



Planning Commission
Meeting Minutes
Monday, April 14, 2025 – 6:30 pm

Call to Order: 6:30

Roll Call

Commissioners Present:

Eric Warnat, Commissioner
Melissa Toner, Commissioner
Patrick Hosterman, Commission Chair
Cody Davis, Commission Vice-Chair
Gabrielle Braley, Commissioner
Jeff Wheatley, Commissioner

Staff Present:

Patricia Love, Community Development Director
Tansy Schroeder, City Planner

Absent: None

Also known to be present: Cathy Wooten, Russell Joe (online), Emily Atkins (online)

Public Requests and Comments: None

Approval of Minutes:

The minutes from the February 10, 2025, Special Joint City Council and Planning Commission meeting were approved with the following additions: Tansy Schroeder met with residents in the hallway for further discussion after the public meeting was adjourned, and comments and concerns about parking at Viking Village Site Development project.

Old Business:

Continuation of Critical Areas Code Amendment Public Hearing

The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires all cities and counties to adopt development regulations that protect critical areas. These regulations help to preserve the natural environment, maintain fish and wildlife habitat, and protect drinking water. Protecting critical areas also helps reduce exposure to risks, such as landslides or flooding, and maintains the natural elements of our landscape.

The purpose of a public hearing is to provide a formal opportunity for the community, agencies, and stakeholders to comment on and participate in the adoption process. The Planning Commission has the option to continue the public hearing or close the public hearing and deliberate on the ordinance prior to making a recommendation to the City Council.

Commissioner Questions & Comments

- What regulations does Snohomish County have in place for buffers in the Urban Growth Area? The County Council has requested Stanwood to delay based on what the County is proposing. Their staff moved the Critical Areas Code forward to County Council. There was some opposition to the increased buffers, so the County Council sent it back to a Committee for further review. It is currently still under review. Stanwood is authorized to adopt a Code that meets Best Available Science and addresses housing counts in the City. Staff will bring more information on what the County's buffers are to the next meeting as an informational item.



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- There is a concern that buffers for Cultural Resource sites are too low at 500 feet. Staff worked with the Stillaguamish Tribe on this section of the code. There is a note in the code that all projects taking place in Stanwood require a notice to the Tribe. Commissioners would like to see inadvertent discovery plan language added to the procedures code to add an extra layer of protection.
- Commissioners would like to know why Habitat Score 8-9 was the only section that had a reduction of buffers. Staff is looking into this and will add an explanation in the packet for City Council.
- There is an increase in buffers in most zones, what is the impact to property owners? This is being addressed in subdivision flexibility by still meeting the density requirements but allowing different lot sizes and housing types. Homeowners have a right to request a reduction of property taxes when there are Native Growth Protection Areas on their property.
- ADU's will not be allowed in Critical Areas.
- How does the City plan to protect old growth trees and vegetation, and can staff add a section to the code describing the plans to protect old growth? The City does not currently have a tree protection ordinance, but there are standards to protect a percentage of trees on a given property. The Site-Specific Tree Height (SSTH) provides protection for stream corridors through the buffers. Trees cannot be taken down that are in buffers. A Tree Preservation Ordinance can be looked at on a recommendation from the Planning Commission. Staff is considering a proposal of allowing smaller lots housing clusters, that will allow protection of trees and create more open space within a development.
- Is there something in the code that protects slopes? Sometimes when trees are removed to improve the view, the sloped area can slide. There is a Slope Preservation section of the Critical Areas code that describes setbacks required near slopes and the preservation of vegetation.
- Stanwood has the option to adopt the Snohomish Code, but it is not required. Stanwood has had their own CA code for many years and plans to continue to use it.
- Staff will adjust the language for the Cultural Resources Inadvertent Discovery Plan in the recommendation to City Council.
- Wildlife buffers are determined by a habitat assessment performed by a biologist.
- Clarify where the science comes from that is used to determine buffers and buffer widths.
- Motion 1: Commissioner Davis motioned, and Commissioner Wheatley seconded to approve the Findings of Facts and Conclusions of the Critical Areas Code with the amended language that the Best Available Science comes from the recommendations from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Ecology, and inclusion of an Inadvertent Discovery Plan for Cultural Resources.
- Motion 2: Commissioner Wheatley motioned, and Commissioner Braley seconded the Critical Areas Code as amended.

Public Questions and Comments

Stanwood Resident:

- Thank you to staff for the level of detail put into this project.
- Buffers are important to protect wetlands and wildlife. Even with buffers, Critical Areas are still at risk.
- Continue to protect Critical Areas as the City boundaries and codes change over time.



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Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties (MBAKS)

- Stanwood has plans to accommodate 4,608 new units by 2044 according to the Stanwood Comprehensive Plan. A Critical Areas code is a great tool that is used to protect the environment. Wildlife guidance on SSTH is from 2006, and MBAKS advises Stanwood not to use it as it may not be the Best Available Science. But if Stanwood does decide to use it, MBAKS asks the Commissioners to contemplate how the proposed Critical Areas code protects critical functions and values. MBAKS does not support the increase in buffers as they could negatively impact the cost of housing and housing supply. The Planning Commission could propose adopting the Snohomish County Critical Areas Code. Thank you to Staff for working with MBAKS.

New Business:

Subdivision Code

City staff and consultants have been actively developing the initial draft of the subdivision and housing code amendments. While the full draft is not yet ready for public review, the following bulk standards table provides an early look at how lot design flexibility is being proposed. While the concept is very preliminary and staff anticipates significant changes, the intent is to get early feedback on the code direction.

Things to consider when reviewing the preliminary code language:

- Lot density is based on existing Planned Residential Development (PRD) standards.
- Simplify the bulk standards table by eliminating the minimum lot size section: regulate by density.
- Lot width to depth requirements is based on ratios to provide lot design flexibility.

To incorporate lot design flexibility into the subdivision code, the old bulk matrix is being proposed to be changed from ridged lot size and dimension to a *Floor Area Ratio* concept. Floor Area Ratio is a zoning concept used in urban planning to control the bulk and intensity of development on a piece of land. It helps determine how much building area is allowed relative to the size of the lot.

Commissioner Questions & Comments

- With variable lot sizes, will there be variable setbacks? Yes
- Will there be a minimum lot size? Currently no, but staff is considering this.
- Staff is working to make the code flexible to move with the changing housing market.
- Try to find a medium between housing costs and having a beautiful community. Staff is not proposing to change the density but trying to figure out how to meet the density.
- Commissioners like how this gives the developers flexibility and options to build what the buyers want with different housing types.
- The market drives the cost of housing.
- The Commissioners are interested in learning more about this and seeing examples.



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Miscellaneous Business:

Recent Council Action on Commission Items:

- Council Adoption of Procedures Code

Upcoming Items:

- Continued Discussion of Subdivision Code
- Missing Middle Housing Code Amendment

Adjourn: 8:20 p.m.