



City of Othello
Planning Commission Meeting
January 20, 2026
Zuleica Morfin

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Rob Simmons called the meeting to order at 6:02pm

ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Chair Rob Simmons, Ruth Sawyer, Jose Garza, Maria Martinez, Daniela Voorhies, Donald Burks MD, Chad Robbins

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

Attendees: Council member Chris Dorow, Council member Alma Carmona, Council member Kelli Camp, Bob Carlson

PUBLIC INPUT

Council member Chris Dorow introduced new Council member Alma Carmona as the new Planning Commission Liaison. He also introduced new Council member Kelli Camp. The three Council members make up the Comprehensive Plan Committee.

MINUTES APPROVAL

December 15, 2025, minutes approved. M/S Voorhies/Sawyer

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE - POPULATION PROJECTION METHOD

One of the steps of the Comprehensive Plan update is to determine what population to plan for over the next 20 years. The amount of population increase affects everything from how much residential land will be needed, to wastewater treatment capacity, to water rights, to traffic safety improvements. The State Office of Financial Management (OFM) provides low-, medium-, and high-growth projections for each county. Our existing Plan used some creative math, and rather than using the high-growth projection of 11,007 by 2035 (1.75% annual growth), used a 20-year population projection of 17,825 by 2035. This high number has caused problems for everything from the Housing Action Plan (where we had to write justifications for why we weren't using the number in our adopted Comp Plan) to the current draft water and sewer plans, which to some extent are trying to plan for population that won't happen in that time frame, which would require spending on improvements which aren't needed yet. On the other hand, projections that are too low mean the city is not prepared for growth as it happens.

The consultant provided 5 different ways to forecast the population. He recommended the linear trend of 12,067 by 2047, continuing at the rate Othello has been growing since 1990, unless the Commission felt that people will continue to have larger families inside city limits compared to the rest of the county and if they felt that people would continue to move into the city significantly more than people would move out of the city. There have been several large annexations in the past few years that provide new land for housing inside city limits. In that case, he would recommend one of the more exponential growth projections: Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) for the past 5 years (12,781) or 10 years (13,373). Commissioner Daniela Voorhies liked the 5-year CAGR because it allowed for growth but not too much growth like the 10-year CAGR. Council Member Chris Dorow wanted commissioners to keep in mind that the city is currently working on water stability, if that was to be accomplished that would put them in a

good situation for growth. He reminded them of the presentation they heard a while ago about Grant County being maxed out on electricity transmission, making other places with abundant electricity like Othello attractive for business growth. He also mentioned that Othello is the only city growing in Adams County. Chair Rob Simmons likes the 5-year CAGR knowing that in 10 years the planning commission will be able to look at the population and make adjustments. Commissioner Chad Robbins liked the 5-year CAGR as well, he would rather plan high than low. He mentioned that there is not a lot of difference in end result with most of the projection methods, only a few hundred different after 20 years. With consensus Ms. Henning had enough direction for the consultant.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE – PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN

The Commission reviewed the proposed Public Engagement Plan, which includes stakeholder interviews, a survey, open houses, and Planning Commission/Council workshops. Chair Rob Simmons mentioned it seemed thorough. The Commission did not request any changes.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE – COMMUNITY PROFILE

The Commission reviewed the proposed Public Engagement Plan, which summarizes characteristics of Othello, such as population growth trends, demographics, economic indicators, and housing. Commissioners had questions about Table 5: Job Counts By Places Where Othello Residents Are Employed. They asked for more information about the 37.9% employed in places other than the 10 cities listed, whether it included those working in unincorporated areas, and whether it included people working remotely. Ms. Henning said she would request more information from the consultant.

STATE LAW UPDATES- NEW HOUSING IN EXISTING BUILDINGS & CHILDCARE

State law adopted in 2023 and amended in 2025 changes how all cities (RCW [35.21.990](#)) and all code cities (RCW [35A.21.440](#)) regulate redevelopment of existing buildings into housing, in commercial, mixed-use, and residential zones. Othello must adopt new codes by June 30, 2026, or be pre-empted by the state regulations. An existing building is one that received a Certificate of Occupancy at least 3 years ago. A different state law adopted in 2025 requires all cities (RCW [35.21.996](#)) and all code cities (RCW [35A.21.460](#)) to allow childcare centers in all zones. A childcare center is defined broadly as “an agency that regularly provides early childhood education and early learning services for a group of children for periods of less than 24 hours.” These regulations must be adopted by June 27, 2027. Because both new laws require amending portions of the zoning code, it makes sense to combine the review.

Council member Alma Carmona remembered that when they had worked on the zoning update, they had discovered that you couldn’t convert a garage into living space by the code’s definition. So, she wondered how this new law affects the conversion of a garage. The City could require what was required before to continue. Before adopting the new changes, commissioners should consider revisiting the garage requirements. Bob Carlson suggested commissioners re-look at the zones and the requirements within those zones to better prepare for this update. Commissioners discussed whether to update childcare along with the new housing update or wait until it is due. Commissioners agreed to continue the discussion on childcare as opposed to waiting. Council member Carmona mentioned that parking standards for child care centers should be considered.

ADJOURNMENT

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:52pm. Next meeting is Tuesday February 17, 2026.

Robert M Simmons DC
Robert M Simmons DC (Feb 23, 2026 11:10:35 PST) _____ Date: 23/02/2026
Rob Simmons, Chair

zuleica morfin zuleica morfin _____ Date: Feb 23, 2026
Zuleica Morfin, Building and Planning Secretary