

# Mason County Planning Advisory Commission

July 6, 2015

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## **1. Call to Order**

Rob Drexler called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm

## **2. Roll Call**

**Present:** Rob Drexler, Tim Duffy, Kristy Buck, Vicki Wilson

**Excused:** Steve Van Denover, Bill Dewey, Kevin Shetty

## **3. Regular Business**

### **a. Adoption of Agenda**

Agenda approved as written

### **b. Approval of Minutes**

No minutes

## **4. 2016 Growth Management Act Comprehensive Plan Update-Workshop Begin review of Chapters I & II for mandated updates, public comment, and Planning Commission edits.**

*Presenter: Barbara Adkins, Department of Community Development*

Barbara began by addressing how she would like to handle public comment and the various chapters of the Comprehensive Plan. She stated that going in order by chapter would be ideal so she can take pieces of the update to the Board of County Commissioners. Barbara then mentioned census information compiled by the county GIS (Geographic Information System) department from the last 20 years. She informed all present that this information is available if anybody would like to see it. She also announced that she will be going before the Board of County Commissioners regarding building code changes for agriculture buildings and boathouses. Though building code is not handled by the PAC, she welcomed everyone to attend and comment if they could not attend the meeting.

Rob asked if a Citizens Committee was still being formed as discussed earlier. Barbara said there is currently one committee that is for Allyn/Belfair but no other committee has been formed due to lack of applications. Kristy asked Barbara if she was going to be adding suggested changes to somewhat guide the PAC. Barbara responded saying she originally planned to just clean up the information such as wrong dates, and delete committees that no longer exist. She added that she would not make policy changes without the PAC. Kristy said she would like some suggestions to get an idea of what is or is not working. Because she had not added any changes, Barbara asked the PAC if they would like the Economic Development Council to discuss their proposed

changes, and noted that she would have edits and suggestions ready by the next meeting on chapters I, II, and possibly III. The PAC members agreed that would be a good start.

Liz Ellis of Fawn Lake asked if the PAC members had experience with the updating of the Comprehensive Plan and if they understood the importance of how the plan was supposed to work. Barbara explained that the members of the PAC have various degrees of experience depending on how long they have sat on the Commission. She said that all of the members had to go through an application process to make sure they don't have any conflicts of interest, to check their background, experiences, etc. She stated that between all of the members, they have years of experience and knowledge, and do hours of homework every month in preparation for the meetings.

Terri Thompson inquired as to how public input should be submitted. Barbara said that public comments can be sent to Melissa Drewry, clerk, who could then send them out to the PAC members before the upcoming meetings. Terri then asked how an actual public hearing will be done since they are currently holding workshops. Rob explained that both the Planning Advisory Commission and the Board of County Commissioners will have hearings. He added that the County Commissioners are ultimately going to make the final decisions. Terri asked when the hearings would be to which Rob answered he did not know at this time. Constance Ibsen then asked what the preferred method for suggested changes was. She asked if the PAC wanted to see a document with track changes or if they could just submit suggestions. Rob said that even if you have 1 paragraph or a line of suggested language that should be submitted. Constance asked if data or examples should be included with the comments. Barbara said that examples should be submitted to support suggestions.

Kristy asked Barbara if there was any sort of conflict with the fact that she and Rob sit on the Economic Development Council Board of Directors, since the EDC was presenting. Barbara said there is no conflict at this time and asked the other PAC members if they felt the same, which they did due to the fact that neither Rob nor Kristy sat on the revision subcommittee that came up with the suggested changes.

Lynn Longan from the EDC spoke to introduce the suggested changes and the council. She said the EDC has a committee of 6 people that have been editing and making recommended updates. She then introduced Jay Hupp to discuss the changes suggested by the council.

Jay began by discussing business development. He said that Mason County currently has a poor reputation to operate and open businesses. Jay suggested taking a look at land use regulations and development regulations to make things less difficult for business owners. He reviewed a study done between 1998 and 2000 titled *Business Demographics and the Impact of Land Use Restrictions on the Mason County Economy- Phase II Report*. He said the study showed that 62% of privately owned and operated businesses within Mason County are located outside the Urban Growth Areas (UGA's) and the Limited Areas of More Intense Rural Development (LAMIRD's). He explained that these businesses were random in size, location and function. After examining the businesses, it was discovered that most of them were labeled as "cottage industry". He went on to say that this group faces a very hostile environment that needs to be addressed. Kristy asked where he got his business size definitions quoted in the

recommendations. He said he found the definition for “small business” in the WAC. He added that the 30,000 square feet on building sizes is a figure that the EDC agreed upon versus the currently allowed 7,500 sq. ft. Vicki asked if the EDC had any idea as to the changes that have occurred since the previously mentioned study was completed in 2000. Jay responded saying they have not done any specific research since that study. He added that even though no formal research has been done, in the last 15 years, he has observed an increase of 10% in the amount of residents that travel outside the county for employment.

Terri Thompson asked how many businesses were home based in the EDC’s study and also asked if industrial businesses were having a difficult time within the county, or if it was all businesses. Jay claimed it was across the board. He said it doesn’t matter the size of the business, all types of businesses are struggling. Terri said she has had a business license for the last 15 years with no problems. She then asked Jay about the words “random”, and “randomly”, asking why the EDC used those terms when they have nothing to do with planning. He answered saying that geographically, that is how the businesses were found in Mason County. They are randomly located, random in function, and random in size.

Liz Ellis asked if the previously mentioned report could be distributed or posted on the website. She said that though she appreciates the information Jay gave, new data needs to be collected especially if a new definition is being proposed. She then asked what specifically was wrong with the current Growth Management Act regulations causing businesses to be placed in the county instead of within the city. Jay answered saying if a copy of the study can be requested through the EDC. He added that the reason another more recent study has not been done is due to the cost. In answering the second question, he said there are many issues that can be covered but for the most part, rural businesses are treated like home base cottage industries which leads to various issues.

Constance Ibsen said she actually had a copy of the study and stated that there is no mention of LAMIRD’s in that original study. Jay, Constance, and Liz Ellis then had a conversation about what is considered a LAMRID versus a Rural Activity Center (RAC) or Hamlet. After this discussion, Constance encouraged the EDC to look into more recent data. Jay asked if an updated study would have an impact on the ultimate objective, which is to change land use and development regulations. He added that Mason County has never created a definition of their “rural character”.

Liz Ellis commented, saying she is appalled with the idea of a business being built close to her home with the exception of small in home businesses such as daycares. She suggested that businesses need to be in designated business/urban areas instead of residential areas. Jay replied that there is a lot being read into the suggestions than intended. He said that the intention is to describe the rural character of Mason County as it existed in 2000, and in order to protect the rural character, it needs to be defined.

Constance Ibsen read the Mason County Vision Statement:

*Mason County will remain a primarily rural county where residents will enjoy peace and quiet, privacy, natural views, and rural enterprise. Although rural character means different things to different people, aspects of it include: natural vistas, wildlife, and natural*

*ecosystems; fewer restrictions and more privacy than in an urban area; the easy operation of resource based industries such as timber, mining and agriculture; and the close ties of family and community to the land.*

Constance went on to say that a committee would need to be formed to describe rural character, and that it can't just fall to the EDC or the PAC. She added that if the Comprehensive Plan update is planning to change this, it needs to be announced so people can have input.

Rob advised the room that Jay Hupp was at the meeting to answer questions, and said if anybody wants to speak to the board, then they are welcome to do so on their own.

Barbara Parsloe addressed the fact that Jay said the EDC was trying to describe what the county was like in 2000. She asked why we would be looking at 2000, when the goal of a comprehensive plan update is to look at the future. Jay responded that he wasn't sure where the plan is going to go.

Debbie Soper asked about the proposed change to RU-512 which says:

*Adjacent residential uses and non-residential uses in the Rural Area should be buffered or screened from each other. Existing uses will not be required to provide buffers or screens, except in the case of the expansion or intensification of use. Adjacent residential uses and non-residential uses in Rural Areas need not be screened or buffered from each other.*

She specifically asked about the purpose of removing protection from the residents. Jay said the reason behind the suggested change is because that is how the county existed in 2000, and that is not how the county "grew up". He said that leaving it as it is currently written just puts another hardship on possible business owners.

Vicki asked Jay if he remembers any discussion about the results of the previously discussed study at the last Comprehensive Plan update meetings in 2005. He answered saying that the only thing placed into the last update from the study was the articulation that over 60% of the businesses in Mason County privately owned are located outside the UGA's, and RAC's. He added that the number of residents that commute outside of the county was added as well. Lynn Longan spoke saying during the last Comprehensive Plan update, she worked at the Department of Commerce and with growth management. She explained that the commissioners at that time were unwilling to make any large changes due to legal issues at the time.

Barbara Parsloe asked if the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to find out what the residents want for the future. No answer was given.

Debbie Soper said she felt many of the suggested changes by the EDC seem to take away the protection of the residents and she hopes the PAC looks into this since the residents are the ones paying taxes. She added that her property value, along with others, has gone down due to an auto detail shop that was opened by her home.

Kristy addressed RU-512 asking Jay if that specifically means that adjacent residential and non-residential use on the same parcel, owned by the same person, don't have to buffer from each other. Jay said he wasn't sure but then added that he believes it was the visual impact that is trying to be prevented. He said the buffer isn't that big of an issue to him because he likes knowing what his neighbors are doing and likes to see money making industry.

Pat Jerrells said she doesn't believe there is any sort of buffer law because her neighbor is right on the road and highly visible.

Terri Thompson read the following suggested change from RU-524:

*RLRB operations should not be disruptive to the use of neighboring properties. Where such things as excessive noise, vibration, glare, fumes, odors, electrical interference or excessive traffic, parking or storage requirements are anticipated, or experienced, Special Use Permits may be required.*

She commented that as a county that is trying to encourage business and tourism, protection of our environment is essential if we want people to move here. She feels that this paragraph does not provide enough protection. An unknown audience member commented that "may" is not a strong enough word.

Debbie Riley said that when she moved here from Walla Walla she was surprised to find such strong home owners associations and was told that they are so strict due to the fact that the County doesn't have proper protection in place for the citizens.

Terri Thompson spoke about critical areas. She said that implementation, monitoring, and enforcement is needed.

Conley Watson discussed the fact that Mason County does not allow buildings higher than two stories because the fire departments do not have the right equipment. He then asked if that issue would be considered in the update. Rob said he doesn't believe any firefighting issues would be looked at. Barbara added that the county already has height limitations in place.

Rob said there are very valid comments that have been discussed, and asked if more detailed minutes could be done so the PAC could have a detailed record. Vicki addressed an earlier question from Liz Ellis asking about the experience of the PAC in updating the Comprehensive Plan. She said this was her first time being on the PAC when an update was being done. She mentioned that she is somewhat worried about having an "us versus them" mentality when it comes to businesses and residents. Kristy added that there are going to be people on both sides which needs to be respected. She also added that just because someone does not agree with something, doesn't mean that it will be stricken. Rob then said that he hopes people will speak up even if their comments are not favored by the other community members.

Jay commented that he feels there is some confusion between the vision statement and the definition of rural character. He defined rural character as the rural character of the county, and the vision statement as what you want to be.

Laurel Nelson-King spoke saying that reducing restrictions to make it easier for business means that everyone needs to be prepared to have a business next to them with no buffers.

Terri Thompson stated that the Puget Sound region is supposed to get an influx of up to 1,000,000 people within the next ten years. She said that what we have needs to be protected and we need to protect the drinking water to support an influx of this size.

Liz Ellis noted that she works for the Department of Ecology but is attending the meetings as a citizen. She said she would be happy to lend her experience in any way possible and noted that she has experience working on various comprehensive plans. She added that various things need to be looked at for the future including our transportation, utilities, water, housing, economics, shoreline, etc. She questioned if we need to change our zoning laws, and asked that EDC's comments are closely examined to see if they would be appropriate for the upcoming decade.

Constance Ibsen asked if Barbara had requested an extension for the update. Barbara said she was told when she tried requesting one that the possibility of an extension wasn't even being looked at yet. Constance went on to say that she is still somewhat lost in the process and is unsure what her role as a citizen should be. She asked if she should be talking to people outside of the meetings to gain more input. Rob responded saying he would rather have the PAC take their time to get it right than rush the process. He told Constance that if she can get people together, she should even if it's not an official committee meeting. He reiterated that anybody is welcome to send in their suggestions and questions.

Vicki referred to the March 5, 2015 staff report. She said that staff report had summarized public comments and a very frequent topic was a buildable lands analysis. She asked Barbara if anything would happen with that idea and if resources were available. Barbara said the resources were not available to her but if money became available that is something that could be looked at. Lynn asked if a new analysis was necessary or if the one done by the EDC in 2005 would be sufficient. Kristy and Rob said they felt that that survey could be updated because not much has changed. The 2005 study is available through the EDC.

Vicki said she was looking at some census information from 2013 and the number of operating businesses with one or more paid employees is listed at 988 which is different than what the EDC quoted. Lynn said her information was received from the Department of Revenue who said there were over 3,000 businesses. Lynn said she went with information from the Department of Revenue because they collect taxes from the businesses.

Barbara and the PAC discussed the next Comprehensive Plan Update workshop and decided on August 17, 2015. Barbara noted that they would be going through chapters I & II with her comments and edits, and also addressing comments from this meeting.

## **5. New Business**

None

## **6. Adjournment**

At 8:15pm Rob made a motion to adjourn. Motion seconded by Kristy.