

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY
OBSERVER REPORT

**Pierce County Planning Commission
November 24, 2020**

LWVTPC Observer: Lydia Zepeda

Called to order at 9:30 am

Commissioners present (District, title): Sharon Hanek (1), Shawn Manley (2), Sharon Benson (4, Chair), Julie Williams (5, Secretary), Jeff Brown (6, Vice-Chair), Kathryn Jerkovich (7)

Absent: Kevin Rau (3)

Also present: Erik Jaszewski PPW staff, Dan Cardwell, Danica Williams

Agenda

Minutes from October 27, 2020: see pp 3-4 of link below. Approved.

Public Hearing: Urban infill housing design and lot creation: Pierce County code amendments to support housing affordability through urban infill development.

Repeal and replace Pierce County Code Chapter 18J.17 Small Lot Design, as well as amend Chapters 10.24 Parking, 17B.20 Construction and Infrastructure Regulations – Road and Bridge Design and Construction Standards, 18.25 Definitions, 18A.15 Density, Setbacks, and Lot Dimension, 18A.35 Parking, 18A.37 Accessory Development – Residential, 18A.65 Affordable Housing Incentives, 18A.75 Use Permits, and 18J.15 Countywide Design Standards and Guidelines.

For proposed changes, see:

<https://www.co.pierce.wa.us/DocumentCenter/View/96498/11-24-20-PC-Agenda-Packet>

Erik Jaszewski presented the proposal:

The purpose of this session is a public hearing and getting feedback from the public and commission on the proposed ordinance. Staff will come back in January with final recommendations for approval.

Changes are proposed because home sale prices are going up at 12% and rents 4% per year; 1/3 of household owners are cost burdened and over half of renters are cost burdened (paying more than 1/3 of income on housing).

In August 2019 the affordability housing report came out. In November 2019 an affordable housing workgroup was established to implement recommendations of the report. This proposal is one of the results.

The strategy is to do infill in the missing middle (between single family units and large apartment complexes). Goal: to have smaller housing on smaller lots that are more affordable at market rates, such as townhouses, duplex, triplex, fourplex, courtyard apartments, ADUs, cottages, tiny homes, etc. When more homes can be fit in, greater advantage can be taken of land available in urban areas. This proposal would support higher density and encourage attractive well-designed, affordable development.

The proposal repeals and replaces the existing design chapter, applies the higher density missing-middle idea with ground floor entry (want feedback on how it will relate to Centers and Corridors).

Proposed Changes in Small Lot Chapter:

Reduce parking minimum from 2 to 1.5 spaces

More flexibility for parking layout/location and parking garages

More flexibility in street layout

More flexibility in lot dimensions and setbacks

Allow public and private roads

Location of utilities

Allow ADUs

Flexibility in materials, colors, roofs, columns, architectural details and features

Flexibility in design objectives, can use variance process.

Eliminate duplicate standards in grading, stormwaters, description of road types, traffic calming, fire and EV and sidewalks and pathway, maximum impervious surface, accession structure, tree retention, lighting: these are all in other chapters of code.

Eliminates impractical standards that are barriers:

Style of columns, hedges, how gutters and hedge are locate, mail and newspaper boxes, trash and recycling containers and hot tub standards

Infill Lot Creation:

Applies development regulations to whole parcel, not individual subdivided lots

Lot can be minimal as the footprint of home,

Unsubdivided areas are shared in common

Existing dwelling units on single parcel are eligible, e.g. townhouses

How is common land owned then? each parcel fee simple, common area owned in common, no legal entity specified (could be condominium or cooperative).

Other minor changes:

Fixes references, update naming/numbering/ citations, eliminate graphics that do not reflect regulations, clarifies application of PDD table 18A.75.050-1.

Allows PDD for developments that include low income housing (an Affordable Housing report recommendation).

Contact Erik Jaszewski at erik.jaszewski@piercecountywa.gov.

Questions from Commissioners with staff responses:

Will ownership of ADUs be allowed like in Seattle? In Seattle it works as a condominium process. Yes, it is not excluded, but may require easement.

These must be in areas with sewers or where sewers can be provided? Yes.

Is there another process besides variance to allow design changes? Yes, it is called a site plan review rather than a variance.

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU): how do we regulate ADUs across county, not just infill. We will have additional amendments to ADU codes across the county, so Planning Commission will have additional opportunities to look at ADUs.

Will we be mandating this code anywhere? No. The purpose is to create options, not force infill.

How to deal with common areas if neighbors do not cooperate? HOA could be formed by residents and they control what happens to common space. Code says common areas must be identified as such; it is up

to developer to set up legal entity, typically a HOA. Trying to provide flexibility. This code provides an alternative to creating a condominium that allows fee simple ownership of home.

Jeff Brown: applauds the approach and participating of many groups to address missing need. It would be helpful to have real examples and what problems they faced and how they dealt with them. Would developer design all the homes or does it allow individuals to design their own homes?

While it is aspirational to have fewer cars, is it realistic? Most people have at least two cars. He is concerned about cars in the streets.

Design: He is concerned that developers can introduce modern design incongruent with neighborhoods with traditional homes, e.g. in Proctor.

He is concerned about ADUs as separate ownership because it could create blight, prefers single owner, cites examples in Seattle, where these are occupied by lower income households and there tends to get blight. Would prefer original landowner to retain ownership because believes they will prevent blight. Comments that examples shown were great, but how to guarantee that they will continue to look great over time?

Response: design goes beyond this proposal, the purpose of the proposal is to allow ADUs.

ADUS are appropriate for Centers and Corridors where transitioning to dense communities, but not for single family neighborhoods.

Sharon Hanek is concerned about clear distinction about ownership, who owns what so can sell. Also concerned about parking. Fire and police need to have access when there is an emergency. It can be a potential danger. Prefers two parking spots. Response: anything property sold must have a legal description.

Sharon Benson concerned that most of the examples are multi-story because sees a need for single story for those wishing to age in place or who have a disability. Can they get extra points for single floor? Also if there is a mortgage on your property, lender must approve any partition of the property.

Manley, any impacts on AMI or developer fees? Response: No, those are for low income housing, this proposal is trying to reduce barriers to market rate, and keep market prices lower, not to provide low income housing. No, this proposal has no impact on developer fees. We already provide fee waivers for low income housing development.

Open to public at 10:33 am

Jeffrey Johnson manages a water company. He has concerns about small lot design and lots that do not need to be on road frontage. Water meters are generally at the front of a road. The property owner is responsible for pipe to meter. Electricity and gas, responsible to meters. Need to have access to and may go through neighbors land, but you are responsible for utilities to your home. Concerned that utility lines run through neighbors or through common areas, if there is a leak the homeowner needs to track leak and excavate common area or neighbors. Power and gas must put on structure. Also folks will not want fire hydrants, telephone or utility boxes in front "yards."

Jesse Gamble wants to thank staff and supports proposal to provide much needed housing.

Kathryn Sheldon thanks them for creating this plan. From perspective as a single home owner, Jeff Browns comments resonate with me. We need to look at mistakes of others. The designs may be attractive, but they do not plan for grid development. They are all cul-de-sac designs. We need access in and out of area for emergencies.

We are relying more and more on HOAs and this can be disingenuous because the increase cost of home ownership.

I am concerned that investors are buying up developments and using them as rentals. Buyers are competing with large investors.

I also know parking is expensive, but even in single family neighbor there are multigenerational and there are more than two cars.

I also agree that need single floor design to allow folks to stay in their homes.

Public comments closed at 10:47.

Motion to continue the action item to January meeting. Approved.

December meeting is Dec 8.

January meeting will be full agenda: five meetings.

Adjourned at 10:49 am