

**TOWN OF LA CONNER  
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING  
June 6, 2023**

---

---

The Planning Commission meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

Commissioners present: Carol Hedlin, Marna Hanneman, Bruce Bradburn, John Leaver

Commissioners absent: None

Staff: Michael Davolio, Ajah Eills

---

---

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Jim Mathews expressed disbelief at the plans Greg Ellis had submitted at the last Town Council meeting, specifically about the parking in the right-of-way.

Planner Davolio stated that the town is waiting for additional information from the applicant.

Commissioner Hanneman stated that she had recently attended the North-West Planners Forum, and it was very informative with several good speakers. She will pass along relevant information to the town staff.

**MINUTES:**

Commissioner Bradburn moved to approve the minutes from the May 16, 2023 meeting with corrections. Seconded by Commissioner Leaver. Motion carried unanimously.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

Staff reported that they had received the soil report from the 306 Center Project, and have published both the report and a one-page summary on the town's website. The report satisfies the Hearing Examiners requirement for additional soil testing. The applicant will have to schedule a pre-construction meeting with public works before beginning construction.

William Smith asked who would be responsible for supervising the removal of the contaminated soil.

Davolio stated that the applicant would be required to have an engineer on site to supervise the work.

Debby Aldrich asked who issued the building permit and if there would be a comment period.

Davolio stated that the county does; the town issues a concurrent review letter. There will be no comment period.

Jim Mathews asked who provides the concurrent review letter.

Davolio stated that the planning department does.

Debby Aldrich asked if the Department of Ecology knew about the site.

Davolio said yes, the Town sent them a SEPA.

Jim Mathews noted that the applicate had originally applied for a variance for height, and asked who would be monitoring this for compliance.

Davolio stated that the town does, the planning department, public works, the fire department, and code enforcement.

Staff reported that the door hangers were hung, and the survey has received 64 responses so far. Staff plans to keep the survey open through the end of June. An email list will likely be created. Council member MaryLee Chamberlain had a positive experience hanging the door hangers, and has communicated with staff the efforts of the Communication Committee, which will be included in the comprehensive plan update.

Rene Mathews asked for an explanation of the door hangers.

Staff explained that it was a survey that was hung on residences around town.

There was no update on the Transportation Element.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

Staff presented potential short-term rental regulations, and stated that this topic often brought out a lot of conversation. People are on all different sides of this issue, and there are many discussions to be had. This is a starting point.

Commissioner Hanneman stated that the City of Granite Falls has eliminated all short-term rental uses in the commercial zone. She acknowledged that this is a controversial topic.

Davolio stated that Coupeville has done the opposite, eliminating all short-term rental use in the residential zone.

William Smith stated his belief that short-term rentals undermine community structure, especially in residential zones.

Commissioner Bradburn expressed that he was concerned the regulations are too restrictive.

Marilyn Thostenson asked if BnB's were allowed in town.

Davolio replied they were allowed by conditional use permit.

An ongoing conversation ensued about the possibility of short-term rentals undermining community structure, and the challenges of enforcement. Mention was made that neighbors may be helpful in enforcing it.

Commissioner Hanneman mentioned that there were less than 100 available beds for short-term rentals, and questioned where people would stay during festivals.

Commissioner Leaver stated that he was required to provide parking for his BnB that is within his house. Other houses have many cars on the street. He provides tax money to the town and the state.

William Smith stated that short-term rentals erode the soul of the town.

Mollie Rights questioned how the oversight of this would work, and mentioned that the house she currently owns was used as an AirBnB prior to their purchase of it.

Commissioner Hanneman stated that ADU's would not be able to be rented short-term.

William Smith asked how we could examine the number and types of way that AirBnB's do not serve the town. Mentions that he lived next to one AirBnB that had a party atmosphere, although not in La Conner.

Both Commissioner Hanneman and Planner Davolio mentioned that BnB's are required to pay hotel/motel taxes. Hanneman went on to mention an old community plan for revitalizing the space around the Moore Clark building.

Marilyn Thostenson agreed that the old plan would have enhanced the town.

Commissioner Bradburn asked if the building had been condemned.

Marilyn Thostenson mentioned that they had spent money to clean it up when they purchased the property.

Eills mentioned that the town had sent a "dangerous building" letter to the owners of the building.

There was a discussion regarding restrictions on second and third home ownership within La Conner based on some choices made by municipalities around the country. Hanneman mentioned that this discussion had occurred before.

William Smith asked if there was a general town consensus that AirBnB's damage the town?

The Commission responded that there is not currently that consensus, other community members chimed in that renters' shop in the stores, eat in the restaurants, and enjoy the town.

It was decided that more discussion is needed before any action is taken.

**CLOSING COMMENTS:**

William Smith asked if the town has given any thought to limiting construction because of the flooding.

Commissioner Hanneman responded that we had not.

William Smith responded that he doesn't understand why the town can not or will not limit construction given that it will be in danger from the flood levels.

Gerald George responded that the Emergency Management Commission (EMC) is currently trying to address the level of the December 2022 flood.

Jim Mathews stated that he was deeply impacted by the flood and the water that impacted him was pumped out from the La Conner Retirement Inn.

There was scattered conversation about the flooding and the flood risk as related to new construction and developments. The EMC regards the flood risk as absolute. There was discussion about building materials, building moratoriums, how to make concrete decisions about flood protection, FEMA maps, historical dike removal, and "100" year floods.

Commissioner Hedlin stated that flooding will be continually addressed moving forward.

The next Planning Commission meeting will be on June 20, 2023.

With no further business Commissioner Hanneman moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:57 p.m. Seconded by Commissioner Bradburn. Motion carried unanimously.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date