



City of Othello
Planning Commission Meeting
November 18, 2024
Zuleica Morfin

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Chris Dorow called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Chair Chris Dorow, Alma Carmona, Brian Gentry, Ruth Sawyer, Daniela Voorhies

Absent: Kevin Gilbert, Maria Martinez

Staff: Community Development Director Anne Henning, Building and Planning Secretary Zuleica Morfin

Attendees: Bob Carlson, Jose Garza

PUBLIC INPUT

None

MINUTES APPROVAL

September 16, 2024, minutes approved M/S Ruth Sawyer/Alma Carmona

HIGHWAY 26 TRAIL/LINEAR PARK - DISCUSSION & INPUT

In 2023, the City of Othello was invited by the Washington State Department of Transportation to apply for funds to address impacts caused by highways. The project we proposed and that was funded was to build a trail/linear park on city-owned property north of Highway 26, to provide a safer location for people who walk along the highway. The hope is that the second phase of this trail will extend from 14th Avenue to 7th Avenue, and eventually even further. It would be connected to Sagestone Street through the existing connectors on each end.

Commissioners discussed ideas of what they would like the trail/linear park north of Highway 26 to look like. Chair Chris Dorow said he would like to see trees as he has heard people say they really enjoy walking at Kiwanis Park in the day because of all the trees and the shade they give. He mentioned this idea has come up multiple times on surveys. The trail property is within an irrigation easement. Ms. Henning told Commissioners that city grant writer Sarah Montemayor was trying to open communication with the Irrigation District on whether trees could be allowed and what trees would be ok to plant. Commissioner Brian Gentry asked if their vision was a long skinny tree park. Commissioner Ruth Sawyer would rather see it in somewhat of its original state rather than creating it into something else, so more native shrub-steppe with indigenous plants. Commissioner Alma Carmona suggested there be a drinking fountain if they were thinking of ways to cool down that area. Commissioner Brian Gentry asked if there might be a fence between the trail and the highway because he wouldn't want kids running out onto the highway. Ms. Henning asked about having a sign that showed the distance for the loop of the trail and Sagestone Street. Another idea from Commissioner Alma Carmona was that she thought misters would make it cooler.

ZONING UPDATE - OMC 17.61, 9.33, 17.56.050 & 055 - OFF STREET PARKING AND RV PARKING - DISCUSSION

The Planning Commission last extensively reviewed the Off-Street Parking requirements in 2018, and updated one section in 2020 (allowing garage conversions for houses built before the garage requirement, and allowing a maximum of 4 rather than 3 spaces in a front yard). At the September 2024 meeting, local resident Rob Simmons explained that he recently proposed a triplex, and the requirement for 8' setback for parking spaces accessed from an alley caused him problems in the design of his building. The Planning Commission decided to review the Off-Street Parking chapter. During review by Planning and Code Enforcement staff, parking and storage of RVs and other vehicles was identified as a related issue that also needs to be addressed.

Ms. Henning provided site plans for the Commissioners to see how the 8' alley setback had an effect. The projects most affected were triplexes. She also showed some that were built before that 8' setback was required. Chair Chris Dorow said that when Rob Simmons raised the question of why there needed to be such a big setback from the alley it made him think the same. Ms. Henning said she felt like the more space that they required the more likely it was that someone would try to squeeze another car in. Originally the idea of 8' setback stemmed from the concern that a garbage truck wouldn't be able to fit through the alley if it was less than that. Chair Chris Dorow pitched the idea of a 2' setback from the alley. Commissioner Alma Carmona felt like 2' was too big of a jump for her especially if someone had a tow hitch with a cooler platform. She was ok with going halfway down to 4' but 2' was way too close for her. Commissioner Brian Gentry asked Bob Carlson what his thoughts were about this. Mr. Carlson said that he liked what Ms. Henning had suggested in the packet of 3'. After much discussion, Commissioners came to an agreement that 3' was fine.

Commissioners went on to discuss the requirements for restaurant parking, which currently requires 1 parking space for every 100 square feet of building area. Ms. Henning feels this requirement might be too much. She suggested they could be considered the same as retail business, with a sliding scale of more spaces per square foot for smaller buildings. The staff report provided a chart showing actual parking spaces, existing code requirement, and what would be required using the retail calculation for existing restaurants. Bob Carlson said using retail standards wouldn't be enough parking and he didn't think the code should put responsibility on the neighboring businesses for parking. He suggested they not decrease too much. Chair Chris Dorow said that with looking at Cow Path, Casa Mexicana, and McDonald's if they changed it to retail standards, there would not be enough. Commissioner Alma Carmona asked if there was some sort of format that could be used based on occupancy. Chair Chris Dorow suggested they adjust the sliding scale, so it is more like the retail scale but somewhat different. Ms. Henning suggested it could be based on the customer area.

Jose Garza brought up how the movie theater has unused parking and Skill Source next door cannot use the parking because it belongs to the movie theater. Commissioner Brian Gentry said that over at his building (REMAX), they do not have sufficient parking, and they borrow parking space from the neighboring business. Chair Chris Dorow said he liked the idea of 7 parking spaces for every 1,000 square feet for small businesses because it adds parking and makes it reasonable. He didn't want to discourage business by requiring too much parking. Commissioner Gentry liked 7.5 parking spaces for every 1,000 square feet as it gave a little more flexibility. Commissioners all agreed on 7.5 parking spaces for every 1,000 square feet for now.

Ms. Henning brought up the possibility of reducing parking required for small dwelling units, like 1-bedroom and studio apartments. She mentioned 625 Lilac, which has a single-car garage that was

converted into a small apartment. She asked the Commissioners if there needs to be 2 parking spaces for that apartment in addition to the 2 spaces for the house. Currently the requirement is 2 parking spaces per unit. Commissioner Brian Gentry said he had no problem with making more parking in front of this home.

Commissioners discussed the RV parking and storage proposals. The draft is organized so that parking and storage on the street is in OMC 9.33, and parking/storage on private property is in OMC 17.56 (Zoning). Commissioner Gentry had a question about whether a person could have a series of 10-day RVs in front of their property, or whether the intention was to limit this to only one RV in 6 months. Commissioners agreed that the existing language requiring an in-person request at the Police Department could be deleted. Chair Chris Dorow said he had read through all the changes and liked them all.

Ms. Henning said she would bring these chapters back with all the changes discussed at the public hearing next month.

ZONING UPDATE - OMC 17.56.040 - VISION CLEARANCE AT INTERSECTIONS - DISCUSSION

If there are buildings, tall fences, or other obstructions right at an intersection, it can be difficult or impossible for drivers and pedestrians to see if there is something approaching on the other street, creating a hazard and potential for crashes. Therefore, most jurisdictions have some regulations limiting the height of obstructions at a corner. These regulations might be known as clear view triangle, sight distance regulations, or in Othello's case, vision clearance at intersections. At the May 2018 meeting, the Planning Commission looked at some examples of clear view triangle language but found them all too complicated. With this issue coming up related to RV parking and storage, staff is making another attempt at revising this section to make it easier to understand.

Ms. Henning asked Commissioners to read over the changes on 17.56.040 Vision Clearance at Intersections to see if they liked the changes. She told Commissioners that the requirements would stay the same and the only change was the verbiage so that people could understand it better, along with pictures. The change from 25' measured along the property line to 50' measured along the curb still has pretty much the same triangle at the corner, just easier to measure. Commissioners were in favor of the changes.

SUBDIVISION UPDATE - OMC TITLE 16 - UNIT LOT SUBDIVISION - INTRODUCTION & DISCUSSION

State law added in 2023 requires us to include in our short plat regulations "procedures for unit lot subdivisions allowing division of a parent lot into separately owned unit lots. Portion of the parent lot not subdivided for individual unit lots shall be owned in common by the owners of the individual lots, or by a homeowners' association comprised of the owners of the individual unit lots" (RCW 58.17.060(3)). Staff requested assistance from MRSC in understanding this issue. Planning & Policy Manager Steve Butler described it as a process that allows for the division of land into smaller, individual lots for development purposes. He said the process is especially relevant for townhome developments, because it provides opportunities for fee simple ownership of land within a zero-lot line type of development that typically does not meet minimum lot sizes. He provided links to several example codes, including Lynnwood, Poulsbo, Snohomish, and Snohomish County.

With the state law now being that unit lot subdivisions be allowed, we have to figure out how to put it into the subdivision code. Ms. Henning said since we have already been working on the subdivision code, this is a good time to add it. Commissioners approved of Ms. Henning's draft.

HOUSING ACTION PLAN STRATEGY: SMALLER HOMES ON SMALLER LOTS - DISCUSSION

In 2021, Othello adopted a Housing Action Plan that identifies strategies, actions, and policy tools to increase housing supply and affordability. Since that time, we have implemented some of the strategies but there are still many we haven't explored, and housing availability and affordability continue to be concerns. One recommendation was smaller houses on smaller lots. Commissioner Brian Gentry's concern was the traffic these tiny homes would create as he was already haunted with how the traffic on 7th Ave would be when the apartments are done. Commissioner Alma Carmona said she liked the idea of a tiny home as long as they weren't bothering the existing homes. Commissioners were ok with this being brought back in a draft and keeping 2 parking spaces as well as parking in the back if the lot happens to be narrow.

ADJOURNMENT

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:01pm. Next meeting is Monday, December 16, 2024.

Date: _____
Chris Dorow, Chair

Date: _____
Zuleica Morfin, Building and Planning Secretary