

Anacortes Planning Commission Minutes - September 11, 2024

Roll Call

Chairperson Linda Martin called to order the Anacortes Planning Commission meeting of September 11, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. Commissioners Jim Stoneman, Frank Jeretzky, Paul Ryan, Luke Currier, and Mike Mills were present.

Commissioner William McCombs attended the meeting via Zoom.

Minutes

There were no minutes submitted for approval.

Public Comment

Bill Turner, 2012 I Ave, Anacortes, referred to page 6 of the Housing Action Plan (HAP) regarding priority levels and timelines. He reviewed the goals from the HAP that were supposed to have already happened. Hiring a Housing Coordinator was another item that is past due. He feels we need to hire this person so that citizens have someone to talk to and provide information. All of these items are past their due date. He would like to see some action. He recommends looking at neighborhoods or zoning areas one at a time and gathering public input.

Ian Munce, 1711 Quail Dr, Anacortes, thanked staff for getting the packet out earlier. The Planning Department has been ridiculously underfunded for years. They don't have the resources they deserve. This is not a criticism of staff, but of city leadership underfunding exercises and still expecting an outcome. The HAP is a great example. We love it, but there's no real action. In the 1990's Anacortes decided it wanted to continue to be a small community. We need to focus on that. We also need to focus on neighborhood character and not change those. The idea of densifying the city is not what people want. He suggests staff meet with HOA's, stakeholders, neighbors, etc to determine what they want and bring that information back to the Planning Commission.

Public Hearings

Other Business

2025 Comprehensive Plan Update: Land Use and Housing Regulatory Concepts presentation and discussion

Libby Grage reviewed the Comprehensive Plan timeline and stated we are in the "shaping the plan" phase. This includes information gathering and analyzing that information. Staff is also working on the land use analysis. There will be Planning Commission worksessions on all the elements individually. The state's deadline for completing the Comprehensive Plan update is December 31, 2025. She reviewed the next steps, including releasing the draft policy revisions for each element separately. Once those are released, we will make sure that the public is notified and given time to provide comment. Then, in spring 2025, staff anticipates releasing the draft of the integrated plan. The Planning Commission will review that. Then, in summer/fall 2025 there will be public hearings and recommendations to City Council. As policy revisions are released, they will be in a spreadsheet or table with the current policies, then the proposed amendments, and lastly a description of the reason for the proposed changes. She reviewed the Planning Commission upcoming meeting dates and topics.

Jim Stoneman asked if the Commissioners ever review the submitted comments during the meeting.

Ms. Grage stated that has been done in the past. We chose to summarize them and provide recommendations. Since this is an ongoing process, we receive comments all the time, so that would be a difficult process.

Markus Johnson (Makers) pointed out that tonight's discussion is the remaining Housing Action Plan (HAP) recommendations and strategies. HAP 2.4.2 recommends updating maximum lot coverage in R4 and R4A zones. We are not suggesting changing the minimum landscape area, but proposing changing the lot coverage. This can be impactful for smaller sites. The proposal is to increase lot coverage to 60% for R4 and R4A. Regarding HAP 2.4.4, updating density standards, there is currently no minimum density standard in the zoning code. The proposed update is to dissuade under-building in this zone. This would not apply to all of R4 and R4A; rather it would apply to lots that have 12000-15000 sq feet. Most lots in this area are 6000-7500 sq ft so the proposal is in essence for 2 lots combined. HAP 2.4.4 also looks at updating maximum density in all residential zones. The current maximum densities prevent middle housing developments. The next strategy, HAP 2.4.5, is updating setbacks, which looks mainly the street setback for R2A and R3 and recommends reducing to 15 feet instead of the 20 feet currently. This smaller setback compliments the middle housing types while still providing usable open space and landscaping. Garages would still be set back at 20 feet. Also, in HAP 2.4.5 is the interior side upper-floor setbacks. Due to construction methods and construction costs, developers do not want the step back. The intention is to clarify & simplify this aspect of the code. The proposal is to remove the upper floor side setbacks in R3, R4, & R4A zones. The height bonus program in HAP 2.4.6 currently allows for a height bonus in R4, CBD and C zones if they meet the conditions. The proposal is to increase the small unit size to 650sf, which increases livability. They also recommend considering other criteria that the height bonus could apply to, such as day care, senior housing, etc. He moved on to HAP 2.4.7 for elevator penthouse. The proposal is to increase from 15 to 17 feet so that new developments can provide shared roof access while also having space for the elevator.

Mr. Johnson reviewed RCW 35A.63.300 for density bonuses for religious organizations if affordable housing for low income households is being developed. Due to societal changes, religious organizations are looking at re-purposing their spaces. The proposal is to set the density bonus standards based on zoning areas so that if they decide to develop affordable housing there are bonus opportunities. He reviewed the zoning areas and possible changes. The intent is to make it easier to develop affordable housing for these religious organizations. For example, religious space on the ground floor and housing above. HAP strategy 2.5.1 recommends amending the definition of family to comply with state law. The intent of HAP recommendation 2.5.2 for design standards of town-homes is to clarify what can and can't be done. Then HAP 2.5.3 clarifies that multifamily (MF) and town-home developments are subject to the landscape block frontage provisions. The recommendations in HAP 2.5.4 fine tunes the usable open space for residential development. Also in HAP 2.5.4, regarding shared open space on roof decks, they provided 3 options to choose from: (1) keep language the same, (2) allow them to count for up to 50% of required space for all developments with MF uses or (3) use current language and allow MF building incorporated into a horizontal mixed use development to also count shared roof decks as 100% of required open space. The commissioners will have to determine which to bring forward. HAP 2.5.5 is more fine-tuning for open space for town homes. The recommendation in HAP 2.5.6 for landscaping design standards is to allow for more efficient use of land with a reduction of 2.5 feet to the minimum planting widths. Then HAP strategy 2.5.7 clarifies the applicability of service areas by adjusting design standards. There are minor revisions suggested in HAP 2.5.8 for the articulation standards. HAP 2.5.9 suggests updating the building material standards. The recommendations in HAP 2.5.10 include new language to ensure that there are no new blank walls.

Markus Johnson moved on to HAP 2.6.1, the parking standards. The recommendations are to provide more certainty and clarity. One recommendation is to have a new standard for middle housing, such as moving away from bedroom counts to a fixed amount. These changes would make development of middle housing, affordable housing and senior housing easier and in line with other communities in Washington state. They recommend a fee-in-lieu payment for retail uses in a mixed-use building in any location. For guest parking, currently only the CBD waives guest parking requirements. They recommend extending that to R4, C and MMU zones. Another option is to remove the guest parking requirement all together. Lastly, HAP 4.3.2 recommends reexamining the purpose, priorities and development regulations for the R1 zone. This zone has benefits regarding open space and wildlife corridors that may need to be considered. Minor zoning changes in this area would help to create a few more developable lots. Tax Increment Financing could be a tool to

help finance the infrastructure needed as development happens.

Public Comment Opened

Ian Munce recommends neighborhood input for these. One size will not fit all. This may be your last chance to provide input for infill in your neighborhoods. People will be up in arms once these start to be developed. Cottage developments are not currently permitted in R1 and may not be well received by neighbors. He reminded the Commissioners that the topography and critical areas in R1 will hinder development. Bill Turner reiterated the City needs to hire a housing coordinator! He listed organizations this person could meet with and provide information. He's concerned that there has not been enough input from citizens.

Public Comment Closed

Commissioner Discussion

Paul Ryan said that limiting parking and increasing density don't go together. The convenience of transit is not the same in our community as in other surrounding communities. He expressed concern at limiting parking to 0.5 for MF housing because those individuals may need 1-2 vehicles to travel to work outside our community as we don't have a wide range of employment opportunities across all income levels.

Mike Mills pointed out that in the first few slides, we talked about lot coverage and setbacks, which usually result in larger and more expensive housing units. This is counter to the objective of encouraging lower cost housing. The only way to make that work is to increase the minimum number of housing units.

Markus Johnson clarified that the lot coverage conversation was for the R4 zone. The proposed change allows for more units to be built on the lot which in turn lowers the rent and provides more housing. In relation to setbacks, those were for the R2A and R3 medium density zones. The suggestions looked at providing more flexibility on the lot for duplexes and triplexes.

John Coleman understands the concerns that the proposed changes to lot coverage and setbacks would encourage larger single family residences if they choose not to develop as MF. The intent is to make duplexes and triplexes easier to develop if there is enough space on the parcel.

Mike Mills commented that larger housing units result in higher priced units. He wants to ensure a minimum number of housing units to avoid the larger SFR.

Mr. Coleman said that is not in this section. We want to encourage development to a specific density where possible. He's not sure if the city can require a minimum density of 2 units for this area. He suggested language to clarify that these development standards apply when more than one dwelling unit is proposed.

Frank Jeretzky referenced page 7 asking why this is 60% instead of 55% lot coverage.

Markus Johnson commented that in those zones, you normally see 6 units. We expect a higher number of units in the R4 zones. Sixty percent lot coverage is high for middle housing, but works for Anacortes in R4 zones.

Commissioner Jeretzky moved on to page 9 referencing the 32nd & R building. There's no parking allowed on R Ave and 32nd has commercial developments, there's no onsite parking, no parking provided for guests. He recommended that the Commissioners consider the impact on the neighborhood for the excess parking above the one vehicle the tenants are allowed to have. He moved on to page 12, asking how the 15 foot setback is measured. He pointed out that the front steps will encroach into that setback.

John Coleman clarified that the steps can be in the setback, unless they are covered. If the Commission recommends decreasing the front setback, you may want to include something about parking in the front because 15 feet is not long enough for most vehicles. Garages may need to be set back further or be backloaded.

Frank Jeretzky referenced page 32. He's trying to understand how affordable housing requires a 1/2 parking space, but senior housing requires one spot. This is not what is really happening in town. He expressed concern that 1/2 is too low, especially taking into account the overflow that happens in the street.

Luke Currier asked for examples of successes from other communities of religious organizations that are involved in affordable housing.

Mr. Johnson said in the Central District of Seattle, there's a group that encourages religious organizations to

have representation on the ground level and affordable housing above. Some organizations use that ground floor space for community activities as well.

Frank Jeretzky pointed out that the Lutheran Church on LaVenture has senior housing. That is a great development.

Markus Johnson reminded the Planning Commissioners that they can hold off on this recommendation.

John Coleman said the recommendation in R4 is 65 ft maximum height. Currently, the maximum height is 50 feet, and there was pushback on that. He asked Markus if there is a requirement for this increase.

Mr. Johnson said there is not. There are other forms of bonuses that can take place. He recommends making sure that the bonuses are "real bonuses" and not too close to the current zoning.

Paul Ryan asked if the city can have other codes that restrict occupancy based on room size. He pointed out that you cannot have 3 people in a 70 square foot room under the property codes.

Markus Johnson agreed and said he is not sure, but will look into it.

Mike Mills asked if there is a definition for 'religiously owned property' in our code.

Mr. Johnson commented that is covered in state law. Any proposed change will comply with the State. If there isn't a definition, we can define it.

Mike Mills said the 'impervious lot coverage' bothers me. Anacortes likes its parks and forest lands.

Regarding bonuses for religious organizations, he wondered if we should give considerations if they provide parking for neighboring commercial uses. The religious organization use the parking at specific times.

Markus Johnson stated that kind of bonus could be very complex and difficult to administer. He suggested this be handled in a private agreement.

William McCombs asked if there is a definition of affordable housing.

Mr. Johnson clarified that in this context, affordable housing applies to 80% AMI for ownership units and 60% for rentals. State law usually mandates that the units remain affordable for 50 years.

William McCombs asked for a description of fee in lieu parking.

Markus Johnson said that instead of developer doing on-site parking, they will pay into a bucket to contribute to a larger parking facility or other city benefit.

William McCombs wondered if the environmental aspects were taken into consideration when determining the lot coverage recommendation.

Mr. Johnson agreed. He commented that is one reason we chose 60% lot coverage. This allows the developer to work around environmental aspects. The intent is to have landscaping capture rain water.

William McCombs asked if the HAP recommendations were going to be part of a survey.

John Coleman pointed out that the HAP was part of a survey. There were 1100 people that responded when we did that which shaped the HAP. We cannot survey everyone on these topics. We are trying to get the word out that we are discussing this. We have another open house scheduled; there will be more meetings, public hearings, etc. Staff feels that adding one more survey will not capture these individual items.

Regarding the 65 foot height limit, we understand that there are other options and requested that Makers provide those.

Linda Martin reminded us of the bigger picture: the Planning Commission is reviewing the HAP. The whole point of the HAP is to find ways to increase density and provide different housing types. Currently, 80.5% of all dwelling units are SFR's. Based on the allocation from Commerce, the change is to move towards 65% for SFR's. Approximately 5000 people are projected to come and we want to plan for those people. There is a need for middle housing and we need to determine how to make that happen while still maintaining the feel of Anacortes. She recommends considering all of the proposals, and become experts in each section. She passed out a chart to the commissioners, stating it would be helpful to have recommendations from the planning staff and then the Commissioners can make recommendations. Makers has already provided some great language that we could draw from.

Paul Ryan stated he likes how this is broken down into sections.

Linda Martin commented that doing it this way allows the Planning Commission to forward our recommendation to City Council.

Mike Mills agreed that breaking these into digestible chunks makes sense. He recommends being mindful of

how many Commission members will review each topic.
The Commissioners divided up the sections.

Planning Department Update

John Coleman said that hopefully in October or early November there will be a survey for guiding the Economic Development Strategic Plan. We are working with WWU consultants who are putting the survey together. We hope to have it out for review for 3 weeks. After that we will schedule some listening sessions where citizens can provide feedback. This will inform the Economic Development element of the Comprehensive Plan update. Regarding the Housing Coordinator, we already have one. This is a part-time position.

Linda Martin reminded everyone that the Department of Commerce offers a short course on local planning. It's online, 2.5 hours on September 26th and it's free.

Adjournment

Linda Martin adjourned the meeting at 8:10 p.m.