



**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
501 North Anderson Street, Ellensburg WA 98926**

MINUTES OF ELLENSBURG CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

Date and Time: Planning Commission Meeting of April 8, 2021 at 5:45 p.m.
Place of Meeting: Virtual Zoom Meeting
Present: Beverly Heckart, Fred Padjen, Ed Harrell, George Bottcher, Sathy Rajendran, Gayl Curtiss
Absent: George Bottcher, Geraldine O'Mahony
Others Present: Community Development Director Kirsten Sackett; Council Liaison Stacey Engel

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Padjen called the meeting to order at 5:45 pm.

Commissioner Heckart made a motion to excuse the absence of Commissioner Mahony. Commissioner Rajendran Seconded. All in favor, motion passed.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Commissioner Harrell moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Curtiss seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Heckart moved to approve the minutes of the March 11, 2021 Planning Commission meeting with two corrections. Commissioner Rajendran seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

4. NEW BUSINESS

None

5. OLD BUSINESS

None

6. CITIZEN COMMENT

No members of the public in attendance.

7. STAFF UPDATE

a. Update on Zoning & Land Use Ordinance

Director Sackett provided an update on the ordinance. She explained that the rezone portion of the ordinance was more complicated than originally anticipated. Several parcels within the City are being proposed for rezone, but we can't just do one area-wide rezone. Each of the single parcels intended for rezone will need to go through its own SEPA process and have a separate public hearing for individual site-specific rezones. We are also still exploring the requirements for the area-wide rezone process for the contiguous parcels that will be rezoned.

All of the necessary work is in process and will come before the Commission after SEPA is complete.

b. Housing Action Plan Update

Director Sackett explained the upcoming work for a Housing Action Plan that will be developed for Ellensburg. The State of Washington has a housing crisis and the Department of Commerce wants communities to have a strong housing element in their Comprehensive Plan. She said that the City currently has a strong housing element, for which the City received an award in 2017, but as we begin working on the Housing Action Plan we may find areas of the Housing Chapter that should be updated.

Commerce also recommends that cities compile a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) in order to inform the Comprehensive Plan. Ellensburg collaborated with the County to have one completed in 2015, and the data was then utilized to develop the 2017-adopted Comprehensive plan. The data in our HNA is updated annually and is made available to the public on the Affordable Housing dashboard. Commerce is now encouraging jurisdictions to go to the next step and create a Housing Action Plan (HAP) which identifies housing strategies specific to an individual community. Within the HAP you can consider what you can do to encourage the production of more housing, and how to incentivize affordable housing. We are projected to have 2% growth rate per year until 2037, and to keep up with that growth we need to construct about 330 residential units per year. Currently we are closer to 125 units per year. We need to find ways to boost production and that is one issue that the HAP is intended to address

BERK Consulting developed the HNA in 2015, and the City also contracted with them to do a Land Capacity Analysis during the same time period. The results from that study were also incorporated into our comprehensive plan. Director Sackett shared her screen to show the commissioners where to find the Affordable Housing Dashboard online. She said that we will be working with the Public Information Officer to bring this information more to the front pages since we will be having more outreach with the public. Director Sackett went through the data that is in the dashboard. She also shared the location of the Department of Commerce website for the commissioner's edification.

c. Commerce Training – Housing Action Plans

Sackett shared a video produced by the Department of Commerce that explains the purpose of a Housing Action Plan. This was followed by discussion about the video.

Commissioner Heckart asked which commission would be responsible for the HAP - the Planning Commission or the Affordable Housing Commission. Director Sackett responded that both commissions would work on it, in addition to a Stakeholder Advisory Group that will be meeting to steer the HAP. She said that anticipated adoption date is October 4, 2021 with City Council, and we do have a timeline to get there. The Stakeholder Advisory Group will be comprised of about 9 to 13 people including real estate interests, developer interests, interfaith alliances and affordable housing interests etc. There will be public outreach to ask lots of questions of the public and to gather their feedback.

Commissioner Heckart asked if there should be a Planning Commission member on the Advisory Group. Director Sackett commented that Department of Commerce contract includes specific requirements about the makeup of the Advisory Group, most of all that it needs to be diverse in interests. Director Sackett thought that it would be a good idea to include a

commissioner on the Advisory Group. She also said that there might be joint meetings between the Planning Commission and the Affordable Housing Commission.

There was some Discussion about the differences between the work of the Planning Commission and Affordable Housing Commission, and how they operate when looking at the Comprehensive Plan. After the strategies are outlined in the HAP, the Planning Commission will be doing follow-up work of making amendments to the Land Development Code. The AHC is tasked with managing the affordable housing sales tax fund, and they are looking directly at finding construction projects that meet the goals of that program.

Director Sackett updated the commission on the Habitat for Humanity affordable housing project on the City surplus property off Bender and Water Roads. She said this will be the first project to be approved using city surplus property, and one of two utilizing the sales tax funds that have been collected. There was additional discussion of the Habitat model.

There was then discussion about the Multi-Family Tax Exemption (MFTE) program and the associated Residential Targeted Area. Director Sackett explained that multifamily units that are developed in the Residential Targeted Area are eligible for a tax exemption from the State. The residential targeted area in Ellensburg has been identified as the boundaries of the Central Commercial (C-C) zoning district. She said that the City has had about 7 projects that have qualified under the MFTE program. Director Sackett gave an overview of other development proposals that have asked about the multi-family tax exemptions. If we could offer them to new developments by expanding the boundaries of the residential targeted area, we might get more interest in building more multi-family. This is a good incentive that brings interest, and we want to expand the boundary into other zones, like Central Commercial II. She said this program is different from the affordable housing sales tax funds, as those can be applied for by anybody that has an idea to make renovations to existing buildings or construct new units, that provide affordable housing options.

Commissioner Curtiss volunteered herself to be on the Stakeholder Advisory Group for the HAP. Commissioner Heckart made a motion to appoint Commissioner Curtiss to serve on the Stakeholder Advisory Group. Commissioner Harrell seconded. All in favor, motion passed.

Commissioner Padjen thought the training video was very good and that other commissions might really benefit from the training to come up with more ideas.

Commissioner Harrell asked about the BERK data, and whether they have bank connections to delve into the different neighborhoods in Ellensburg and if there are different rates or discrimination. Director Sackett will speak to BERK about that question when she talks with them next. BERK is also requesting a lot of different information that we are sending to them that will help with updating our Housing Needs Assessment data for inclusion in the HAP.

Commissioner Curtiss asked if the department is fully staffed. Director Sackett reported that the department is currently short by one employee, with recruitment going on right now. The department is also using outside contractors for large projects such as the HAP and ordinance development.

Director Sackett explained that in addition to the HAP, the FEMA maps are being updated so we need to update our flood plain regulations in the Critical Area section of our code. Commissioner Curtis asked if the properties that will be affected will need to get insurance for that change. Director Sackett noted that any properties within a floodplain are required by FEMA to carry flood insurance. She noted that the County already advertised this to the public, and the City will also be giving notice to the property owners that the map changes are

coming. The department is also working on ordinances to update the Land Development Code.

The discussion went back to the discussion from the March 11, 2021 meeting and the commissioner's interests in what the commission could focus on. Commissioner Heckart said that part of her vision was to keep walkability and connectivity. The discussion focused on the walkability and connectivity, and Chair Padjen said a lot of the housing types don't lend themselves to walkability. Council Liaison Engel said that there can still be cul-de-sacs with pedestrian access easements. There was discussion on the fact that the land development code does have a provision for pedestrian easements if the abutting property owners will allow it. We need to create a balance between connecting roads but still pushing cars to arterial roads. Developers can get more houses around a cul-de-sac than building a through road.

Council Liaison Engel shared that City Council did hire a new City Manager, Heidi Behrends Cerniwey. Her start date will be May 17th. Jon Aker's last day is May 5th.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Padjen adjourned the meeting at 7:30 pm.