioners read all the materials before the workshops and submit questions to staff, which will help staff hone the presentations. Below is a summary of the proposed code amendments contained in Attachment A.

1. City UGAs: The County will be taking over administration of zoning and development regulations within the unincorporated urban growth areas (UGAs) associated with cities. Cities may elect to either have the County apply Rural Development District (RDD-5) zoning within the unincorporated UGA or to sign an Interlocal Agreement (ILA) within which the County adopts by reference the city's zoning designations and development regulations. Under the ILA option, divisions of land that will create five (5) or more lots, where any lot is less than two (2) acres in size, shall not be approved within the unincorporated UGA. Divisions of land that will create five (5) or more lots, where all lots are two (2) acres in size or larger, or divisions of land that will create four (4) or fewer lots or adjust boundaries of existing lots, shall conform to the city lot size and density standards. The intention is to ensure that development supports future annexation of the UGA by the city.

2. Land Use Table: The current land use summary table in Chapter 17.42 groups many uses under generalized categories, such as “isolated small business”, which has created confusion. By expanding the use table, there will be consistency in how the use allowances are implemented. In addition, it will be easier for the public to determine if a particular land use is allowed within any given zone. Staff have attempted to retain the same allowance for most rural zones as where allowed in the original Table 2. Some changes were made to reflect changes in state law regarding housing in LAMIRDs and day care facilities.
3. SEPA Categorical Exemptions: New exemptions from SEPA are added including single family dwelling units up to four units per lot, personal storage buildings, and multifamily residential up to 16 dwelling units. This will reduce the time and cost associated with building new housing.
4. Clustered Tourist Uses: Uses that support tourism, such as hotels, restaurants, gas stations, etc., are encouraged at the Interstate 5 (I5) interchanges. The allowances are expanded to include land within 1,000 feet of all I5 interchanges to make appropriate use of existing infrastructure. Clustered Tourist Uses are processed as a Type I land use permit. Limitations on building size are clarified.
5. RRC and STR: The Small Town Residential (STR) zoning designation is being eliminated because it is the same as the Rural Residential Center (RRC-B) zoning designation with a minimum lots size of ¼ acre. All of the RRC zone names are updated as A through E to make is clearer on the official zoning map. Per the Planning Commission’s recommendation, none of the existing RRC minimum lot sizes are proposed to change.
6. Short Term Rentals: Based on recommendations by the Planning Commission on May 27, staff have updated the proposed Short Term Rental regulations to apply in all UGA – Small Towns and LAMIRD Type 1 neighborhoods, which includes all Rural Residential Centers such as High Valley, Timberline, Ashford, Mineral and many others. This new Chapter 17.105 also includes limitation on the total number of Short Term Rentals: no more than 25% of the total existing dwelling units within each urban growth area or Type I LAMIRD may be provided as Short Term Rental. In addition, the new regulations would limit the number of occupants per Short Term Rental to two per bedroom plus three additional occupants. To implement this new code, owners of Short Term Rentals would be required to get a Type I permit through Lewis County and demonstrate the standards are met.
7. Multifamily in LAMIRDs: SB5471, enacted in 2025, limits the number of dwelling units per lot in LAMIRDs to four. Currently, Lewis County allows multifamily residential up to 24 dwelling units per acre if it is served by a centralized sewer system.
8. Data Processing Centers. With the increased use of AI, data processing centers are increasingly necessary. The standards added to Chapter 17.142 to intended to reduce the off-site impacts of noise, vibration and lighting. In addition, building façade requirements are added to reduce the visual impact.

9. Signs: The intention of the sign regulations is to prohibit signs on Lewis County property or within the right-of-way, unless authorized by the County or placed to meet state or federal regulations; and to prohibit large digital billboards. Many signs would be exempt from the new regulations including temporary signs (e.g., real estate, political, garage sale, sandwich boards, etc.), murals, memorial plaques, school/church signs, gas station signs and commercial business signs that are attached to the structure. Freestanding signs that are not exempt would be required to obtain a permit and meet the standards, including building codes related to wind/sheer and setback standards.
10. Lighting: A standard is added to prevent light glare and spill from impacting rights-of-way and neighboring properties. Exterior light fixtures must be pointed downward, hooded and shielded. There are additional Federal Aviation Administration requirements that may apply.
11. Definitions: There are many additions and amendments to Chapter 17.10 Definitions. There are changes to address new housing requirements under the Growth Management Act, as well as new definitions based on the changes summarized above. The definition of "Qualified Professional" is included. Please note, when there is not a Lewis County-specific definition, Washington State definitions in the RCWs or WACs prevail or we default to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definitions.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will present the remaining draft development regulations on June 24 at 6:00pm to the Planning Commission. The commissioners are encouraged to provide questions and comments prior to the meeting to help staff hone the presentation.

A public hearing before the Planning Commission on all of the draft development regulations will take place on July 8, 2025 at 6:00pm. Written testimony may be submitted starting on June 18 and ending on July 7 at 4:00pm. Oral testimony may be provided at the hearing.

The public is encouraged to attend all Planning Commission meetings in person at 125 NW Chehalis Avenue, Chehalis or via Zoom. Please check the Lewis County Event Calendar to confirm location and dates <https://lewiscountywa.gov/departments/community-development/events/>. The Zoom link is on the agenda for each meeting. These are workshops; therefore, no testimony will be taken.

All materials are posted the Lewis County Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update webpage <https://lewiscountywa.gov/departments/community-development/rezones/comprehensive-plan-and-development-regulation-amendments/comprehensive-plan-periodic-update/>. The development regulations can be found under Task 10. Hard copies are available upon request.