



City of Othello  
Planning Commission Meeting  
March 17, 2025  
Zuleica Morfin

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Chris Dorow called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

### **ROLL CALL**

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

**Absent:** Alma Carmona was excused due to a work obligation

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

**Attendees:** Bob Carlson

### **PUBLIC INPUT**

None

### **MINUTES APPROVAL**

February 18, 2025, minutes approved. M/S Sawyer/Garza

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

#### **OthelloGo App.**

Ms. Henning informed commissioners about the new OthelloGo app that was created as a better way to communicate with our community.

Local Road Safety Plan Survey

#### **Stakeholder Committee for County-Wide Housing Planning – Introduction/Invitation**

Othello and Adams County received a CLIHP grant (Coordinating Low-Income Housing Planning) from the Washington Department of Commerce for housing planning. Part of what we will do with this grant is hire a consultant to prepare a Land Capacity Analysis to determine where and how much housing can be accommodated through development and redevelopment, allocate housing and population throughout the county, review zoning codes to identify potential barriers to housing, and develop county-wide planning policies for housing, especially affordable housing. Some of these tasks would benefit from involvement by a stakeholder group. The time frame is the next few months, with the final documents completed by June. Ms. Henning asked commissioners if any of them would be interested in being a part of the stakeholder group that the consultant is putting together for this. Commissioner Jose Garza said he could commit to being a part of it but needed dates and times. Commissioner Ruth Sawyer also volunteered.

#### **Open House for Adams County Zoning Update & Housing Planning – Introduction/Invitation**

Adams County Planning Commission has been working for the last several years on updating their zoning code and zoning map. They will be holding an Open House April 15 at 6 PM at the County building, 425 E. Main Street. The City/County Housing Planning will also participate in this open house. There will be a second session April 22 in Ritzville. The City will share information on social media and the new OthelloGo app. A mailer will be going out with the utility bills with information on the local safety plan as well as the open house. Commissioner Rob Simmons said with being on auto pay and paperless he doesn't receive the notices that get sent out in the mail. So, he asked if those kind of notices could go on the app.

**ZONING UPDATE/STEP HOUSING: EMERGENCY SHELTER, TRANSITIONAL HOUSING, EMERGENCY HOUSING, PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING - DISCUSSION**

House Bill 1220, adopted in 2021, added requirements related to supportive and emergency housing. RCW 35A.21.430 and 35.21.683 require code cities (RCW 35A) and all cities (RCW 35) to not prohibit transitional housing or permanent supportive housing in any zones where dwelling units or hotels are allowed, and to not prohibit emergency shelters and emergency housing in any zones in which hotels are allowed. Therefore, we must update our municipal code. We received a grant from the Washington Department of Commerce for housing planning, most of which we are using to hire consultants to help us. The Municipal Code changes we will do on our own, so that we have more grant funds for the consultant work that we don't have the capacity for in-house. Although we initially didn't qualify for this grant, because it was only open to fully-planning Growth Management jurisdictions, we were offered the opportunity because the fully-planning jurisdictions didn't use it all. However, there is a tight timeline to use the funds, so we are prioritizing this issue. Ms. Henning told commissioners the comprehensive plan that is due by 2027 must accommodate all the housing. One part of it is how we will have enough housing by 2027 for all the people who need it and the other part is the zoning.

Commissioners discussed the draft for 17.80 for emergency shelters and housing. In the Definitions section, Ms. Henning asked if they wanted the definitions of affordable housing in this chapter since the term isn't used. Chair Chris Dorow mentioned that this was also addressed in the housing plan and there would be some places where it would fit and some places where it wouldn't fit. Consensus to keep this definition.

One of the definitions that needs some change is the definition of family. Our code currently defines it as limited to 5 unrelated people. The state has passed laws that family can't be limited by the number of people, but it can be whatever number of unrelated people who are living as a housekeeping unit. It can only be regulated as far as space, so there needs to be a certain amount of space per person. Another definition that needed some change was the definition of temporary. The problem was that in the code, temporary is defined as one year and in the building code it is defined as 6 months. Ms. Henning suggested removing this from the zoning definition and letting the building code regulate this as far as temporary structures. Commissioners were ok with removing this from the zoning code and letting it be taken care of in the building code and adding the definition of temporary up to the person and how long they reside at a location, not the structure or length of time for the land use.



Ms. Henning explained to commissioners that emergency housing is a specific kind of housing for people who are homeless or have an imminent risk of being homeless and not just a place to live. Commissioner Daniela Voorhies said she wouldn't consider people who aren't buying a home homeless. Commissioners wanted a clearer definition of what homelessness is as it could have many different meanings. Commissioners agreed that if this was already defined in the RCW, they would let the RCW take care of it. As for Tiny Houses, Ms. Henning asked commissioners if they wanted to add the definition of tiny houses and tiny shelters. Chair Chris Dorow said he was ok with tiny shelters used as emergency shelters, but he couldn't see how they would be used in residential zones with the building code. Commissioners agreed to remove both definitions.

17.80.040 Additional Regulations. (a) Indoor emergency shelters, transitional housing, indoor emergency housing, and permitted supportive housing must meet the same development and operating regulations as permitted residential dwellings, including adhering to building and fire codes (see OMC 14.04) and Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, to ensure consistency in health and safety for all residents. Ms. Henning explained that the ADA language is going to be removed from this section to be regulated as it would be for any other use.

The Department of Commerce suggested not requiring 2 parking spaces per unit for facilities that are for people who are homeless, since they would be likely to have fewer cars. Commissioner Ruth Sawyer said it should be left the same as the code for where they are building the facility. Commissioners agreed to remove the parking reduction in this section.

Hosting the homeless by religious organizations must be allowed (RCW 35A.21.360), with a few requirements the city can add by ordinance. The City can require a memorandum of understanding, so that language was included in the draft. Chair Chris Dorow asked who would be responsible for paying to create the MOU. He wouldn't like the city to be on the hook for paying the MOU fees and if it had to be split 50/50 it could get expensive. Chair Chris Dorow said he saw in Burien's code that the organization had to present the MOU for review. But he didn't see that language in ours. Chair Chris Dorow suggested having the city attorney look over the RCW and our code to make sure they match.

(E) Permanent supportive housing and transitional housing facilities are subject to the following criteria:  
(1) The number of units allowed on a given property shall be no more than the number of standard dwelling units that would be allowed under the zoning of the property.

Chair Chris Dorow said this would only help in a residential area and not in a C2 or C3 and certain locations where apartments are allowed.

(F) Emergency housing or emergency shelters shall be regulated the same as hotels and motels, with the following additional requirements necessary for health and safety:

(1) The number of emergency housing or emergency shelter units allowed on any given property shall be based on the capacity of the building. Related to this, Ms. Henning shared different language she was given: The density of emergency housing or emergency shelter within a facility shall not exceed the requirements of the underlying zone, no occupied structures may exceed occupancy limits set by the currently adopted building code. This would be tying it to the zoning code and to the building code. Chair Chris Dorow asked how 7<sup>th</sup> Ave would be affected by this seeing since this street was transitional between commercial and residential. Ms. Henning said that hotels and motels were not allowed on 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. Chair Chris Dorow recalled how he wanted hotels/motels on 7<sup>th</sup> and lost that debate.

(5) The organization managing and operating the emergency housing or emergency shelter facilities shall provide sanitation and basic safety measures including the following:

(III) Two large first-aid kits that include emergency eye wash bottles and naloxone (Narcan) kits.

Commissioner Rob Simmons asked if having the Narcan is something that is typical now. Chair Chris Dorow said this was a state rule, but it is more of a public safety thing than a health care thing.

Chair Chris Dorow asked where it says, "when a religious organization sets up an emergency shelter or a temporary shelter" and it's not indoors, it is outdoors, where and how would that be defined. This would be in the parking lot. He was trying to figure out how many properties could set up an emergency shelter. Ms. Henning said it was any property owned by a religious organization could choose to offer shelter.

Ms. Henning suggested they add the provisions that the state law allows: require restroom access, require proper disposal of waste if recreational vehicles are hosted, and not allow minimum required parking spaces to be used for hosting. She asked commissioners if they wanted to set up time limits within what the state law allows. The commissioners agreed 6 months was good. They felt the possible fee should be addressed by the Council.

Chair Chris Dorow had a concern in allowing the emergency shelters near schools. Ms. Henning said she didn't think the state law allowed the city to limit the location like that but she would talk to the city attorney about it. Chair Dorow thought it could fit within "protecting public health and safety." Ms. Henning also told commissioners that RCW requires the religious organization to hold a community meeting about their proposed encampment. Chair Chris Dorow asked if the encampment needed to be fenced/screened, he said he had seen one in Seattle where it was. This would probably have to be an argument that it's necessary for public health and safety. Commissioners would like to see it fenced.

Commissioners asked whether the requirement for one toilet per 20 people was sufficient. Ms. Henning said she would check what the building code required. Ms. Henning mentioned that Department of Commerce recommended deleting the requirement for a safety plan, unless the City would provide examples for a facility to follow and would be able to review the safety plan provided. Ms. Henning stated that city staff wouldn't have the experience to know whether a provided safety plan was adequate. The Commission agreed to delete this requirement.


The public hearing will be scheduled for April 21, 2025.

#### **REPORTS**

The February Building and Planning Department report and the Annual Rental Licensing & Inspection Report were included in the packet.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:01pm. Next meeting is Monday, April 21, 2025.

 Date: 4/21/25  
Chris Dorow, Chair

 Date: 4/21/25  
Zuleica Morfin, Building and Planning Secretary