

## **Anacortes Planning Commission Minutes - May 14, 2025**

### **Roll Call**

Chairperson Linda Martin called to order the Anacortes Planning Commission meeting of May 14, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. Commissioners Jim Stoneman, William McCombs, Luke Currier, and Mike Mills were present. Commissioners Paul Ryan and Frank Jeretzky were absent. Jim Stoneman moved to excuse the absences of Mr. Ryan and Mr. Jeretzky. Will McCombs seconded. All ayes.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

### **Minutes**

#### **Minutes of November 13, 2024 are Submitted for Approval**

Mike Mills moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Jim Stoneman seconded. All ayes.

### **Public Comment**

No public comment taken.

### **Public Hearings**

### **Other Business**

#### **2025 Comprehensive Plan Update - Draft Amendments to the Economic Development Element Goals & Policies - Introduction**

John Coleman introduced Andrew Oliver from Leland Consulting. In November of last year we put out an Economic Development survey. The results have been reviewed. We have a creative economy in Anacortes. Earlier today we published minor updates to support the creative economy goals and policies.

Andrew Oliver said we used the draft survey results to update the goals and policies. We also tried to consolidate the current goals and policies to make them more actionable. For example, goal #5 was a "grab bag" of policies. We took that goal out and reorganized the content into other areas. Several things in goal #1 are proposed to remain. We tried to provide specificity by adding the Creative District, incubator spaces, etc. We also tried to align some of these goals and policies with other Comprehensive Plan goals and policies.

Linda Martin asked if ED 1.9 was removed.

Andrew Oliver clarified the strike-through for that item needs to be removed. This has been re-written to provide clarity and focused more on the Creative District.

Jim Stoneman asked if the Anacortes Creative District is a new organization.

John Coleman said it is. He reviewed how it came to be. The Creative District is encouraging art in the community. The City wants to support that with goals and policies. The District area is mostly within the CBD but also goes to Causland Park and the Depot.

Linda Martin asked staff to describe what "provide incubator space for micro-enterprise" means in ED 1.6.

John Coleman clarified that we are a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) community. We typically support community services with that funding. It's mostly project-based funding, but the funds can also be used to create jobs, micro-enterprises (small start-up companies), etc. That's why it is referenced in the Comprehensive Plan.

Andrew Oliver reviewed other proposed changes to the goals and policies. At the end of goal 1, there are 3 new policies proposed: 1) coordination, 2) attract knowledge-based enterprises, and 3) support expansion of local medical care facilities as sources of jobs and income. These 3 came from other sections and fit better in this area. In ED 2 several policies were consolidated into the first policy. We recommend removing "consider implementing limits on non-retail uses in the CBD" because there are a variety of uses currently in the CBD. In ED 2.13, we are suggesting changing the parking policy to more align with the climate element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Will McCombs pointed out that there are a few policies using "consider" as the goal. He would prefer better language that encourages us to do something instead of considering.

Linda Martin wondered how ED 2.5 aligns with the short-term rental (STR) ban.

John Coleman clarified that we want to encourage hotels in the CBD. This is consistent with the development regulations.

Linda Martin asked how ED 2.6 affects the planned event center.

Andrew Oliver stated this was not removed; rather it was moved to another policy. He moved on to goal 3 which had only minor edits; such as, adding "art associations" to promote the Creative District.

Will McCombs asked if this can be more direct in the language. He suggested saying "create and fund a city culture and tourism office".

Andrew Oliver agreed. He reviewed ED 3.10.

John Coleman said that currently we don't have the funding or plans to create this. Leaving the language less specific shows this is important, but doesn't require us to do it. This gives us future options.

Mike Mills said he agrees with Commissioner McCombs that the language is too wishy-washy. He is also concerned about being too specific because we don't have a mechanism to prioritize these.

Andrew Oliver suggested replacing consider with encourage or explore. He moved on to ED 3.4.

Will McCombs commented that regarding tourism, Anacortes doesn't have a unique attraction. There are several things to see and do, but not "one thing" to attract visitors to Anacortes. If we want to make Anacortes a tourist destination, we need to determine what that would be.

Linda Martin said we have Washington Park and Cap Sante viewpoint.

Will McCombs felt that there are things Anacortes could do to draw more visitors and make it a destination.

Jim Stoneman stated that some of those are called out in ED 3.10.

Will McCombs said he likes the language in ED 3.10, but it could be more detailed to help create a unique destination for Anacortes.

John Coleman suggested adding a "key or focal point of attraction that would encourage visitors to Anacortes on it's own merits".

Several Commissioners agreed.

Andrew Oliver moved on to the addition to goal 3, ED 3.14, which brings in greenhouse gas (GHG) emission language. He moved on to goal 4 stating there are very few changes here.

Mike Mills said he wants to talk about who's responsible for what when it comes to the refineries at March's Point between the County and City.

John Coleman clarified that March's Point is part of the Urban Growth Area under the County's jurisdiction. In the zoning for that area, it says that the County is to follow the City's development standards for that area. The County will contact City staff to review the proposals.

Andrew Oliver moved on to goal 5, stating these were consolidated in other sections or removed.

Clarification language was added to ED 6.2.

Will McCombs said this is a great opportunity. We can call out specifically for culinary and hospitality fields. We can partner with Skagit Valley College programs to have world-class restaurants & hotels.

Andrew Oliver stated that can be added to ED 6.3 or 6.4.

Will McCombs referenced incubator spaces for micro-enterprise. He asked if those are often collaborative with colleges and universities.

John Coleman said not necessarily, especially since this is CDBG funding. This could be for someone starting a business in their home, but end up needing more space. They could rent the space for a specific timeframe to grow their business. We often hear about a need for a small commercial kitchen available for specific periods of time.

Luke Currier pointed out that NW Career and Technical Academy has a commercial kitchen program in Mt Vernon. He suggested adding that here.

Andrew Oliver moved on to goals 7 and 8. In ED 8.2, language was added regarding GHG emissions from the climate element.

Mike Mills commented that we have lots of money invested in the fiber optic network. He suggested using

that as a tool to attract businesses.

Andrew Oliver will incorporate that.

John Coleman said next steps include the consultants making changes from tonight's comments. The updated document will come back at the next meeting.

Linda Martin asked where the "community vision" statement can be found.

John Coleman clarified it is its own section of the Comprehensive Plan in the introduction.

Libby Grage read the community vision statement.

### **2025 Comprehensive Plan Update - Draft Amendments to the Parks, Recreation & Open Space Element Goals and Policies - Introduction**

Jon Lunsford reviewed PR 1 goal. Some of these were broadened to include specific areas. A new policy was added for civic spaces and public gathering spaces. There's another new policy to support arts and culture. PR 1.8 was expanded to have more detail.

Linda Martin referenced PR 1.1, asking where these underserved locations and communities are located.

Jon Lunsford pointed out that the R Ave and Q Ave corridors didn't have good opportunities for access to parks. We looked at places to expand for people to walk to and enjoy.

Will McCombs commented that the mission of Parks & Recreation includes mostly outdoor facilities. He wonders how we can establish a solution for a community recreation center that includes a pool.

Jon Lunsford clarified that we looked at that idea years ago and deemed it was not feasible. We are now looking at areas for a recreation center.

Will McCombs said the community is lacking a place for kids to go in inclement weather.

Jon Lunsford agreed. It could be used by a variety of age groups, including senior citizens.

Will McCombs said he would love to emphasize that in the plan.

Luke Currier stated that it would be privately funded and built, then gifted to the City and the Parks department would run it.

Mike Mills referenced PR 1.5, regarding non-motorized transportation. He asked how Parks defines this.

Jon Lunsford clarified it is for anything human-powered. For people that need something motorized in order to access the facility or park, that would be allowed outright. There are speed limits on the trails. We only allow class 1 on our trails and parks. Anything with a throttle (class 2 & 3) would be considered motorized.

Mike Mills asked if that is based on speed.

Bob Vaux commented that during the e-bike discussion, we decided to stay consistent with the state policies and chose class 1. Speed was a topic of discussion. We understand that many people advocated for e-bikes, but there were also people opposed to them. This is continuing to evolve, and we will stay on top of that.

Jon Lunsford moved on to goal 2 regarding shoreline access. Much of this section was retained. He moved on to goal 3, Parks program management. We currently run in a frugal manner to keep things affordable for the community members. We added some clarification to these policies. We also added a new policy to add a park ranger. Currently, we rely heavily on the police and fire when issues arise on public lands.

Linda Martin referenced PR 3.11. The changes seem to have changed the intent of the goal. She recommends putting maintenance back in.

Jon Lunsford said that can be added back in. In PR 4.3, Ship Harbor has changed over the years. We are adding the Samish Indian Nation to be mindful of the cultural sensitivity of the site. He moved on to goal 5, stating that some of these were moved to other sections, such as 3.11.

Jim Stoneman expressed concern that this goal got lost in consolidating.

Jon Lunsford said we will work on section 3 to retain some of the information from section 5. He moved on to goal 6, funding. We are updating our impact fees to be in line with state law. The impact fees fund the facilities, but not the people to maintain the facilities. We have wonderful community partners that volunteer to help upkeep many of our public areas.

Linda Martin wondered if PR 6.6 should remain.

Jon Lunsford clarified that it was consolidated with PR 6.7.

Will McCombs asked if this was included in the ordinance. It seems redundant to include it here.

Jon Lunsford agreed. We updated the impact fees to include commercial, multi-family and single-family. Most of goal 7 regarding stewardship is being retained. He moved on to goal 8, forestland management. There are some suggested new policies; including adding habitat of local importance and SOP's for maintenance. The citizen science groups are doing some of PR 8.7 already.

Linda Martin asked if the Parks Plan is being incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan.

Jon Lunsford agreed and clarified that the forestland management plan will not be added to the Comprehensive Plan.

Libby Grage clarified that the Parks and Recreation element is mandatory under GMA, which is why we are migrating the stand-alone Parks Plan into the Comprehensive Plan.

Linda Martin asked if the forestland ACFL plan is a stand-alone document also.

Libby Grage stated that the ACFL is not part of the Comprehensive Plan which is why the forestland plan is not included.

Linda Martin referenced the last sentence in PR 8.7. She feels this is more of a procedure, not a goal or policy.

Will McCombs circled back to the separate document for the ACFL. He wonders why forestland management is included in the Parks & Recreation element. He asked if there is overlap from this section to the other document.

Jon Lunsford pointed out that Parks is one department that manages many things. We include the forestland because we manage it. The policies and procedures to manage the forestland is in that other element. We take what's applicable and use that. He moved on to goal 9, the open space connectivity, which was reworked for consistency with state regulations.

Mike Mills stated that in PR 9.2, US bike route 10 could be an asset for Anacortes as a connectivity opportunity to the surrounding communities.

Jon Lunsford moved on to the new goals, including the senior center. This topic just went before City Council, so there may be more updates. This could include faith-based organizations, veterans groups, etc.

Will McCombs commented this is one of the things that raises the quality of life in Anacortes.

### **2025 Comprehensive Plan Update - Climate Element and Environment & Conservation Element Goals & Policies - Continued Discussion**

Linda Martin said at the last meeting, there was not much time to review the comments from the community. There are 96 comments online currently. There is at least one goal in the climate section we need to look at again. One of the recurring themes in the comments from the community had to do with the refineries and why the refineries weren't included in the GHG emission inventory. She understands that this is part of the UGA. She contacted the Department of Commerce regarding the impact the emissions from the refineries have on our community. The Department of Commerce confirmed that the city is doing exactly what they should in not including it. Another topic is lithium battery storage (BESS). She looked into that as well. Sedro-Woolley City Council took a formal vote stating they are not in favor of these in the City of Sedro-Woolley. Battery storage is mentioned in several places, so she recommends the Planning Commission look at those tonight and converse.

Mike Mills clarified that his concern regarding the refineries was to ensure that the County is adequately handling the planning for that area.

Linda Martin stated that Commerce said the City can provide input to the County regarding the refineries.

John Coleman pointed out that the County did a GHG emission inventory which included the refineries. The County's Comprehensive Plan is out for public review.

Linda Martin said the County's plan has lots of resilient goals, but not many GHG goals. She moved on to battery issue in CE 6. She recommends striking-out "storage" instead of "including generation, transmission and storage".

Jim Stoneman said the concerns raised are valid. He commented that in this policy (CE 6), the changes were just removing examples.

Linda Martin expressed concern that if we strike them all, we are by omission including storage.

Mike Mills asked how we reconcile the battery storage concerns with our goals to go all electric.

Will McCombs commented that no one wants BESS, but if we are going all electric we have to build a system to support that. It's not realistic to put a moratorium on this. They need to be planned well.

Luke Currier stated that BESS is a complex issue and we have to consider all the sides.

Linda Martin said the issue is in the "if's". If we are going all electric, do we lose our agency to choose or not.

Jim Stoneman asked if they need to be in the city limits.

Libby Grage pointed out there may be appropriate areas in the city limits for these. The specifics of these storage facilities could be handled via the development regulations.

John Coleman said in reviewing the County Comprehensive Plan update regarding battery storage, goal 12b policy 1.4 talks about balancing the need for energy efficiency for increased electrification along with the need for storage facilities. This suggests we identify and carefully examine potential locations.

Jim Stoneman wondered if the language should be reworked to make it clear that we are not promoting battery storage in Anacortes.

Linda Martin said the consultants made the differentiation between small versus large facilities.

John Coleman agreed that we are going to need to address the appropriate scale, but that can be done in code. We should be purposeful in where these are allowed.

Linda Martin wondered how to handle the citizen concerns.

Will McCombs said if the goal is zero GHG emissions, we need to have a resilient power grid. He suggested an overarching goal that calls out the minimum requirements.

Mike Mills agreed that battery storage will be necessary to achieve the goal of zero GHG emissions, so we need to manage this as best we can.

John Coleman circled back to the refineries and read County policy 9a 5.5. They are supporting the transition at March's Point, but not stopping the current operations. Transitioning to low-carbon systems is in the policy.

Jim Stoneman said he likes the language in CE 8. He wonders if we could include some of the language from the County policy 12b 1.4. The goal currently feels like battery storage is our goal, not the goal of renewable energy.

Libby Grage suggested updating the language to be similar to "as well as planning for small-scale renewable energy and incorporating appropriately scaled sites for battery storage".

Will McCombs felt that there was good language suggested in one of the public comments.

Linda Martin said she likes the more neutral-sounding language from the County and cleaning up the verbiage in CE 8.

Will McCombs referenced CE 8.3 stating it's not clear if this is small-scale storage or industrial.

John Coleman said it was written to not be specific. The direction from the Commission tonight is to consider them and find a way to regulate it in a way that makes sense for Anacortes; such as, "identify areas that are appropriate for renewable energy". We want to support energy resilience by carefully considering locations for battery storage.

Linda Martin stated that CE 8.2 sounds like it will happen in the City and that Anacortes is going to be a leader.

John Coleman suggested changing it to explore opportunities in a manner that is appropriate.

Luke Currier said he read CE 8.2 a little differently. It sounds like collection of energy generated on site. Battery infrastructure needs to be clarified.

Linda Martin provided a list of sections that the Commissioners would like to review again. She moved on to CE 6.1 stating that the beginning is fine, but sections (a), (b) and (c) seem like the action plan rather than the goal. She suggested removing those.

Libby Grage clarified that section (a) came from PSE to help them plan for development.

Linda Martin moved on to CE 6.2, recommending removing all but the last sentence.

John Coleman pointed out that was a recommendation from the climate team.

Luke Currier said he's fine with that change.

Linda Martin commented that there could be unintended consequences in CE 7.1 regarding incentives. She

expressed concern that this could increase costs.

Mike Mills stated this commits the City to offer incentives.

Linda Martin asked if this increases the cost of the building, which would then be passed on to the consumers. We want energy-efficient buildings, but not at the expense of the tenants.

Will McCombs referenced CE 8 wondering if there are any geothermal examples in Anacortes.

Libby Grage pointed out that a building on the waterfront uses geothermal energy.

John Coleman said this is specific to collecting hot water and/or gases from underground that is then used to heat the building or water.

Will McCombs suggested removing geothermal if we don't have them. He asked what CE 10.5 has to do with school buses.

Luke Currier pointed out this is encouraging families to use school buses, instead of driving.

Linda Martin recommended that the school district look at the redundancies in their plan.

Mike Mills circled back to the geothermal topic. He recommended leaving it in if it includes man-made geothermal examples.

John Coleman said we could include heating and cooling techniques as the example. He asked the Planning Commission if they would like to review this again or if staff can make the changes and incorporate in the updated draft Comprehensive Plan.

The Commissioners said they are okay with staff making the changes.

### **Planning Department Update**

John Coleman said the next meeting will be a public hearing for the Economic Development and Parks & Recreation elements. After that, staff and the consultants will make updates and create the updated draft Comprehensive Plan. We hope to have the public hearing in late-June or early-July. There will also be a public hearing for a Shoreline Substantial Development Permit (SDP) next month. Lastly, City Council approved the contract for a consultant to review the current best available science for the critical areas ordinance update.

### **Adjournment**

Chairperson Martin adjourned the meeting at 8:55 p.m.