



City of Othello
Planning Commission Special Meeting
March 2, 2026
Zuleica Morfin

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Rob Simmons called the special meeting to order at 6:01pm.

ROLL CALL

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

Staff: Community Development Director Anne Henning

Attendees: Council member Chris Dorow, Council member Alma Carmona, Bob Carlson, Veronica Alsumaeel, Eva Gamboa

Remote: Council member Kelli Camp

PUBLIC INPUT

None

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE –VISION 2047

The foundation of a Comprehensive Plan is the community’s vision for the future: How do we see Othello, now and in the next 20 years? What do we want to preserve and what do we want to change? What do we hope to accomplish in the next 20 years?

Commissioners went through the Othello Vision 2047 worksheet. Below are the worksheet prompts and Commissioners’ responses.

North Star - Your Hopes & Dreams for the City of Othello

*Imagine that reality is suspended – time and money limits do not exist. **What are your greatest hopes and desires for Othello?***

Council member Chris Dorow shared a vision statement adapted from a strategic plan that was worked on in the past but was never formally adopted: “To be the most welcoming small city in Washington where families and businesses grow, thrive, and prosper.” He mentioned the original had said “town”, while he felt that once Othello reaches 10,000 residents, it will be a small city. Commissioners all liked this statement as a starting point for the vision statement. There was discussion that “welcoming” is the most important part, whether “small” needed to be part of the identity, and if farming or agriculture could be worked in.

In this version of Othello: What makes the city unique?

Commissioner answers included:

- Welcoming
- Community
- Not one thing, it’s the people
- Culture

- Diversity within the culture
- The city resists traditional class structure:hovels next to mansions
- Geographic center, hub for industries
- Wholesome, strangers smile at you
- Good weather, safe, school staff
- Generations of families
- Commonality, not ways to separate people

Commissioner Maria Martinez made the following statement “Othello is a cultural-rich, rural agricultural community with deep family roots and a strong sense of identity where diverse cultures, language, and traditions are visible and celebrated.”

What is it like to live in this City?

Commissioner Maria Martinez said living in this city is safe, welcoming and community-centered. As rural city residents value connection, open space, and strong neighborhood relationships, while having access to stable housing, parks, schools and essential service. Below are other responses from commissioners.

- People watch out for each other
- Safe and close-knit community that is growing from a town into a small city
- Small city feel but high housing prices
- Home-grown: teachers’ kids are now teachers, coaches’ kids are coaches. People come back
- Local businesses
- Easy and efficient to get anywhere in town
- Quiet

What is it like to work in this City?

Othello supports a resilient rural economy rooted in agriculture while expanding into food processing, healthcare, education, tourism, and locally-owned small businesses. Employment opportunities provide stability and long-term growth within the region.

- Diverse types of jobs
- It feels like working with a big family. (But some things are needed currently: Livable income for all, affordable childcare, high-speed internet)
- Easier modes of transportation: Walk or ride a bike without being on the road with cars

What kinds of things do locals enjoy doing in this City?

- Othello will host conferences, art shows, and performing arts
- Fishing, hunting, golfing, school sports, festivals, fundraisers, and outdoor recreation
- Painting events
- Downtown gatherings

Things that Othello needs:

- More events
- More shopping
- Musical instrument teachers

What kinds of things do visitors enjoy doing in this City?

- Farmers market
- New amenities at Lions park (playground, basketball court, pickle ball, baseball fields)
- Visting restaurants (Golden Fountain Chinese, many great Mexican restaurants)
- Sand Hill Crane Festival
- Hunting, fishing
- Future entertainment district: Restaurants, bars, theaters. Like Winthrop or Leavenworth. Or like other cities that don't necessarily have a theme.
- Drive-in theater

Back to reality, but it's now 20 years in the future – the year 2047.

20 years is a long time to still accomplish big things! But let's take a more realistic approach now.

Use a few words or short phrases to describe life in Othello in 2047.

What is it like to live in Othello?

- Diverse shopping & dining options, entertainment
- Despite explosive growth, Othello has maintained its small-town feel, new industrial growth has allowed the city to prosper
- Data centers to bring in revenue but not a lot of workers, maintain small town feel
- Enough water
- Addressed affordable housing shortages by significantly increasing affordable homes and rental options. Families, seniors, and workforce residents are able to remain in the community without being cost-burdened. Rural character is preserved while neighborhoods are safe, connected, and supported by reliable infrastructure.

What is it like to work in Othello?

- Livable income, competitive market
- Opportunity for many types of careers
- Maintains agricultural strength while diversifying into complementary industries. Locally-owned businesses thrive, and work force development programs support living wage employment.
- Key infrastructure investments set the table for a dramatic increase in the quality of life. Visionary growth management plans allow Othello to keep its small town feel while everyone prospers.
- Technology will affect agriculture. Fewer workers but higher wages (maintaining equipment instead of working in the fields). New crop varieties.

What kinds of things do locals enjoy doing in Othello?

- Farmers market
- Fairgrounds host more events: arts, concerts
- Shopping, dining, sports facilities and fields

- Outdoor recreation, large eco park. School sport complex. Hwy 26 commercial district & Main Street. Historic district/entertainment district. Amphitheater in eco park at old rodeo grounds. All summer Shakespeare
- Eco Park with hiking trails, wetland restoration, wildlife. Manage water in the eco park to draw specific wildlife. Like Spokane Mirabeau Park
- Auditorium
- Leader in recycling and repurpose because of entrepreneurs

What kinds of things do visitors enjoy doing in Othello?

- Giant farmers market with commercial kitchen like Scale House in Spokane
- Small business products: meat and cheese

What are the City's biggest accomplishments, assets, and values over the past 20 years?

- Rail access to deep water port in Pasco
- Main Street business built all the way to Hwy 17
- Decorative street lighting project finished
- More festivals
- Water independence through ASR project (aquifer storage & recovery)
- 3 roundabouts for safety and commercial growth
- City has purchased Irrigation District property and converted it to farmers market, RV park, food hub, business incubator
- Eco park with amphitheater
- Neighborhood design kept small town feel
- New industry: Brewery, 3 data centers, distribution center
- City & school district work together to create trade school for agriculture
- Emergency preparedness. Regular drills make us one of the safest cities in the nation
- 12 new physicians
- More cold storage

***What do you think each item below looks like in 2047 in Othello?** Think along the lines of accomplishments, new developments, trends/patterns, or goals across the 2027-2047 timespan.*

Land Use and City Expansion:

- Safer access across Highway 17 and 26 to promote growth past those boundaries
- Industrial land developed
- Existing annexations have been built out
- Highway interchange at Cunningham (Main) and Hwy 17

Housing Types & Affordability:

- Expanded affordable rental units, starter homes, ADUs, townhouses, and senior housing
- More multi-family options
- With new homes built, older homes become more affordable

- Manufactured homes are recognized as an affordable housing option, and are easier to finance than currently

Transportation Networks (including Bike and Pedestrian):

- Safety
- Sidewalks
- Education for drivers
- E- bikes/scooters
- Trails to get around
- Trees along trails for shade
- Solution to Main & 14th bottleneck

Public Services (Utilities, Schools, Government Services, etc.):

- New high school, new K-8 schools
- Childcare centers
- Public transportation
- Upgraded water and sewer
- Upgraded natural gas, electric, broadband internet
- Better communication about community events

Climate & Weather Resilience:

- Shaded parks and more tree canopy
- Water conservation planning
- Infrastructure built for long term resilience

Parks & Recreation:

- New parks
- Everything proposed in the current park plan has been built by then
- Shaded gathering areas
- Sports facilities
- Accessible playgrounds
- Dedicated youth spaces offering affordable programming
- Youth infrastructure includes evening and weekend access to reduce financial barriers and support all families

Local Economy & Business:

- Health care
- More industry
- Businesses along Main Street
- Local businesses
- Tourism

Commissioners did not get through the last few pages of the Vision worksheet during the meeting. They were asked to send their thoughts to Ms. Henning by Friday.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE - DRAFT COMMUNITY SURVEY

Based on the Planning Commission’s review at the February meeting, staff and our Comprehensive Plan consultant have modified the online survey and created a shorter paper version. The Planning Commission did a quick review to determine if any further changes need to be made. Commissioners were mostly comfortable with the changes made to the online and paper survey. There were suggestions that the online version was still too long, and maybe the City could offer an incentive to encourage people to complete the survey.

STATE LAW UPDATES – NEW HOUSING IN EXISTING BUILDINGS AND CHILDCARE

Ms. Henning noted that there wasn’t time to discuss these topics tonight. If the City does not make the required changes by the June deadline, the only impact will be that we must default to the state requirements. She felt the Commission could work on these topics as time allows in the next few months, but it is not urgent.

ADJOURNMENT

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:37pm. Next meeting is Monday March 16, 2026.

Rob Simmons Date: Mar 18, 2026
Rob Simmons, Chair

Zuleica Morfin Date: 3/18/26
Zuleica Morfin, Building and Planning Secretary

Signature: Robert M Simmons DC
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