

Mason County Planning Advisory Commission & BOCC Joint Meeting

June 20, 2017

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Call to Order

Commissioner Shuttly called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

Roll Call

Present: Commissioner Shuttly, Commissioner Neatherlin, Commissioner Jeffreys, Marilyn Vogler, Deb Soper, Vicki Wilson, Aaron Cleveland, James Thomas, and Jason Bailey

Agenda Changes- Commissioner Shuttly asked if there were any changes to the agenda. No changes made.

Welcome by Board of County Commissioners – Commissioner Shuttly expressed his gratitude for the PAC’s hard work, mentioned that all the current commissioners had served on the PAC at one time or another, was looking forward to hearing what progress the PAC had made, and was ready to have further dialog on the direction of the Comprehensive Plan. Commissioner Neatherlin called the PAC the most important citizen advisory commission that the County had and that there was a lot riding on the decisions of the PAC. Commissioner Jeffreys mentioned that when she was a member of the PAC, the Growth Management Act was new to the County and they struggled with making decisions match with the Act. She noted that during that time the County pulled back from moving forward too far because of the fear of litigation, but with more and more Superior Court decisions favoring counties, she believes it is time for Mason County to get more creative and not follow the cookie cutter approach.

Other Business – None

Public Comment Period – Commissioner Shuttly told the audience to be mindful of the 15 minute limit on comment time.

Rick Calvin, representing the Mason County Historic Preservation Commission, spoke about changes that the HPC was trying to add to the Comp Plan. The commission has about ten comments to update the language in the glossary, provide some explanation of traditional cultural places and areas, and in addition there is an item that addresses the housing element to consider historical resources for multi-family housing or single family. Another very important addition is an introduction and development of the Mason County Historic Preservation Plan, a tool that can be used in the next cycle of the Comprehensive Plan. In order to apply for more funding the Preservation Plan has to be in the Comprehensive Plan. Marilyn mentioned that she believed she had made the changes to the Glossary in regards to the traditional cultural places and the historical resources for housing, she will return to the Glossary to check for the Preservation Plan element. James would like copies of the draft by the HPC to be forwarded to the PAC members.

Lisa Klein introduced herself as a land planner, she works for AHBL which is an engineering consulting company located in Tacoma, Wa and Seattle, Wa. She has worked for cities as well as developers. She has been working recently with Jack Johnson, who brought up questions about Belfair, the stagnation of development, and the link to County codes. She had recommendations regarding primarily development regulation type topics, but they go “hand in hand” with the Comp Plan that is being developed.

She talked about housekeeping items regarding definitions and uses not in code. They are proposing modifications to the RR4 zoning within the Belfair UGA, such as 3 units per acre based on a net developable acre calculation to a maximum of 4 units per acre based on a gross site area maximum. She went on to talk about adjustments to the open space requirements, landscape buffers (which are higher than many surrounding counties), roadway standards, park space size and location requirements, and low impact development and the newest standards from the Department of Ecology.

Jeff Carey appreciated the work that is being done on the current Comp Plan. He noted that there needed to be consolidation and clarification of information between the Comp Plan chapters that have been presented in this meeting and the last PAC meeting, June 19, 2017. He talked about looking at the attributes of each community in Mason County separately so that growth can be accommodated accordingly.

Patricia Vandehey asked what the results were of the Green Diamond request for changes to the Master Development Plans. Dave answered that those changes have been submitted to the Department of Commerce. She then asked if the Growth Management Act had changed in the last six months, she was concerned the RCWs and WACs would not allow for the changes proposed in the Master Development Plans. James Thomas asked Patricia to come to the next PAC meeting to get clarification on the details she was looking for.

Ken Van Buskirk shared what he thought should be some priorities for the Comp Plan. He mentioned the Belfair Sub-Area Plan and how it hasn't been amended or revised since its inception back in 2002. He would like this issue to be revisited and a formal advisory group formed to specifically make some recommendations on Belfair. He also thought the Transportation Element, though passed by the County Commissioners, is far from done. Water quality and conservation is another topic, as well as public involvement, and the conservation lands element. James mentioned that the Planning Advisory Commission is definitely in support of advice from the community of Belfair, but they would appreciate contact information for people who would want to be involved in the shaping of the Sub-Area plan. Ken replied that he would consider the PAC's recommendation.

Lynn Longan, Economic Development Council, wanted to let the public and the Commissioners know that they are moving forward on the Economic Element of the Comp Plan and should have a draft by the end of the month. They also have a public comment tool, the link of which is on the front page of www.choosemason.com.

Briefing – Staff overview and discussion of progress and next steps in developing Mason County's Comprehensive Plan

Presenter: Paula Reeves, Planning Manager and David Windom, Director of Community Services

Dave presented his population pyramid, produced by staff who went through census records from 2010. The bubble at 55-60 year olds represents the largest part of our County. He mentioned that in roughly 15 years this bubble population will move out of the pyramid and we will be left with a more vertical graph, indicating population in regards to age groups will be more evenly spread. Average death certificate is 73.2 years. As we plan for infrastructure, he indicated that we have to realize that bubble of 55-60 year old will be moving out of the graph. Marilyn questioned the presence of more males than females in the graph, which is not typical. Dave replied that he believes that presence of more males in the County is due to inward migration of single males. The housing numbers show about 28% single person families and that is typically male.

Paula started the slide presentation that she had previously shown at the PAC meeting the night before. The goal for completion of the Comprehensive Plan is fall of 2017. She listed off some goals, incorporating more public comment, reconcile policies, and incorporate changes in law. The main themes that have resulted from public comment include: enhance economic opportunity, promote housing choices, value communities and neighborhoods, and protect water quality and quantity.

She mentioned that the County and the City of Shelton have come to a consensus on the population growth numbers. She noted that in response to previous discussion with the Commissioners and PAC that it was decided that the Office of Financial Management's mid-range growth projection numbers would be used within the Comp Plan. The UGAs comprise 2% of the land mass of Mason County and this is where they see most of the projected growth residing. Right now there are about 16,000 buildable lots in the County, this does not include lots in the UGAs. She then explained how the growth projection numbers matched with the current housing stock in Mason County. Most of the housing stock in the County is 2, 3, 4, or 5 bedroom homes, though about 28% of the population are a single person family. Currently it may be adequate but with further projected growth, the need for smaller housing or more housing types could be important.

She went over the assets outlined in the Transportation Chapter of the plan. The connection between population and housing demand and the impact on utilities. She talked about the demand for water as increasing less than 1% annually. Dave explained the difference between Group A and Group B wells. Paula talked about the current fuel mix and Joel Meyer's previous comments on Mason County being one of the greenest counties in the state in terms of our fuel. Joel Meyer, Public Information and Government Relations Manager from PUD 3, mentioned the following three points: Mason County has a 97% carbon free fuel mix, virtually all the electricity used is from the Bonneville Power Administration, and the non-profit nature of PUD 3 allows Mason County a comparative advantage in terms of its bills and rates. He mentioned that about 25% of PUD 3's customers are seasonal or part time, one of the largest in the state for this type of customer. He talked about the increase in kilowatt per hour that may occur with the population projections, since Mason County uses mainly electric heat. Mason County does not have as many opportunities in regards to conservation of this type of resource due to its high residential nature, most conservation occurs in the area of commercial and industrial. So the 20% conservation in this energy area that OFM projects may be a little high. He thanked the County for including PUD 3 in the discussions regarding utilities.

Commissioner Jeffreys asked Paula if she had made corrections to the housing stock in regards to the inclusion of recreational homes. Paula answered that they still had a lot of work to do in this area, as well as learning how they can capture resources and revenue from this sector. More and more people are using their homes as vacation rentals. Commissioner Jeffreys asked Joel if he could provide that seasonal housing data grouped by region. Joel replied that he will look into the possibility of breaking that data up.

Paula then showed a slide depicting the utility corridor, showing where the utility demand is and core areas of development. Also, the Capital Facilities Chapter was mentioned and the inventory of investments in the County.

Commissioner Shutty asked the PAC and Board if they had questions or feedback for Paula.

Jason Bailey asked the Commissioners if they had seen similar numbers, in past presentations, regarding the population growth that is expected over the next 20 years. Commissioner Shutty answered yes. Jason was worried that the population growth projection was high especially with such slow net migration in the last few years. Commissioner Neatherlin replied that supply was a great factor in such a low migration rate in the last few years, rentals are almost impossible to get and when there is a 2 or 3 bedroom manufactured home, it is renting for \$1,200-\$1,400 a month because demand is so great. Commissioner Shutty stated that he believed the County would begin to feel demand for housing from the Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater, as well as Kitsap County and Seattle. Mason County will need planning policies in place to handle the influx.

Commissioner Jeffreys added that she believed millennials, especially married millennials, want to be house owners, so there is demand in a younger market. She also added that Mason County was an affordable option for those that were ready to retire. She talked about the last housing boom and how Mason County really missed out on this opportunity. Commissioner Neatherlin mentioned the restrictiveness of the Belfair UGA development regulations and how this deters a lot of developers.

Marilyn asked the Commissioners about the demographic in the County and how we are weighted with retirees rather than a working age group. Commissioner Shutty answered that the key phrase that we need to pull from Paula's presentation is "meet current demands but will meet future demands". Commissioner Jeffreys added that having a varied mix of housing is a good start and that small cottage housing is not only enticing to the single mom but also the retiree. Commissioner Neatherlin stated that he didn't think the PAC had to take all the responsibility for planning, developers can also be good resources when deciding on planning strategies to bring growth to the communities. He gave the example of Leavenworth and how they were able to create a cohesive theme for their community. He also pointed out that it was important that the rural was planned for in such a way that it did not deter owners from making wealth off their land. James Thomas replied that he believed the PAC was trying to take the approach of allowing people to capture their dream, but also allow those people with the small dreams, maybe less resources, to capture theirs as well.

Work Session – Discussion, Guidance and Direction

Presenter: Paula Reeves, Planning Manager, Mason County Community Services

Paula moved on to a set of questions she had for the commissions. One question she had was regarding the Planning Policies and whether they should be in their own chapter or spread throughout the plan, or in both. Commissioner Shutty liked the idea of seeing the policies in one place. Marilyn added that some policies apply in more than one location, making them hard to disperse. James agreed that keeping the policies in one place makes sense in regards to ease of use. Vicki stated that her problem with the policies is that there are so many of them. She mentioned the housing policies and that there were additional policies within the Housing Chapter itself, it becomes overwhelming and hard to communicate to people outside the County what is important to the County, in regards to its housing issues. She would like to have a structure of five or six housing policies and under those further requirements would fall. James asked Vicki if she would take the Housing Chapter and present to the PAC a structure that would be more user friendly. Vicki stated that she would be willing to work with Paula to accomplish this. Aaron Cleveland agreed on the wordiness of the County Wide Planning Policies chapter and James said that they will try their best with the chapter but time constraints will probably not allow for as thorough a revision as they would like. Jason asked if they had previously reached out to other counties for examples and James answered that they have but the examples out there are really mixed. Commissioner Jeffreys mentioned that if a policy doesn't have a development regulation to implement that plan, then it really shouldn't be in the Comp Plan.

The group moved on to the next question, which was “what are the priorities for this planning process, i.e. affordable housing, water conservation, economic development, etc.. and do we have the right focus?”

Commissioner Shutty replied, in answer to the above question, that we could not be afraid to plan to stimulate economic development. In addition, water use is also a big issue with the wait for the Hirst decision, so this is an important component of what we will be planning for as well. James interjected by asking what economic growth looked like to the Commissioners. He was concerned that they might want to attract, with jobs, those people with higher degrees, but they also needed good jobs for those who work in the service industry. Commissioner Shutty said that what it really came down to was building a 21st century workforce and economy, which he believed they were heading in the direction of, especially with the focus on not only higher education, but education for the skilled trades. Commissioner Neatherlin added that Mason County's problem was a workforce problem, that many businesses were having a hard time finding people with even six months of experience. So the lack of skilled workers, not living wage jobs, becomes the problem. He stated that the PAC's mission, in regards to planning, zoning, and water quality, was to make it possible for businesses to establish their dream. Jason Bailey mentioned the figure from last night that showed about 65% of those who lived in Mason County worked outside of the County, with a great percentage working in King.

The PAC and Board talked about protecting water quality and the requirements of home owners to pump and provide maintenance to their septic systems. They talked about those that did not comply with County regulations in regards to waste systems and that the biggest challenge was having the resources to find those in non-compliance and the enforcement thereafter. Dave mentioned that Environmental Health sent out over 8,000 notices to home owners regarding the operation and maintenance of their septic systems, in some cases they have sent multiple letters. Jason Bailey was concerned that home owners could do their own operation and maintenance

inspections. Dave replied that even with a professional inspection there are only two options to report “failing” or “not failing at this moment”. They can only guarantee what is going on at the moment. Jason would like an O & M be required every year and done through a professional. Vicki mentioned the incentive for pumping septic tanks that was noted at last night’s PAC meeting. For those who are considered low income, up to \$200 can be reimbursed on septic pumping, there may also be low interest loans through the Department of Ecology.

Vicki asked the Commissioners if they had any thoughts on the fact that Mason County was a bedroom community. Commissioner Jeffreys mentioned that they were sandwiched in between two great population centers and that the community has to build on their strengths. Commissioner Shutty added that as a commission it is their job to provide stability and predictability of policies and regulations that provide opportunities for developers to come in and grow the community. Commissioner Neatherlin stated he didn’t have a problem with being a bedroom community, but if his community members didn’t want that for themselves then he was supportive of their desires. Marilyn and James agreed that some industries would not be appropriate for the County. She noted that bedroom communities tend to support a strong mixed retail and that is where our employment is growing. James also mentioned the strong fiber optic cable we have and that many people would have the opportunity to work with a business such as Microsoft without actually commuting there. Commissioner Neatherlin interjected that we had to be careful about determining what businesses could enter our community. Commissioner Jeffreys talked about bedroom communities in respect to taxes, the more housing the County has and retail to support that housing, the more tax base to support infrastructure. She noted that it was hard to see Mason County as a job center because most job centers start out as just that.

James Thomas wanted to make sure the PAC knew what the Commissioners wanted them to focus on in the process of completing the Comprehensive Plan. Commissioner Neatherlin again stated that he believed the commission didn’t have the responsibility of regulating who brought business to Mason County but are more responsible for looking at where planning was accommodating growth and a variety of growth. He added that sometimes when you are on these types of commissions, you really have to put your personal preferences aside and concentrate on what the law requires. Marilyn interjected to say that they know the character of the County will change and the job of the PAC is to plan for what that change looks like or the limits of that change. Commissioner Jeffreys was concerned about micromanaging and that investors should have a voice in shaping the community. Commissioner Shutty brought up the topic of allowed uses and non-allowed uses and that it should be a continued discussion between the commissions and staff.

Commissioner Shutty asked for any additional thoughts. None presented. He mentioned that another joint meeting was on the schedule. Paula replied that that meeting would be held in late September. Commissioner Shutty and Neatherlin thanked the Planning Advisory Commission for all their work.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:27 p.m.