



City of Othello
Planning Commission Meeting
February 18, 2025
Zuleica Morfin

CALL TO ORDER

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

ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Chair Chris Dorow, Alma Carmona, Daniela Voorhies, Ruth Sawyer, Maria Martinez, Rob Simmons, Jose Garza

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

Attendees: Bob Carlson

INTRODUCTIONS

The newly-appointed Commissioners introduced themselves. Rob Simmons said he has been a chiropractor in Othello for the last 28 years. He mentioned he had been attending some of the meetings and he sees there is a lot coming up. Jose Garza said he was born in Othello. He is now the Director of the Othello Food Bank. He is working on efforts that build community.

Chair Chris Dorow explained that the Planning Commission operates as a kind of “think tank” for land use and development, and they provide recommendations to the City Council.

ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

Chair Chris Dorow opened nominations for Chair. Alma Carmona nominated Chris Dorow, seconded by Daniela Voorhies. There were no other nominations. Unanimous approval.

Chair Dorow opened nominations for Vice-Chair and nominated Alma Carmona, seconded by Daniela Voorhies. There were no other nominations. Unanimous approval.

MINUTES APPROVAL

December 16, 2024, minutes approved. M/S Carmona/Sawyer

Zoning Update/Housing Action Plan Strategies - OMC 17.09, 17.20, 17.56 - Definitions, Setbacks, Eave Overhang, House Width, Cottage Housing, Townhouses, Landscaping - 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. As discussed at the Dec. 19 meeting, there are some simple changes to the Zoning Code that could increase the buildable area or eliminate development barriers, to potentially create additional housing. These include: Setbacks, house width, and eave overhang. Other changes discussed that could encourage housing options are to add allowances for townhouses and for cottage cluster/bungalow court developments. Another strategy from the Housing Action Plan is to remove the multifamily landscaping requirement from the Residential chapter and allow it to be regulated by the Landscape chapter.

House Width. The Residential Zones currently require the minimum width for a primary structure to be 24', which can limit smaller homes. Staff believes the 24' width was a reaction to the state requiring cities to allow manufactured homes anywhere a single-family home was allowed, and the 24' minimum width was added to prevent location of a single-wide home in a residential zone. However, instead of a width requirement, Othello can do what most other cities do, which is to require that the home meet RCW 35.63.160 for a "designated manufactured home", which includes that it be at least two sections.

Commissioners had some concerns about deleting the width requirement but were generally in favor of the change.

Setbacks. Another area that could be a simple change would be to reduce front setbacks for all portions of the house other than the garage door (to preserve enough depth for parking spaces). This would allow more lot area to be used for living area or porches, rather than front yard.

Commissioner Ruth Sawyer said that towns with smaller front yards seem a lot cozier. She mentioned that the Palos Verdes development has smaller front yards. Chair Chris Dorow asked how the vision clearance would be addressed here. Ms. Henning explained that the vision clearance at intersections would still need to be met, so a house on a corner lot may need to be set back more than the minimum setback to meet the vision clearance standard.

Overhangs. A related simple change would be to allow eave overhang into the front setback, rather than only into the side setback as the code is currently written. Staff could not determine any reason that eave overhang isn't allowed into a front yard.

Commissioner Alama Carmona said she didn't have an issue with overhangs but if she remembered right back during Covid they discussed this issue and the Fire Chief had some concerns with it. Ms. Henning will check with the Fire Chief.

Townhouses. Townhouses are not currently specified as a permitted use, and the current requirement for a side setback prevents townhouses from being possible. The attached draft addresses both issues, by allowing attached dwellings and by specifying no side setback for attached dwellings. The packet included some examples from other cities of design standards for townhouses.

Commissioner Alma Carmona mentioned the townhouses in Tri Cities on Road 68 and how she liked the idea of having those in Othello but she felt the City Council might not like them in an R-1 or R-2 zone. Commissioner Jose Garza liked the idea of alleys for townhouses, because it would give a cleaner look and the trash cans would be in back. Commissioner Rob Simmons said with a smaller setback, it would allow the townhouses to be closer to the street and leave room for parking in the back. He felt the front setback could be reduced more to accommodate this. Commissioner Carmona said parking should be required behind the building for all townhouses, and that garages shouldn't be required. Commissioners agreed. Commissioner Rob Simmons asked Ms. Henning if she could find out what the setback was in the picture in the packet of the townhouses in Ellensburg. Chair Chris Dorow asked Ms. Henning to bring back her dream design standard to the next meeting.

Cottage Cluster/Bungalow Court. OMC 17.09 has an existing definition of "Bungalow Court", which was listed as an allowed use when the R-3 Zone was created in 1995. (Ord. 948, p.31). However, this use was

removed from the list of allowed uses in the 2020 update of the code, since it hadn't been used. Since that time, with the attention on the need to provide a range of housing options, the importance of this historic allowed use has become more clear. Ms. Henning asked whether the Commission wanted to set standards for this use, or wait until someone proposes a development. By having a chapter, we show that Othello is open to this type of development. Some samples from other jurisdictions were included in the packet. Commissioners asked for examples of constructed developments.

Ms. Henning said this use was only suitable in R3 and R4 zone, since it would be multiple dwellings on a lot. Commissioner Jose Garza felt that these cottages/bungalows should be detached units, which the other commissioners agreed with. Commissioners felt that the standard of 2 parking spaces per unit should be required for cottages/bungalows, which they felt would likely make a project infeasible.

Design Standards

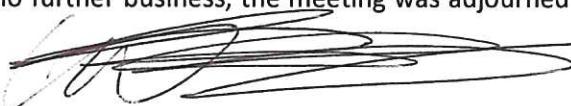
Commissioners confirmed they did not want to add any design standards that would apply to single family homes.

Landscaping

Currently, in the R-4 Zone, multi-family development is required to provide 300 square feet of landscaping per dwelling unit. The Housing Action Plan had recommended deleting this requirement and just having all uses comply with the Landscape chapter, OMC 17.74. Commissioners agreed with this direction.

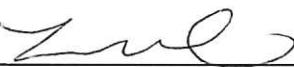
ADJOURNMENT

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:01pm. Next meeting is Monday, March 17, 2025.



Date: 3/17/25

Chris Dorow, Chair



Date: 3/17/25

Zuleica Morfin, Building and Planning Secretary