

ONALASKA SUBAREA PLAN

Community Meeting Notes August 23, 2023

Approximately 30 people attended the second community meeting on the Onalaska Subarea Plan, held at 6:00pm at the Onalaska Elementary/Middle School Multipurpose Room. Staff presented an overview of what a subarea plan is and how it is created, followed by a summary of the existing development capacity within the Onalaska urban growth area. Materials related to the topics presented are available on the webpage

<https://lewiscountywa.gov/departments/community-development/rezones/comprehensive-plan-and-development-regulation-amendments/onalaska-subarea-plan/>

Following the staff presentation, there was a group discussion about the community's concerns regarding future growth and development. Below is a summary of the discussion.

1. **Small Town Character** – This was the top concern of the attendees and they stated that they enjoy and want to preserve the pace of life and the way Onalaska looks and feels. They like having a safe community and that they know their neighbors. Having space between houses and yards is a priority. And they appreciate the easy access to surrounding natural areas. They are worried about new residents wanting to change the town. And they are worried about commercial development like Dollar General or McDonalds, which they feel do not fit in the small town.
2. **Services** – The second concern that received a lot of discussion was services, including school capacity, water capacity, fire/EMS/police services and traffic. Attendees were worried about more people moving on Onalaska will exceed the current capacity of the facilities. In particular, there was concern about the school and teacher/student ratio. Another big concern was the ability of fire and EMS to serve a growing population, particularly given that there are no emergency medical services (e.g., urgent care, hospital) nearby. There was also concern that the existing residents would bear the cost of needing to increase capacity, instead of the cost being placed on the new developments. Finally, transportation safety was discussed, and one suggestion was the need for four-way-stops on SR508.



3. **Housing Affordability** – Attendees also discussed rising property and housing prices. There was a concern about property tax increases making it harder for people to keep their homes, particularly for people on a fixed income. And there was concern about new developers with more wealth pushing out locals.

4. **Preserving Farmland** – The final item discussed was preserving the surrounding farmland. One attendee commented that Onalaska is a “food oasis” and she would like to keep it that way. There was a concern that 5 acre lots that are currently in small-farm production will get bought by outside developers and no longer be used for farming. Finally, there was a concern that if the urban growth area is kept too tight it might push people in to the rural areas.

