

Anacortes Planning Commission Minutes - February 12, 2025

Roll Call

Chairperson Linda Martin called to order the Anacortes Planning Commission meeting of February 12, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. Commissioners William McCombs, Frank Jeretzky, Paul Ryan, and Mike Mills were present. Commissioners Jim Stoneman and Luke Currier were absent.

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes

There were no minutes submitted for review.

Public Comment

There was no public comment taken.

Public Hearings

Other Business

2025 Comprehensive Plan Update - Proposed amendments to the goals and policies in the Capital Facilities & Utilities elements, continued discussion

Libby Grage pointed out that at the last meeting there were questions from the Commissioners about levels of services for Fire/EMS and Police. That information is included in the packet.

Linda Martin asked if the Commissioners had any questions.

There were none noted.

Commissioner Martin referenced the NFPA standards in a few sections, but under effective response force Chief Harris said it does not match the NFPA standards but it's comparable.

Will McCombs commented this seems backwards. If there is a standard that they should be meeting, shouldn't that be the focus instead of adjusting the standards to meet our staffing levels. He expressed concern that our figures are lower than the national standard.

Paul Ryan agreed that NFPA 1710 calls for a 4-man minimum, but ours is 3.

Libby Grage said she will check with them and get back to you.

Ms. Grage moved on to the proposed policy update to item CF1.2. The changes from last meeting are highlighted in the packet. Staff suggested removing the residential, commercial and industrial as we want the concurrency standards applied to all development types. Concurrency review happens during review of a development permit application where staff routes the documents to all departments that are responsible for providing concurrent services and facilities. Staff reviews what impact the new development will have on facilities and services. Staff added some clarifying language for utilities; such as water, wastewater and stormwater, that concurrent with development means, prior to the actual use of the facilities. For other services and facilities, concurrent with development means that a financial commitment is in place to complete the improvements or strategies within 6 years of occupancy of the development.

Frank Jeretzky referenced San Juan Passage which took a long time to build out. He asked if concurrency applies only to those that are developed during that 6-year period.

Libby Grage said she was not sure, but it should be based on the deficiencies identified during the initial review and then the time clock starts.

Linda Martin pointed out that there are areas in Anacortes that have several HOA's. She wonders if that was their way of getting around the concurrency. If a developer built section A and deemed it complete, would that satisfy the concurrency.

Ms. Grage clarified that there are provisions for projects that have different phases to avoid that.

Mike Mills said that San Juan Passage was developed in 4-5 phases that were City approved.

Libby Grage stated the facilities need to be in place before final plat approval, regardless of how long it takes for the homes to be built. The public comment period for Capital Facilities and Utilities is going on now and the public hearing will be the next Planning Commission meeting. She reviewed where people can view the documents and how & where to provide public comment.

2025 Comprehensive Plan Update - Housing Action Plan (HAP) strategies discussion, continued

Ms. Grage provided some background on the Housing Action Plan (HAP) purpose and the process so far. She reviewed the tracker for the recommended changes to the HAP. To help with the discussion, staff compiled a draft amendment proposal with strike through and underline. Staff also added information boxes (in blue) with helpful information or resources.

Linda Martin recommends picking up where the Planning Commission left off. She noticed that there was public comment provided a while ago that the GMA does not require greater density for communities under 25K in population. She asked if that was true.

Libby Grage stated that there was a housing bill passed in the last 1-2 years that requires increased densities in urban growth areas allowing for more units on lots which applies to jurisdiction of 25K or more, so that particular law does not apply to Anacortes.

Linda Martin said we want to hone these down for City Council to determine if (1) this will increase density, (2) would it tend for more affordability or promote more affordable housing and (3) would the community accept it. These are the questions she keeps in mind when reviewing the HAP.

Will McCombs pointed out the move towards increased density may be necessary, but one thing people appreciate about Anacortes is the small town feel. He cautioned that there are places where increased density makes sense, but not across the board.

Frank Jeretzky said it could be impossible to achieve all three of those things.

Commissioner Martin stated that our population includes a large number of senior citizens. Increased density usually comes hand in hand with stairs which is not congruent with an aging population.

Mr. McCombs asked if the changes to the HAP are still being reviewed by City Council or have they already accepted it.

Libby Grage said the City Council docketed consideration of the HAP recommendations as part of the Comprehensive Plan process. The Council planning committee made recommendations on which from the HAP would have the likelihood of moving forward. Those recommendations were accepted by the City Council and forwarded to Planning Commission for review. The expectation is that the Planning Commission will make recommendations on which will move forward. The final draft will go to public comment public hearing, and then a Planning Commission recommendation to Council for adoption. The Planning Commission left off at 2.1.9, single-room occupancy housing. Staff has not completed their review of those, so that will come back to the Commission. Staff is also working on 2.1.10 and 2.3 so that will come back as well.

Mike Mills referenced 2.4.1, stating that there is supporting information on page 15 & 25 of 61 and page 9 & 19 of 39.

Ms. Grage agreed that they work together.

The Commissioners would like to start on page 9 of 39.

Mike Mills pointed out that HAP 2.4.1 regarding lot size for a minimum lot size for a duplex does not match the lot size for R2 listed on page 25.

Libby Grage clarified that in R2 the minimum lot size for a standard-size duplex is 9000 sq ft. With a small duplex, where there are maximum sizes per unit, the minimum lot size would be 7500 sq ft.

Mr. Mills referenced page 19 and suggested adding "small duplex" to section 2.a.

Linda Martin wondered why Old Town was left off the chart regarding reducing lot sizes.

Libby Grage said the HAP did not make recommendations for the Old Town zone related to duplexes and minimum lot sizes. The Planning Commission can make a recommendation to include that.

Linda Martin pointed out that when you include the small-sized duplex, it could make it more affordable. It seems like we make changes to all the residential zones except Old Town. That is an area that has comparable zoning to R3.

Mike Mills recommended paralleling R2A or R3 for Old Town.

Will McCombs asked if there special considerations for Old Town to not treat it like other residential areas.

Libby Grage clarified that approximately 15 years ago, there was an effort to create new design standards.

These were applied to Old Town in order to make sure that new development is more consistent with the more historic structures. There are requirements for modulation, height, etc. Old Town is close to downtown, amenities, walkable, etc. This is an area that people want to live in.

Mr. Mills commented that the look and feel of the area is determined by the design standards, not the size of the dwellings.

Libby Grage said there are no new developable lots in this area. There is the possibility for redevelopment and infill.

Linda Martin asked if Commissioner Mills was suggesting adding 6000 sq ft lot size for a small duplex in Old Town.

Mike Mills agreed. He moved on to ADU for Old Town suggesting that they add 1500 sq ft.

Ms. Grage pointed out that may require making changes to the future land use section of the Comprehensive Plan. Staff would need to review that before making changes.

Linda Martin said "attached" and "duplex" are important caveats in these situations.

Libby Grage stated that currently, there is no minimum lot size for an ADU, but adding this would change that. Staff may need to bring this back to the Planning Commission. ADU's are still required to comply with the rest of the development and zoning regulations.

Linda Martin summarized that for 2.4.1, the Planning Commission is okay with adding to the Old Town column - the lot size for a small duplex would be 6000 sq ft and the additional lot size for additional attached dwelling unit to be 1500 sq ft.

Libby Grage commented that adding the 1500 sq ft sounds like we are okay with a triplex in Old Town. She referenced the uses in AMC 19.41.030 - triplexes and townhomes are not currently permitted in Old Town.

If the Commissioners want that change, this will need to be updated.

Frank Jeretzky expressed concern that the community will not be ok with that.

Libby Grage reminded the Commissioners that currently only duplex is permitted in Old Town.

Mrs. Martin suggested that the Council planning committee provide some insight as to why Old Town is treated differently.

Mike Mills said it would be a good idea to pass this back to planning committee. He separates the design from the other metrics. The visual aspects of the district can still be maintained via the design standards.

Ms. Grage pointed out that the HAP has a recommendation to look at the Old Town zone and consider changing the zoning for a portion to transition to higher density. That was not one of the HAP proposals that the City Council moved forward. She will follow up on this.

Linda Martin moved on to 2.4.4 asking if staff has a recommendation.

Libby Grage reviewed the staff recommendation to add a minimum density for lots that are greater than 6000 sq ft in the R4 zone. This would allow for a SFR to be placed on a lot smaller than 6000 sq ft. There are some changes staff is working on based on the future land use map.

Mr. Mills asked if there is something that makes this special.

Libby Grage clarified this is the highest density residential zone that we have. It makes sense to have the highest density for this area. There are also minimum densities in our mixed-use zones.

Will McCombs suggested some sort of grandfather clause. We want people that own property in that area to be able to develop the property.

Libby Grage asked if the recommendation for lots that are over 6000 sq ft, that this new regulation for minimum density should not apply to those.

Mr. McCombs stated that if someone already owns a lot, they should be able to develop that lot. If it changes ownership, then we could apply the new regulations.

Libby Grage expressed concern as to how that could be done. Staff doesn't track change of ownership. There is a concept called vesting, but that requires a complete application be in place prior to the change. We could recommend a pause on the effective date to allow people to submit a proposal if they want.

Will McCombs pointed out that real estate transactions are public record, so that can be checked. Ms. Grage clarified that this doesn't say they cannot develop it, just that they have to comply with the regulations. The Planning Commission can make that recommendation and staff will verify if additional changes need to go along with that.

Linda Martin moved on to 2.4.6.

Libby Grage referenced AMC 19.42.050 which proposed changing from 600 sq ft to 650 sq ft per unit. This allows for additional storage space. We have some indication from developers that the additional space is important to the functionality of the units. This is saying that if you do a percentage of small units, you get additional height. She clarified that the 600 sq ft was a number from the past and there is no specific requirement for 600. If 650 sq ft will make the units more functional and increase livability, staff agrees with that change.

Mike Mills said if that additional 50 sq ft was conditioned space, it would add to the livability. If it's just storage, it doesn't make sense. He referenced 2.4.7 regarding the new technology for elevators.

Commissioner Martin expressed concern that this change will not increase density or affordable units, and will not be accepted by the community.

Frank Jeretzky pointed out that the extra floor increases density and hopefully provides more affordable units. The additional height is only the elevator, not the entire building.

Libby Grage reminded the Commissioners that the new technology gets rid of the mechanical room, which adds livable space.

Mr. Mills clarified he's ok with 2.4.6 if it's conditioned space. Regarding 2.4.7, he's more amenable to allowing the additional height since it is only for the elevator shaft, not the entire building.

Linda Martin said it sounds like we are ok with 2.4.6 and 2.4.7.

Will McCombs moved on to 2.5.1. He asked if the State provides a definition of family. He expressed concern that this is misleading. He suggested changing the language to household.

Paul Ryan recommends clarifying family to include: (1) related individuals (one or more persons living together in a household or dwelling unit), (2) unrelated individuals in a nonprofit setting, and (3) unrelated persons in a state-licensed home (up to 6 persons not related to the provider). He also recommends determining who the point of contact is for #2 and #3.

Linda Martin expressed concern that the HAP says to amend the definition of family per state law, but there is no definition in state law.

Ms. Grage said the only law states that the city is not allowed to limit the number of unrelated persons in a unit. A change is required to comply with the state law.

Linda Martin asked if the proposed language is too broad. It sounds like Paul is recommending keeping the language that was proposed to be stricken and adding clarification.

Paul Ryan said he started with the HAP language and added clarification, especially for unrelated persons living together.

Frank Jeretzky pointed out that Bellingham had to deal with this due to the university. They banned people filling up residential homes with too many people and all that comes with them, such as vehicles.

Libby Grage said maximum occupancy is in the building codes, so that would help with the amount of people living in one space.

Mr. McCombs suggested that "family" needs to be removed and replace with "household". We use the term family, but don't really mean what the definition is. A single-family home is usually one household.

Libby Grage pointed out that staff considered that.

Paul Ryan said if we use household, we will need to add that definition.

Frank Jeretzky asked why #3 is included in this section.

Libby Grage said she's unsure of that origin. She clarified that adult family homes are regulated separately under group living.

Linda Martin suggested the commissioners bring this back with "household" instead of family. She moved on to 2.5.2.

Will McCombs said this seems reasonable. He wonders if the standards apply to greater than 4 units for a

townhouse.

Mr. Ryan clarified that a townhouse is defined in AMC as 3 units or more.

Libby Grage referenced page 30 of 39. This is proposed to be added because townhouse developments have their own site and building design standards in AMC 19.43. We've run into confusion when new proposals come in to determine if the block frontage standards apply to townhomes. This was to clarify that block frontage standards, etc are also required.

Will McCombs wants to clarify that those standards will still apply if there were 4 or more units in the townhome. It looks like there may be a loophole if there are more than 4 units.

Libby Grage said the intent was to make sure that the requirements that are applicable to townhomes are called out in one place. Staff recommends making block frontage standards applicable to townhomes as there has been confusion in the past.

Paul Ryan moved on to 2.5.3, page 22 of 39.

Ms. Grage commented that this adds clarification on townhome development. This is pointing back to the block frontage and setback tables. This doesn't change the standards; it tells them where to look.

Paul Ryan expressed concern that some of the original references or links in the HAP are no longer available.

Libby Grage clarified that subsequent to the HAP being adopted, there was an update to the development regulations numbering scheme, specifically the design standard provisions. Each housing type now has it's own section number, instead of being a run-on section.

Mr. Ryan provided suggested language changes: "with regard to the design of planned and future development frontage projects regulated by the AMC". This cross-references other sections for ease of use.

Linda Martin suggested that for 2.5.3, Paul will meet with Libby to clean this up due to some references being removed or renumbered. They moved on to 2.5.4.

Will McCombs asked for examples of indoor recreational / leisure space.

Libby Grage said these provisions apply to all new multi-family and mixed-use developments. Internal open space does not mean within the building; rather it must be on the site. The minimum open space is based on the number of bedrooms for the project. The open space can be shared, ground level, private, common indoor recreational areas, etc. The developer can determine how they want to provide it.

Will McCombs commented that they have a minimum square footage they have to meet, but they chose how to achieve that.

Ms. Grage stated that the concern was developers providing non-functional open spaces.

Will McCombs asked for clarification on the open space requirement in regard to the proximity to an existing park.

Libby Grage said the thought was that if there is an existing park, the residents have access to that. This would reduce the total amount of required open space which could add additional dwelling units. It's likely that if they live next to a park, they will use the park instead of the onsite open spaces.

Will McCombs moved on to roof decks. He expressed his preference for 50% for a shared roof deck. If the only open space is on the roof, it may not be usable for all residents.

Linda Martin summarized that the HAP recommendations in 2.5.4 are fine by the Planning Commission.

She moved on to the chart on page 32 of 39. She wonders why permanent supported housing doesn't have regulations for open space.

Libby Grage clarified that staff is working on those regulations. Staff will be bringing that back as we are still going through the new guidance from Commerce for this type of housing.

Commissioner Martin moved on to 2.5.5.

Will McCombs and Paul Ryan said they are okay with the language in the HAP recommendation.

Mr. McCombs moved on to 2.5.6. On page 39 of 39, the recommendation is to reduce the minimum planting area widths to allow for more efficient use of land. He said he hates to give away landscaping. He recommends maintaining as it currently is.

Linda Martin agreed to the proposed changes in 2.5.6a, but wants to keep 2.5.6b at 10 feet.

Libby Grage clarified that type c landscaping requires 10 ft width. There have been many requests to reduce

this because it is measured from the property line. Anacortes has wide ROW's. Requiring the full 10 feet eats into the developable area. There is the potential to use the ROW for some of the landscaping.

Paul Ryan asked if language should be added; such as, "to include ROW".

Ms. Grage pointed out the ROW depth can vary, so there may be some need for flexibility.

Linda Martin asked staff to bring back additional language.

Libby Grage gave the example of a project on an alley, where the parking is off the alley. As the code is currently, they would need a 10-foot landscaping strip on both sides. That reduces the available parking by 20 feet. There are alternatives; such as a fence, that could achieve the same purpose in less space. The recommendation is to reduce it to 5 feet on each side.

Will McCombs said that's understandable, but he is hesitant to pave everything. If we reduce all our standards and setbacks, we will have all pavement. He would like to maintain some of that landscaping area.

Libby Grage clarified that the intent is to provide screening and buffering of the parking to the neighboring properties. If that can be achieved in other ways, we would like that flexibility.

Frank Jeretzky commented that 5 feet limits the type of screening that can be planted.

Linda Martin said the Planning Commission is okay with the HAP recommendation in 2.5.6a, but they would prefer to leave 2.5.6b as is.

Mike Mills suggested changing it to 7.5 feet. This could encourage development and would be consistent.

Commissioner Martin said the Planning Commission is okay with 2.5.6b changing to 7.5 feet.

Paul Ryan and Will McCombs moved on to 2.5.7. This cleans up the service areas to make them look better while still allowing access. We are okay with the HAP recommendation. They moved on to 2.5.8.

Will McCombs pointed out that most of these are aesthetic to make the block look consistent. Awnings can make walkability better. This should encourage people to come downtown.

Paul Ryan referenced 2.5.10, suggesting changing prohibited to not permissible.

Mr. McCombs said the change to the design standards was to remove perforated metal screening, but there are some good applications of that material. He recommended the Commissioners review this again.

Linda Martin clarified that the Planning Commission is okay with the changes in 2.5.8; 2.5.9 and 2.5.10. She reminded Commissioners Currier and Mills that their section of the HAP review will be at the next meeting.

Planning Commission Rules of Procedure discussion

Linda Martin stated this was added to the agenda to determine if we wanted to add 35a to our charter. Since not all of the Planning Commission members are here, this will be carried over to the next meeting.

Planning Department Update

No update provided by staff.

Will McCombs commented that he attended the planning committee meeting of City Council. They discussed transportation and the Anacortes Family Center housing. It was good to see their process.

Adjournment

Linda Martin adjourned the meeting at 8:43 p.m.