



City of Othello
Planning Commission Meeting
April 22, 2025
Zuleica Morfin

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Chris Dorow called the meeting to order at 6:06 pm.

ROLL CALL

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

Remote: Maria Martinez, joined at 6:10pm

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

Attendees: Bob Carlson, Mike Livingston

PUBLIC INPUT

None

MINUTES APPROVAL

March 17, 2025, minutes approved. M/S Carmona/Sawyer

Chair Chris Dorow asked if the representative from City Council had changed as he had heard Council member John Lallas was no longer able to attend the planning commission meetings on Mondays. Ms. Henning said she had mentioned the Planning Commission liaison but did not have an update yet.

ZONING UPDATES/STEP HOUSING: EMERGENCY SHELTER, TRANSITIONAL HOUSING, EMERGENCY HOUSING, PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING - PUBLIC HEARING & RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUNCIL

House Bill 1220, adopted in 2021, added requirements related to supportive and emergency housing. This includes not using zoning to restrict the number of unrelated people in a dwelling unit, not prohibiting shelters or emergency housing in any zone that allows hotels, not prohibiting transitional housing or permanent supportive housing in any zone that allows dwelling units or hotels, not placing conditions on affordable housing that are different than the requirements for housing in general, and the ability to set conditions on religious organizations hosting encampments and shelters if those conditions are placed by ordinance. Therefore, we must update our municipal code.

The Commission has been working for several months on developing an ordinance, starting with the WA Dept of Commerce model and incorporating provisions from other cities. Ms. Henning told the commissioners there were a few things in the ordinance that they drafted that they should talk about before they made their recommendation. She said the city attorney had warned that the fee being set up as a reimbursement could become a problem if it is not applied evenly. Another thing that could be a problem was the thousand feet from a school that commissioners wanted. The statute basically says you

can't put conditions that substantially burden a religious organization that would like to set up an emergency shelter and also just saying "school" would be too vague. Ms. Henning said putting a separation distance in an MOU would be difficult because either the religious organization's property is in the right place relative to a school or it is not. Chair Chris Dorow's concern was public health and safety, he asked if they needed to present data showing concerns. He said he had looked at about four studies that were done in Seattle and Bellingham, they all showed that near shelters there was a 25-50% rise in heroin use. Chair Chris Dorow asked what the process would be if they wanted to extend the time past 190 days. More than 6 months in a year must be allowed but commissioners could add a provision so that it can be negotiated.

Bob Carlson had some comments; he gave an example of an emergency shelter in Tri- Cities off Clearwater and 395 that a religious organization had ongoing and was a health and safety problem because it went on too long, so he wasn't in favor of allowing more than 190 days out of the year. Chair Chris Dorow asked Mr. Carlson if he saw value in keeping it going. He said he was ok with changing it if there was value. Commissioner Alma Carmona asked what guidelines would be used for the ones that could continue. Chair Chris Dorow said public safety would be used. Commissioner Jose Garza suggested looking at police reports to determine which one should be allowed to continue. The process of approving and extending an MOU would go through the city council. Commissioner Carmona felt winter was the most critical time to provide shelter.

Bob Carlson also pointed out that on page 19 of the packet, section (f) of RCW 35A.21.360 allows a city to limit the number of simultaneous and adjacent religious organization outdoor encampment hosting within one thousand feet of another outdoor encampment concurrently hosted by a religious organization. He suggested this be added. The planning commission agreed.

The city attorney had suggested removing the thousand feet from schools as this could become a problem. The Commission would have preferred to keep it in but went with the attorney's recommendation. The city attorney also recommended adding language to not allow using emergency shelters or emergency housing as designated supervised consumption sites or injection facilities. Commissioners agreed with adding this language. Commissioner Jose Garza asked if the 30 days' public notice could be changed to 60 days, to give more time to notify people and hold a public hearing. Commissioner Alma Carmona said this was an emergency shelter so needed to be done quickly. Another thing the city attorney suggested they remove was the reimbursement language, because of the potential difficulty of applying this fairly. The Commission agreed.

Ms. Henning wanted to make sure they discussed the definition of "family". In the zoning definition it is defined as one person living alone, 2 or more persons related by blood, marriage, or legal adoption, or a group not exceeding 5 persons living as a single housekeeping unit. The state doesn't allow us to set limits on the number of unrelated persons. Commissioners agreed to remove the 5 persons from the definition of family.

At 6:54 pm the public hearing was opened. There was no testimony so the public hearing was closed at 6:55 pm.

Motion passed to recommend to the city council the emergency shelter and housing ordinance with the changes as discussed. M/S Carmona/Simmons. Chair Dorow mentioned the commission had done the best they could within the constraints of the state laws.

COUNTY-WIDE PLANNING POLICIES ON HOUSING - DISCUSSION

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 are doing with this grant is hiring a consultant to develop county-wide planning policies for housing, especially affordable housing. The consultant has drafted initial policies for discussion. Ms. Henning asked commissioners for their input and recommendations on this topic. She mentioned there had been some comments about Policy 3.1 "Focus Higher Density Housing in UGAs - Direct high- and medium- density housing development into future growth areas to support efficient land use and proximity to services." The comments were that higher density should be focused on cities and not urban growth areas, since Adams County is not fully planning under the Growth Management Act so does not have standard urban growth areas. Commissioner Alma Carmona said they should be careful not to grow the city faster than it could keep up. She said she didn't want fast growth and end up like Wenatchee where they have high schools in industrial zones.

Bob Carlson said the Adams County Planning Commission has been working on updating the county zoning code, including determining where there should be higher densities. This is in areas with public water and sewer, which is normally near a city or town. The county is holding open houses to get input. He felt it was difficult to create housing policies that apply both within cities and unincorporated areas, because they are so different.

Commissioner Carmona stated that she liked a lot of the draft policies.

Chair Chris Dorow asked how the county determined Prime Agriculture. Mr. Carlson explained it was better farmland.

Chair Chris Dorow mentioned that Dallas, TX exploded in growth, and it takes about 45 min. to get anywhere. Wenatchee is a smaller scale version of that. He would like to prevent similar situations here. He wanted to make sure we are allowing enough types of housing. He felt the future land use map and zoning text should be revisited at some point.

The consensus of the Commission was that the county-wide policies should be discussed by the Adams County Planning Commission, since they would have a county-wide perspective. Therefore, the Othello Planning Commission would not be making any recommendations on the proposed policies.

OPEN PUBLIC MEETING ACT TRAINING VIDEO (20 MINTUE VIDEO)

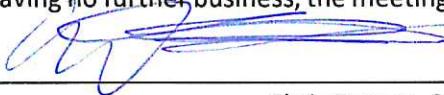
Due to technical difficulties the commissioners will be emailed the training video to watch after the meeting.

REPORTS

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

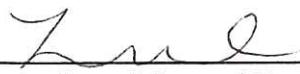
ADJOURNMENT

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:29pm. Next meeting is Monday May 19, 2025.



Date: 5/19/25

Chris Dorow, Chair



Date: 5/19/25

Zuleica Morfin, Building and Planning Secretary