

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING: Community Round Table

February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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The meeting of the La Conner Planning Commission was called to order at 6:04 p.m.  
Commissioners present: Marna Hanneman, Bruce Bradburn, Liz Theaker and John Leaver.

Commissioner's Absent: Carol Hedlin

Staff Present: Planner Michael Davolio, Assistant Planner Ajah Eills.

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**OLD BUSINESS:**

None; the purpose of this meeting was to hold a Community Round Table about the Public Participation Program.

**COMMUNITY ROUND TABLE:**

Michael Davolio began the meeting by thanking the community for their participation in the Comprehensive Plan Process and gave a brief introduction to the two-year comprehensive plan update process. He introduced the joint Planning Commission and Town Council meeting on February 28<sup>th</sup>, and stated that this is when citizen proposed changes to the municipal code will be discussed. He also outlined the priorities of the process, focusing mainly on the goal to be both internally and externally consistent. He named the change to minimum lot size (it took two years to make the changes to the municipal code fully consistent) and the lack of guidelines around Adult Businesses as two examples of consistency checks. Davolio emphasized the priority of Public Involvement would continue throughout the process.

Ajah Eills passed around a survey to all people present regarding the best way for the town to contact them; this survey is attached to the minutes. Eills also emphasized community involvement among all segments of the population is a top priority for the Town.

Davolio thanked the Port representatives for their involvement in the Community Round Table, and mentioned that he had reached out to county staff about the meeting, and he hopes to see county staff at future community round tables. Davolio then introduced the elements of Land Use, Housing, and Transportation that would be the focus of the next months of the Comprehensive Plan Update.

Eills invited all at the table to introduce themselves.

Leslie Smith introduced herself as a resident of La Conner and employer in Skagit County. She is interested in and very supportive of affordable housing initiatives, and is against short term rentals. Email is her preferred method of communication

Bill Reynolds introduced himself as a reporter with the local paper.

Sara Young introduced herself as the Executive Director of the Port of Skagit who has been with the Marina long-term.

Heather Rogerson introduced herself as the Planning & Development Director and Aviation Director for the Port of Skagit.

Jim Matthews introduced himself as a La Conner resident and said that text was the best way to communicate with him.

Maggie Wilder introduced herself and said that both email and placing notices in the newspaper are effective.

William Smith introduced himself and said that email was effective, but that texting stands out because he gets a lot of emails. He also emphasized the need for affordable housing for the average person, and is against short term housing.

Jodi Dean introduced herself as the manager of the Channel Cove project for affordable housing with the Home Trust of Skagit, and said that although she lives five miles outside of La Conner, hope to support the community in any way she can. Her goal is to have five families in five homes by the summer. Email is an effective way to reach her. She also mentioned that most people who live in Channel Cove don't work in La Conner, they live there and commute outside to work.

Liz Theaker asked for an explanation of what Channel Cove was for those who may not know.

Dean explained the history of Channel Cove and mentioned the extreme federal guidelines about who can live there, and the fact that there is a lot of red tape with federal money.

Marna Hanneman mentions she is giddy about the Channel Cove project and would like to see some outreach to those living in Channel Cove. She would like to hear from them.

Linda Talman introduced herself and said that she had a special interest in Non-Motorized transportation. She mentions grants that could be of a benefit to the town, and is disappointed that the Town never applies for them. Talman said that our substandard streets are impeding children on the way to school. In regards to open space and foliage, she brought up a resolution that the Town will put up trees that are good for birds with Town projects. She is also in favor of affordable housing and mentions that the school is cutting programs because they do not have enough students. Texting is a good option to reach her.

Davolio said that we will be getting updated county population projections by the end of March or early April, which is when we will be able to take a substantial look at housing and land use using the 2020 census information. The Town will be able to talk with the county to help them achieve their goals.

Hanneman said that transparency between the Town and the citizens is essential as we move through this update.

Eills inquired about the possibility of putting up public notices on Town kiosks or something similar.

Hanneman thought that kiosks may be a good option.

William Smith mentioned that he has some concerns with the Town using social media to communicate.

Maggie Wilder suggested publishing notices in a more in-formal article-like tone could inspire more people to read them.

Leslie Smith would like to see the "hot topics" more visible/available on the website.

Hanneman brought up the possibility of text notifications.

Theaker asked if we could notify people through text.

Eills stated that we could notify people through text and briefly explained the notify me system.

Talman mentioned that it would be a good idea to make a video guide to the website or something similar.

MaryLee Chamberlain replied that one was made before and put up on the website last year.

Eills mentioned that we could try to find the video and put it up again.

Talman said that school students need to learn how to read websites and could use La Conner's as an example

Theaker said that the Town should send out notices to the Swinomish Tribal Paper to invite the community to our public meetings

A brief general overlapping discussion of the Swinomish Paper followed, with the name Caroline Edwards brought up as a potential contact.

Eills mentioned that the Town could definitely look into that.

Talman suggests reaching out to the library, the post office, at the grocery store, maybe local bars and restaurants, and teachers.

Eills asked if QR codes would be a good idea.

Hanneman states that she doesn't believe that anyone knows what they are.

Davolio brings up that the Town is in talks with the library about getting a reader board that could display information.

Eills asked is a presence at Town events would be helpful.

Talman does not think that this would be helpful and questions which Town events Eills means.

Eills clarifies that she means things such as the upcoming pet parade and events which the public are encouraged to attend within the town limits.

Heather Rogerson said that a presence couldn't hurt.

Talman suggested that the senior center and school would be better.

Jim Mathews echoed the idea that seniors should be more involved and suggests that the Town do some senior specific outreach to the senior living communities within La Conner.

Hanneman agreed that reaching out to the retirement center would be a good idea and said that a lot of seniors didn't know that they could be involved. There was a recent successful meeting about Health and Safety that demonstrates that meetings can be effective.

Mathews said that often times when people send a message to the Town, they don't hear back.

Talman suggested reaching out to the school board.

Theaker brought up that during the recent flooding she could only find information about what was happening in the Town was on social media, specifically next door. She asked if we could have a social media presence with the comments turned off but shareable, as a way to outreach to the community.

Talman brought up other businesses and Delta as examples of social media.

Theaker said that it would be a good idea to think about it.

Leslie Smith asked where we will be going with the update, and what the next steps would be.

Davolio talked about the upcoming Planning Commission meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February, and the joint Planning Commission/Town Council meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

Mathews asked what the term public hearing meant and how people were supposed to know about them.

Davolio explained that we publish public hearing notices in the paper and post them at town hall and the site, as well as send out 300ft mailing notices to people directly around the project.

Talman asked if we could send out 500ft notices, as other codes in nearby cities send out 500ft notices. She also asked if we could make a section of the website that outlines public hearings.

Hanneman mentioned that sometimes the Planning Commission doesn't know about upcoming projects and that can be embarrassing.

Mathews echoed that people don't know about public hearings.

Talman brought up that some cities send out public notices on social media.

Eills said that staff capacity is an issue for social media, and that other cities have personnel whose entire job is to update their website and social media presence. In La Conner we do not have such a person.

Talman mentioned that the staked posts at the site are hard to see and that other cities have bigger and more visible signs.

Mollie Rights said that the Town uses green paper but some people are red/green colorblind.

Talman suggested using yellow paper.

Eills agreed that yellow paper would be a good option moving forward.

The meeting adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Chair

Carol Hedlin

Date

2/28/2023