

# Board of County Commissioners Workshop Read Ahead



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

**Date:** August 22, 2025  
**Staff:** Mindy Brooks, Community Development Director  
**Re:** **Lewis County Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update**  
**Attachments:** [Volume 1 – Comprehensive Plan](#)  
[Volume 2 – Zoning Designations](#)  
[Volume 3 – Development Regulations](#)

---

## BACKGROUND

Every 10 years all counties in cities in Washington State are required to update their comprehensive plans, and implementing ordinances, to address new population allocations and changes in state law since the previous update (RCW 36.70A.130). This is called Periodic Update. Periodic Update is also an opportunity to consider local priorities for managing growth and development.

Lewis County began Periodic Update on January 1, 2024, and is required to complete all updates by December 31, 2025. The Lewis County Planning Commission has made recommendations and is forwarding to the BOCC for consideration the following documents:

- Volume 1 – Comprehensive Plan: goals, policies and land use designations
- Volume 2 – Zoning Designations: zoning that implements the land use designations
- Volume 3 – Development Regulations: regulations that implement the goals and policies
- Volume 5 – Supporting Documents: materials adopted as further findings of fact

The Volume 4 – Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO), which is also required to be updated during Periodic Update, is under development. The delay is to ensure adequate coordination with partner agencies and other stakeholders. It is anticipated that the Planning Commission will make a recommendation on the CAO in October and the BOCC will hold a hearing in December.

This staff report provides a very high-level description of the development regulations amendments proposed with the Periodic Update. A final staff report will be provided on September 5 that provides a summary of the Short Term Rental regulations. Staff encourage everyone to review the documents in detail.

## DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

The updated Comprehensive Plan goals, policies and future land uses must be implemented and one of the primary implementation tools are the development regulations. The development regulations must also be consistent with state laws and regional policies. Below is a summary of the proposed major amendments to development regulations. This is not an exhaustive list and does not summary all of the amendments; please see [Volume 3](#) for the full recommended amendments. Please note, Short Term

Rental regulations are not included in this list although Chapter 17.105 is a new proposed chapter to Title 17, Land Use and Development Regulations, LCC. Short Term Rentals will be addressed in a separate staff report.

1. **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 were allowed in the original Table 2. Some changes were made to reflect changes in state law regarding housing in LAMIRDs and day care facilities.
2. **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 2, 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.
3. **Small Town UGAs:** Onalaska and Packwood are urban growth areas not associated with a city. Both Onalaska and Packwood have subarea plans created by community advisory committees that include goals and policies, as well as a future land uses map, that are being implement through Chapter 17.17, LCC. Below is a summary of each zone’s development regulations.
  - a. Mixed Use Zone: Ground floors must be commercial use when fronting the primary roads and if a second or third story is included it must be residential. The size of commercial uses is capped at 10,000 square feet to match local size and scale. Height is capped at 35 feet of habitable space. Parking must be located on the side or behind the structure. The setback from primary roads is zero feet but the structure may be setback up to 10 feet if the setback is used as an outdoor extension of the commercial use or as public open space.
  - b. Commercial Business District Zone: Ground floors must be commercial use and if a second or third story is included it must be residential. The size of commercial uses is capped at 20,000 square feet to match local size and scale. Height is capped at 35 feet of habitable space.
  - c. Residential High Zone: Density standards at 12 – 18 dwelling units per acre with a minimum lot size of 4,000 square feet. New single-family housing is not allowed; existing single-family houses

may remain. Most commercial uses are not allowed except for home-based businesses. Bed and breakfasts and Short Term Rentals are allowed. Height is capped at 35 feet of habitable space.

- d. Residential Medium Zone: Density standards at 4 – 16 dwelling units per acre with a minimum lot size of 2,500 square feet, which allows for tiny homes on individual lots. Most commercial uses are not allowed except for home-based businesses. Bed and breakfasts and Short Term Rentals are allowed. Height is capped at 35 feet of habitable space.
  - e. Residential Low Zone: Density standards at 4 – 12 dwelling units per acre with a minimum lot size of 5,000 square feet. Multifamily residential is not allowed except cohousing or assisted living facilities. Most commercial uses are not allowed except for home-based businesses. Bed and breakfasts and Short Term Rentals are allowed. Height is capped at 35 feet of habitable space.
  - f. Airport District: The Packwood Airport and surrounding lands support continued airport activities as well as commercial and industrial uses that are compatible with an airport. Residential uses are limited to discourage new incompatible uses.
  - g. Industrial Zone: In Onalaska, there are existing industrial uses along SR508. The IND zone provides for continued use of those lands as industrial and associated commercial. No new residential uses will be allowed in the IND zone.
  - h. Design & Sign Standards: Along Highway 12, Main and Willame in Packwood, and SR508, Carlisle and Leonard in Onalaska, ground floor commercial uses are required to include 50% clear glass and primary pedestrian entrances must have awnings or overhands. In Packwood there are additional standards for rooflines and color of new structures, a requirement that building materials be fire resistant, and a prohibition on new signs that have internal illumination, except gas stations.
- 4. **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.
  - 5. **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.
  - 6. **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.

7. **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.
8. **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.
9. **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.
10. **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.
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 recommended development regulations to the BOCC on August 27. A separate staff report on the recommended Short Term Rental regulations will be provided in advance of the staff presentation to BOCC on September 8. All materials are available online

<https://lewiscountywa.gov/departments/community-development/comprehensive-plan-and-development-regulation-amendments/comprehensive-plan-periodic-update/>.

It is anticipated that the BOCC will hold a public hearing in September 23 to receive testimony on Volumes 1, 2, 3 and 5 of the Periodic Update. A Notice of Hearing will be published at least 14 days in advance of the hearing.

Questions regarding Periodic Update and the documents should be directed to Mindy Brooks at [mindy.brooks@lewiscountywa.gov](mailto:mindy.brooks@lewiscountywa.gov) or 360-740-2610.