



The City is conducting this public meeting using a hybrid model. The public is welcome to attend tonight’s meeting in-person at Sumner City Hall Council Chambers (1104 Maple Street) or virtually by using the meeting access link below:
Updated Link to join Zoom webinar: <https://sumnerwa-gov.zoom.us/j/88655116217>
Or by phone: 253 215 8782 (Tacoma)
Webinar ID: 886 5511 6217

CALL TO ORDER

FLAG SALUTE

ROLL CALL

Roll Call: Sharon Fochtman, Mark Isaacs, Kelly Locke, Bill Moody, Rob Healy, Mark Malcolm, Amy Huo

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Planning Commission meeting minutes- May 1, 2025

PUBLIC COMMENT

The public may comment on topics that are not on the meeting agenda, virtually or in person. The public is strongly encouraged to submit comments via email to chrissandaw@sumnerwa.gov no later than 5pm on the day prior to the meeting. Your comments will be read into the record and limited to 3-minutes.

PUBLIC HEARING

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

1. Manufactured Home Parks Overlay -DISCUSSION

CORRESPONDENCE

COMMISSION COMMENTS

STAFF COMMENTS

1. Overview of Planning Commissions - MRSC Article

ADJOURNMENT

SUBJECT: Planning Commission meeting minutes- May 1, 2025

CATEGORY: Motion

BUDGET IMPACT:

Expenditure Required: None

Within Budget Allocation: N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

1. 20250501-PC Meeting Minutes

STAFF CONTACT: Chrissanda Walker, Associate Planner

SUMMARY BACKGROUND:

COUNCIL COMMITTEE/STUDY SESSION:

MEETING/STUDY SESSION DATE:

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS/MOTION:

Motion to approve the May 1, 2025 meeting minutes



MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 pm by Commissioner Moody

ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Moody- In-person, Healy- In-person, Malcolm- In-person, Fochtman- In-person, Isaacs- Virtual (6:45 PM)

Excused Absences: Locke

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. *Planning Commission meeting minutes-April 3, 2025*

Moved to approve Fochtman, Seconded Healy; **passed unanimously**

PUBLIC COMMENT (The public may provide comments on topics onto tonight's agenda please note. Chair will move onto any public comments on new or unfinished business items, each speaker is limited to 3 minutes)

None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. None before the Commission

NEW BUSINESS

1. Town Center Plan Update (MA-01)- *DISCUSSION*

Staff presentation summary: Chrissanda Walker, associate planner presented information on MA-01, Town Center Plan Update and the various plans, policies and codes that will be amended and a part of the future packet. Staff guided discussion on the reduction of building heights, areas of amendments, and the inclusion of the IDEA overlay in portions of the West Sumer District.

Discussion ensued. Questions from commissioners about single family home parcels potentially being used for redevelopment; requirements regarding improvements from

developers; Zehnder Street development potential; the IDEA Overlay; and comments on traffic impacts. What interest there is from developers, need for more office space, corner lot development, two story buildings, street amendments, varied building heights and step backs were answered by staff.

CORRESPONDENCE

None

COMMISSION COMMENTS

Commissioners raised questions on the July meeting scheduling. Commissioners thanked staff for the update on the town center plan.

STAFF COMMENTS

Staff, Chrissanda Walker, let the Planning Commission know that they are invited to attend a city sponsored field trip to view the Hangar in Kenmore. She also introduced newly appointed Commissioner Malcolm.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved to adjourn (Fochtman), Seconded (Healy); all in favor; meeting adjourned at 7:28 pm.

SUBJECT: Manufactured Home Parks Overlay -DISCUSSION

CATEGORY: Presentation

BUDGET IMPACT:

Expenditure Required: None

Within Budget Allocation: N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Staff Report
2. Draft Ordinance MHP Overlay Zone

STAFF CONTACT: Ryan Windish, Community & Economic Development Director

SUMMARY BACKGROUND:

In January, the City Council adopted the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update as required by the state Growth Management Act (GMA). The 2024 Comprehensive Plan contains anti-displacement policies to protect households and individuals from being displaced by new construction or redevelopment. Displacement mitigation and consideration is required by GMA (RCW 36.70A.070) and is to focus on preservation of affordable housing options for vulnerable communities. The Planning Commission and City Council considered and approved anti-displacement policies including the preservation of manufactured home parks as an affordable housing option.

The Zoning Code text amendment before the Planning Commission would create a Manufactured Home Park (MHP) overlay district that would limit the future use of the land to being only a MHP.

Staff will be presenting the ordinance and the Planning Commission can discuss and comment on the draft ordinance. This will come back to the Planning Commission July 10, 2025 for a public hearing.

COUNCIL COMMITTEE/STUDY SESSION:

MEETING/STUDY SESSION DATE:

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS/MOTION:

Staff recommends discussing the proposal and asking questions.



DATE: June 5, 2025
TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Ryan Windish, Community & Economic Development Director
CC: Chrissanda Walker, Associate Planner
RE: Zoning Code Text Amendment – Manufactured Home Park Overlay District

I. BACKGROUND / WHY THE AMENDMENTS ARE BEING PROPOSED

In January the City Council adopted the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update as required by the state Growth Management Act (GMA). The 2024 Comprehensive Plan contains antidisplacement policies to protect households and individuals from being displaced by new construction or redevelopment. Displacement mitigation and consideration is required by GMA (RCW 36.70A.070) and is to focus on preservation of affordable housing options for vulnerable communities. The Planning Commission and City Council considered and approved antidisplacement policies including the preservation of manufactured home parks as an affordable housing option.

The Zoning Code text amendment before the Planning Commission would create a Manufactured Home Park (MHP) overlay district that would limit the future use of the land to being only a MHP.

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

The Zoning Code Text amendments would do the following:

- A. Specify that a MHP is the only allowed use in the overlay and would only apply to MHPs existing prior to January 1, 2025. New MHPs would be exempt.
- B. Creates an option for owners of MHPs to apply for a use exception if the overlay zone prevents reasonable use of the property or it is not economically viable. Displacement provisions would be available for residents if the MHP ceased to exist.
- C. Allows for residents of the mobile home park to apply to the City for a Mobile Home Park Overlay Zone if the residents become vulnerable to displacement.

The draft ordinance containing the amendments discussed above is presented in Exhibit A, attached.

III. ANALYSIS

The proposed Zoning Code amendments are consistent with the intent and policies of the Comprehensive Plan, including the policies discussed below.

HOUSING ELEMENT

The proposal is consistent with Comprehensive Plan policies and goals for establishing Housing Element as follows:

1. Encourage public and private reinvestment in older residential neighborhoods and private rehabilitation of housing.

1.7. Support the preservation of existing mobile home/manufactured home parks as affordable housing.

2. Provide a range of housing types for all life stages and economic segments of the Sumner community.

2.5. Plan for an adequate supply of land to accommodate projected housing needs for all income bands.

2.5.1. Through the Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Code, Subdivision code, Design Guidelines, and other regulations and standards, allow for a variety of housing types and lot configurations including government-assisted housing; housing for moderate-, low-, very low-, and extremely low-income households; manufactured housing; multifamily housing; group homes; foster care facilities; emergency housing; emergency shelters; permanent supportive housing; and duplexes, triplexes, and townhomes.

6. Support measures to prevent or mitigate residential displacement through tenant protections and existing programs.

6.1. Consider working with agencies to provide public information on County/State programs on eviction prevention, property tax assistance, mortgage assistance, energy assistance, and foreclosure prevention counseling.

6.2. Consistent with state and federal law, consider supporting tenant protections such as tenant relocation assistance, just cause eviction protections, and notice of intent to sell.

6.3. Consider adopting provisions in the zoning code such as special zones or development standards that protect manufactured home parks over other types of housing developments.

LAND USE ELEMENT

The proposal is consistent with Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element policies and goals specifically:

7. The land use designations and target densities described in the sections below are to be utilized in conjunction with the Comprehensive Plan Map, shown in Figure 9-3. These designations guide the zoning districts in the adopted zoning map. Figure 9-2 summarizes the categories and densities of particular districts.

7.5. Overlay Districts

7.5.7. Manufactured Home Park Overlay: The Manufactured Home Park (MFHP) Overlay district

applies to properties primarily in manufactured home park use where the MFHP was created prior to 2024. The purpose of the overlay is to support the continuation of manufactured homes as the primary use on the property and to help ensure that MFHPs continue to provide an affordable housing option for Sumner residents. The overlay is not intended to apply to new MFHPs but may be applied in the future to MFH subdivisions if residents become vulnerable to displacement and apply to the Director for designation. The overlay is a land use designation only and is not intended to include provisions for rent control or tenant protections.

CONCLUSION: The proposed amendments would implement the Comprehensive Plan policies consistent with state law regarding the preservation of manufactured home parks and retain a viable affordable option for low and moderate income households. The amendments directly implement the policy in that it is a tool to protect against displacement as land becomes more valuable and the redevelopment of existing MHPs to other uses such as high density multifamily becomes more profitable. In addition, the amendments would also create an opportunity for the MHP to be resident owned and managed. Further creating certainty for residents that their housing situation would remain affordable into the future.

IV. SEPA ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) analysis of the proposed amendment has been completed. A Determination of Non-Significance was issued on _____.

V. PUBLIC & AGENCY COMMENT

No public or agency comments at this time.

VI. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends discussing the proposal and asking questions.

VII. PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Planning Commission recommendation pending public hearing on July 10, 2025.

VIII. EXHIBITS

A. Draft Ordinance

DRAFT**ORDINANCE NO. XXXX****CITY OF SUMNER, WASHINGTON****AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SUMNER, WASHINGTON, AMENDING ZONING CODE ESTABLISHING A MANUFACTURED HOME PARK OVERLAY ZONE AND AMENDING CHAPTER 18.34, MANUFACTURED HOME PARKS, AND AMENDING SECTIONS 18.34.010; 18.34.020; 18.34.030; 18.34.040; 18.34.050; 18.34.060; AND CREATING A NEW SECTION 18.34.090.**

WHEREAS, the Washington State Growth Management Act requires that the City of Sumner take measures to identify local policies and regulations that result in the displacement of vulnerable populations (RCW 36.70A.070(2)(e)); and to implement policies and regulations that begin to undo racially disparate impacts, displacement, and exclusion in housing (RCW 36.70A.070(2)(f)); and identify areas that may be of higher risk of displacement from market forces that occur with changes in zoning development regulations and capital investments (RCW 36.70A.070(2)(g)); and

WHEREAS, the Growth Management Act further requires the City of Sumner Comprehensive Plan establish antidisplacement policies with the consideration given to the preservation of historical and cultural communities as well as investments in low, very low, and extremely low, and moderate-income housing; equitable development initiatives; inclusionary zoning; community planning requirements; tenant protections; land disposition policies; and consideration of land that may be used for affordable housing (RCW 36.70A.070(2)(h)); and

WHEREAS, the City of Sumner Comprehensive Plan Housing Element contains policy pertaining to the adoption of “provisions in the zoning code such as special zones or development standards that protect manufactured home parks over other types of housing developments” (Policy 6.3); and

WHEREAS, the City of Sumner Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element contains policy specific to the establishment of Manufactured Park Overlay zone with the purpose of the overlay being “to support the continuation of manufactured homes as the primary use on the property and to help ensure that MFHPs continue to provide affordable housing options for Sumner residents:” and

WHEREAS, manufactured home parks offer an affordable housing alternative within the City, particularly for families and seniors over the age of 55; and

WHEREAS, restricting the use of existing manufactured home parks to being only used for manufactured home park purposes reduces the potential for displacement of residents and the likelihood that these properties will be redeveloped; and

WHEREAS, the policies in the Comprehensive Plan pertaining to restrictions on future land uses of Manufactured Home Parks is consistent with the Growth Management Act.

NOW THEREFORE, THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SUMNER, WASHINGTON, DO ORDAIN AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. Chapter 18.34 “Manufactured Home Parks” title and the Sumner Municipal Code is hereby amended to read as follows:

Chapter 18.34

MANUFACTURED HOME PARKS AND OVERLAY ZONE

Sections:

- 18.34.010 Applicability.
- 18.34.020 Permitted locations.
- 18.34.030 Conditional uses.
- 18.34.040 Submittal requirements.
- 18.34.050 Park development standards.
- 18.34.060 Manufactured home site standards.
- 18.34.070 Nonconforming parks, site.
- 18.34.080 Operation and maintenance of manufactured home parks.
- [18.34.090 Manufactured Home Park Overlay Zone.](#)

Section 2. Section, 18.34.010 “Applicability” and the Sumner Municipal Code is hereby amended to read as follows:

18.34.010 Applicability.

The development, preservation and operation of manufactured home parks within the city shall be subject to this chapter.

Section 3. Section, 18.34.020 “Permitted Locations” and the Sumner Municipal Code is hereby amended to read as follows:

18.34.020 Permitted locations.

The locations for new manufactured home parks shall be governed by the underlying zoning.

Section 4. Section, 18.34.030 “Conditional Uses” and the Sumner Municipal Code is hereby amended to read as follows:

18.34.030 Conditional uses.

Where new manufactured home parks are required to receive conditional use approval, the hearing examiner and city council shall be guided by the following criteria in addition to the criteria of SMC 18.48.050 in making a decision:

- A. The park design, including site layout, street configuration, landscaping, and community space, are compatible with the surroundings and the community character goals of the comprehensive plan; and
- B. The park is consistent with the comprehensive plan; and
- C. The park makes adequate provision for sanitary sewers, drainage, water, streets, parks, and schools.

Section 5. Section, 18.34.040 “Submittal Requirements” and the Sumner Municipal Code is hereby amended to read as follows:

18.34.040 Submittal requirements.

All applications submitted for approval of a new manufactured home park shall consist of a development plan, including:

- A. Name of the person who prepared the plan;
- B. Names of all persons owning and managing the land proposed for the development;
- C. Name and address of the proposed manufactured home park;
- D. Scale of the plan and north arrow;
- E. Boundaries and dimensions of the manufactured home park, and number of acres included;
- F. Vicinity map showing uses on adjacent properties and the relationship of the development to such uses;
- G. Location and dimensions of each space, with each space designated by number or other designation;
- H. Location and dimensions of each existing or proposed building;
- I. Location, width and design standards of streets and pedestrian ways;
- J. Location, size and design details of all utilities serving the site;
- K. Location of each lighting fixture for exterior lighting;
- L. Location of recreational and other common areas;
- M. Location and type of landscaping, fences, walls, and other screening structures;

- N. Location, arrangement, and design of all parking facilities;
- O. Location of fire hydrants;
- P. Enlarged plot plan of a typical space, showing location of foundation base, storage space, parking, setbacks to property lines, utility connections, and other improvements;
- Q. Topography of the park site with contour intervals of not more than two feet, and a drainage plan;
- R. A survey plat of the property, plans of structures to be constructed, public water system and sewage approved by appropriate governmental agencies, and garbage disposal provisions;
- S. Any additional information relevant to determining if the proposal meets the applicable approval criteria.

Section 6. Section, 18.34.050 “Park Development Standards” and the Sumner Municipal Code is hereby amended to read as follows:

18.34.050 Park development standards.

The following standards apply to all new manufactured home parks.

- A. Size. A manufactured home park shall be the same as a planned residential development.
- B. Minimum Right-of-Way. A manufactured home park shall front an improved collector or arterial street.
- C. Density. Spaces within manufactured home parks, regardless of the underlying zoning, shall be a minimum of 4,800 square feet. The minimum space width within manufactured home parks shall be 60 feet. Up to 50 percent of the lots within a park may be no less than 50 feet wide.
- D. Buffers. A manufactured home park shall provide and maintain a minimum landscaped buffer of 20 feet along any property line abutting upon a public street or highway and at least a 10-foot landscaped buffer from any other boundary line defining the outside limits of the park. A maximum of half of the required buffer may coincide with the required setback for a space(s) within the park.
- E. Street Lighting. Street lighting shall be provided according to city standard.
- F. Underground Utilities. All utilities shall be installed underground.
- G. Swimming Pools. Community swimming pools shall meet the standards of the Tacoma-Pierce County health department and the building code.
- H. Signs. Signs identifying the manufactured home park shall conform to applicable sign ordinances.

I. Streets. Within manufactured home parks all streets shall be constructed to city of Sumner standards for public streets, including width, sidewalks, paving depth and base, curve radii and curbs; except that sidewalks may be a minimum of four feet wide. The width of right-of-way required of public streets and planting strips are not required to be provided. The responsibility for maintenance of private roads shall be with the park management. The vehicular speed limit shall be 10 miles per hour and shall be posted to the satisfaction of the police department.

J. Fire Hydrants. Fire hydrants as required by chapter 15.28 SMC shall be provided.

K. Recreational Vehicle Storage. Common storage areas for recreational vehicles, boats or trailers shall be provided as part of the manufactured home park design at the rate of 50 square feet for each site in the park. A six-foot-high sight-obscuring fence with a lockable gate shall be erected around the perimeter of such storage areas. Parking of recreational vehicles shall not be allowed other than in approved storage areas.

L. Playgrounds. Mitigation of parks and open space impacts shall be addressed through on-site provision of parks facilities and open space or through the payment of fees in lieu of such facilities and open space.

Section 7. Section, 18.34.060 “Manufactured Home Site Standards” and the Sumner Municipal Code is hereby amended to read as follows:

18.34.060 Manufactured home site standards.

The following standards shall be satisfied for new manufactured home sites within manufactured home parks.

A. One Home Per Site. No greater than one manufactured home shall be allowed on a manufactured home site.

B. Internal Setbacks. A manufactured home or attached accessory building shall not be located closer than 10 feet from any other manufactured home or attached accessory building; closer than 10 feet from any roadway lot line or five feet from any other manufactured home site line. Manufactured home accessory structures, when not attached to the manufactured home, shall not be closer than six feet from such home and shall not be closer than five feet to a manufactured home site line and 10 feet to a roadway lot line. Detached accessory structures, when less than 120 square feet may disregard setbacks from manufactured home site lines provided the structure is separated from the manufactured home and all other structures by six feet. No structures are allowed in park buffers.

C. Lot Coverage. A manufactured home and all accessory structures shall not cover more than 50 percent of the area of a manufactured home site.

D. Trailers and Recreational Vehicles. No travel trailer or recreational vehicle shall be utilized except as temporary living quarters and accessory to an existing manufactured home, which use shall not exceed a maximum of 30 days per year. No trailer or

recreational vehicle shall be stored on a manufactured home site, except designated storage areas, for more than five days per year.

E. Location of Parking. No required parking of motor vehicles shall be allowed within the 10 feet from the site line abutting a street or vehicular way.

F. Height. Structures within manufactured home parks shall be no greater than one story in height.

Section 8. New Section. A new section, 18.34.090 “Manufactured Home Park Overlay Zone” is hereby added to the Sumner Municipal Code to read as follows:

18.34.090 Manufactured Home Park Overlay Zone.

A. The Manufactured Home Park (MHP) Overlay Zone is intended to promote the retention of manufactured home parks as a source of affordable detached single-family and senior housing. This classification is assigned to certain existing manufactured home parks which contain leased home sites, as opposed to fee simple owned lots, and as such are more susceptible to future redevelopment. The Manufactured Home Park Zone Overlay shall apply to Medium Density and High Density Residential zones and limits development to manufactured home parks unless an exception is granted per subsection C of this section, or until a comprehensive plan and zoning amendment for another type of land use is requested, considered and adopted.

B. The following existing manufactured home parks inclusive of all associated parcels, shall be designated on the official Zoning Map per SMC 18.06.020 as Manufactured Home Park Overlay Zones:

1. Crystal Springs Mobile Home Park ;
2. Double A Mobile Manor
3. Summerville Estates

C. Use Exception: A manufactured home park owner may request a use exception from the application of the MHP Overlay Zone to their property following the procedures for a Type VI.a land use decision established in chapter 18.56 SMC. The City Council may approve a use exception if the property owner demonstrates:

1. the MHP Overlay Zone prevents reasonable use of the subject property; or
2. the uses authorized by the MHP Overlay Zone are not economically viable.

If the request is approved by the City Council, then the property shall revert to its previous zoning designation without further action by the City Council. Subsection D of this section sets forth additional requirements for the owner regarding relocation assistance.

D. The owner shall submit to the director a relocation plan detailing, at a minimum, the pertinent laws (City, County, of State), an explanation of tenant rights according to State law, a list of sources of assistance (governmental, financial, etc.), available vacant spaces within the mobile/manufactured home park, a list of nearby parks with available spaces, and a list of companies that move manufactured or mobile homes.

E. Residents within a manufactured home subdivision or park may request a change in zoning to the director that would establish a MHP Overlay Zone designation if there is a potential sale or change that would lead to the displacement of residents. The request for change in zoning shall follow procedures and criteria as set forth in SMC 18.52.

SUBJECT: Overview of Planning Commissions - MRSC Article

CATEGORY: Information Only

BUDGET IMPACT:

Expenditure Required: None

Within Budget Allocation: N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

1. MRSC Planning Commission Article

STAFF CONTACT: Chrissanda Walker, Associate Planner

SUMMARY BACKGROUND:

Now that we have new commissioners on board, staff would like to take some time to go over the key laws, responsibilities, and common procedures that guide the Commission's work. This will help everyone better understand their roles and how the Commission operates, and provide some practical examples to support you in making informed decisions moving forward.

COUNCIL COMMITTEE/STUDY SESSION:

MEETING/STUDY SESSION DATE:

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS/MOTION:

Review the article and recommended resources

Planning Commissions

This page provides an overview of planning commissions for cities, towns, and counties in Washington State, including relevant laws, responsibilities, qualifications, examples of rules of procedure, and more.

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Overview

Cities, towns, and counties that fully plan under the [Growth Management Act](#) (GMA) are required to have planning commissions to review and make recommendations on comprehensive plans, land use regulations, and community development issues to the agency's governing body (the council or board of commissioners).

Cities and counties that are not required to adopt comprehensive plans under [RCW 36.70A.040](#) but voluntarily choose to do so must create planning commissions. These planning commissions are required to review those plans according to [RCW 35.63.080-120](#).

Non-GMA cities or counties that do not adopt comprehensive plans are not legally required to have planning commissions. However, creating a planning commission is a good practice because it is a citizen advisory body that represents the jurisdiction.

Many tribes also use planning commissions to advise their tribal councils. Counties, cities, towns, and other agencies and boards can collaborate with these tribal commissions on issues including land use, transportation planning, climate adaptation strategies, and more. For more information on tribal planning, visit the [Department of Commerce Tribal Planning webpage](#).

Statutes

The following statutes apply to creation, organization and powers of planning commissions:

Cities, Towns, and Counties Planning under the GMA

- [RCW 35.63.100](#) – All GMA cities and towns; requires planning commission to develop and recommend comprehensive plans
- [RCW 35A.63.060](#) – GMA code cities; requires "planning agency" (which can be a commission) to develop comprehensive plans
- [RCW 36.70.400](#) – GMA counties; requires planning commission to develop and recommend comprehensive plans

All Cities and Towns Generally

- [Ch. 35.63 RCW](#) – *Planning Commissions*; applicable to all cities and towns.
 - [RCW 35.63.020](#) – Provides additional authority for first-class cities
- [Ch. 35A.63 RCW](#) – *Planning and Zoning in Code Cities*; allows creation of a planning agency, which can either be a planning commission or

professional roles like planning director or planning staff.

All Counties Generally

- [Ch. 36.70 RCW](#) – *Planning Enabling Act*

Regional Planning Commissions

- [RCW 35.63.070](#) – Cities and towns
 - [RCW 35A.63.040](#) – Code cities
 - [RCW 36.70.060](#) – Counties
-

Responsibilities

The city/town council or board of county commissioners directs the planning commission's projects and seeks feedback from them.

Local governments appoint planning commissioners to represent the city, town, or county at large, not particular interests. The primary role of the planning commission is to prepare and review the comprehensive plan, any proposed amendments, and the zoning/development code for council or board approval, acting as policy advisors, not policymakers.

Some local governments also authorize planning commissions to review certain types of development proposals, such as conditional use permits, critical areas reasonable use permits, and shoreline development permits. When planning commissions perform this role, the commission typically make a recommendation that the local governing body can approve, approve with conditions, or deny.

In some jurisdictions, the planning commission or hearing examiner may hold a public hearing and decide on certain land use actions. In these cases, the planning commission's decision would be subject to appeal to the local governing body.

Important: When planning commissions are involved in reviewing site-specific development proposals, their recommendations or decisions are considered quasi-judicial and therefore subject to the Appearance of Fairness Doctrine ([chapter 42.36 RCW](#)). For more information, see our page [Appearance of Fairness Doctrine](#).

Sometimes, a planning commission may express interest in municipal matters outside of its scope of work. If the planning commission requires that information to consider an item it has been directed to review (for example, a periodic comprehensive plan update), then it has more latitude. Otherwise, the commission should avoid discussing such matters during their meetings.

City and Town Planning Commissions

The requirements for city and town planning commissions may vary depending on the city classification and local ordinances/policies.

Towns and Second-Class Cities

Towns and second-class cities must have at least three and not more than 12 planning commissioners, who must be appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the city/town council ([RCW 35.63.020](#)). The exact number is set by ordinance or resolution, and up to one-third may be city or county officials serving in an "ex officio" capacity.

Any ex officio members serve for the duration of their tenure in office, while the appointed members serve either four-year or six-year staggered terms as determined by local legislative action. Planning commissioners must serve without compensation ([RCW 35.63.030](#)).

City/town councilmembers and certain other local government officials may be ineligible for appointment to the planning commission, as described later in the section on Incompatible Offices.

The planning commission must hold at least one regular meeting in each month for at least nine months each year ([RCW 35.63.040](#)).

Below are examples of town planning commission provisions:

- [Cathlamet Municipal Code Ch. 2.50](#) – *Planning Commission*
- [Winthrop Municipal Code Ch. 2.24](#) – *Planning Commission*

Code Cities

[Chapter 35.63 RCW](#) (summarized above for towns and second-class cities) applies broadly to all incorporated cities and towns. However, code cities have significant flexibility to adopt their own rules if desired regarding planning commission membership, organization, and expenses (see [RCW 35A.63.020](#)). For example, code cities could adopt different membership

requirements, different term lengths, or provide for compensation of planning commissioners.

In code cities, the elected mayor or appointed city manager has the authority to appoint planning commissioners, though council approval may be required by ordinance (see [RCW 35A.12.090](#) for mayor-council cities and [RCW 35A.13.080](#) for council-manager cities).

Below are examples of code city planning commission provisions:

- [Bellevue City Code Ch. 3.64](#) – *Planning Commission*
- [Buckley Municipal Code Ch. 2.33](#) – *Planning Commission*
- [Burlington Municipal Code Ch. 17.115](#) – *Planning Commission*
- [Goldendale Municipal Code Ch. 2.48](#) – *Planning Commission*
- [Kirkland Municipal Code Ch. 3.32](#) – *Planning Commission*
- [Lynden Municipal Code Ch. 2.08](#) – *Planning Commission*

First-Class Cities

Similar to code cities, first-class cities have significant flexibility to adopt their own planning commission rules and extend planning commission membership, duties, and powers beyond those in [chapter 35.63 RCW](#) (see [RCW 35.63.020](#)).

Below are examples of first-class city planning commission provisions:

- [Seattle Municipal Code Ch. 3.64](#) – *City Planning Commission*
- [Vancouver Municipal Code Sec. 20.220.010](#) – *Planning Commission*

County Planning Commissions

Charter counties have more flexibility than non-charter counties in shaping their planning commissions.

Charter Counties

Similar to code cities, charter counties have broad legislative powers in matters of local concern, so long as their action does not conflict with any constitutional provision or state law. See [King County Council v. Public Disclosure Comm'n.](#) (1980) and [AGO 1991 No. 17](#). This legislative authority gives charter counties discretion to adopt planning commission ordinances

with varied terms regarding membership, organization, expenses, and other local matters.

Below are examples of planning commission provisions from charter counties:

- [Clark County Code Ch. 2.06](#) – *Planning Commission*
- [Pierce County Code Ch. 2.78](#) – *Planning Commission*

Non-Charter Counties

Non-charter counties have less flexibility than charter counties since they are required to follow the parameters set forth in [RCW 36.70.070-120](#).

The planning commission must consist of five, seven, or nine members as provided by ordinance. Department heads may serve on the planning commission in an "ex officio" capacity as follows ([RCW 36.70.070](#)):

Size of planning commission	Maximum number of ex officio members provided by ordinance
5	1
7	2
9	3

The remaining members are appointed by the chair of the board of county commissioners with the approval of a majority of the board. In lieu of one ex officio member only, one staff member who is not a department head may be appointed to the commission.

To choose the appointive commissioners, [RCW 36.70.080](#) states that:

[E]ach member of the board shall submit to the chair a list of nominees residing in his or her commissioner district, and the chair shall make his or her appointments from such lists so that as nearly as mathematically possible, each commissioner district shall be equally represented on the commission.

The appointed planning commissioners serve four-year staggered terms ([RCW 36.70.090](#)).

Each county planning commission must hold at least one regular meeting per month, although the meeting may be canceled if there are no pending items over which the planning commission has jurisdiction. See [RCW 36.70.130](#), which applies to each "planning agency" as the term is defined in [RCW 36.70.020](#).

There are no statutes governing compensation for county planning commissioners.

County commissioners and certain other local government officials may be ineligible for appointment to the planning commission, as described below in the section on Incompatible Offices.

Below are examples of planning commission provisions from non-charter counties:

- [Chelan County Code Ch. 10.04 – Planning Department and Commission](#)
 - [Spokane County Code Ch. 1.06 – Planning Commission](#)
-

Planning Commissioner Qualifications

Most planning commissioners have experience with land use, elected office, engineering, traffic, or development. However, some are laypeople with little experience other than an interest in developing their community.

State law does not mandate required qualifications for planning commissioners, but cities, towns, and counties can adopt their own required qualifications, such as residency requirements.

Below are selected examples of planning commission job descriptions and applications:

- [Duvall Planning Commission Info Sheet \(2017\)](#) – Answers common questions about a planning commissioner's duties, purpose, qualifications, and time commitment.
- [Thurston County Planning Commission Requirements for Board Appointments \(2024\)](#)
- [Toledo Planning Commission Vacancy \(2024\)](#)
- [Woodinville Planning Commissioner Job Description and Application \(2024\)](#)
- [Woodland Planning Commission Vacancy \(2024\)](#)

- [Yakima County Planning Commission Volunteer Members \(2021\)](#)
-

Incompatible Offices

A planning commissioner is considered a "public officer" (see [AGO 2016 No. 7](#)) and may be restricted from serving in other governmental roles.

For example, MRSC's position is that city councilmembers or county commissioners should not serve on their own planning commissions, since planning commissioners are subordinate to the legislative body and make recommendations for the legislative body's approval, creating an incompatibility.

For more information, see our page on [Incompatible Offices](#).

Ethics and Conflict of Interest

Planning commissioners are subject to the code of ethics in state law ([chapter 42.23 RCW](#)) as well as any local code of ethics policies. Under the state code of ethics, planning commissioners are prohibited, for example, from using their position to securing special privileges and from receiving a gift from a third party for a matter related to their planning commissioner services.

For more information, see our page on [Ethics and Conflict of Interest](#).

Public Meetings and Rules of Procedure

Planning commissions are subject to the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) and must provide public notice of their meetings; see [RCW 42.30.020\(1\)\(c\)](#).

Below are several MRSC webpages discussing public meeting procedures and requirements:

- [Open Public Meetings Act](#)
- [Public Hearings](#)
- [Parliamentary Procedure: A Brief Guide to Robert's Rules of Order](#)
- [Appearance of Fairness Doctrine](#)

Planning commissions should adopt rules of procedure governing their public meetings and public hearings; below are examples:

Cities and Towns

- [Bellevue Planning Commission Manual \(2022\)](#)
- **Camas**
 - [Planning Commission Rules of Procedure for Legislative Hearings \(2014\)](#)
 - [Planning Commission Rules of Procedure for Quasi-Judicial Hearings \(2014\)](#)
- [Pullman Planning Commission Rules of Procedure for Quasi-Judicial and Legislative Hearings \(2021\)](#)
- [Shoreline Planning Commission Rules of Procedure \(2022\)](#)
- [Woodland Planning Commission Rules of Procedure \(2018\)](#)

Counties

- [Kitsap County Planning Commission Rules of Procedure \(2017\)](#)
- [Thurston County Planning Commission Rules of Procedure \(2024\)](#)
- [Yakima County Planning Commission Rules of Procedure \(2021\)](#)

Interacting with Elected Officials and Staff

In terms of best practices for elected officials working with planning commissions, here are some tips:

- Jurisdictions often have their own rules addressing councilmember attendance at planning commission meetings. If a quorum of councilmembers attend the commission meeting and then *act*, they may be violating the OPMA. While a quorum of the council can attend a commission meeting together, they cannot take any "action." "Action" is defined broadly in the OPMA and includes simple discussion.
- Councils and county commissions should also consider the distinction between legislative actions and quasi-judicial actions considered by the planning commission. Outside of the OPMA, there is no legal problem with a councilmember attending a commission meeting where legislative action is considered. Nevertheless, an independent advisory body should be able to consider their recommendations without influence from the legislative body that appointed them.

MRSC generally recommends that councilmembers do *not attend* planning commission meetings because of concerns with [appearance of fairness](#) issues.

For more information, see our page [Advisory Boards and Commissions](#).

Examples of Policies for Interactions with Planning Commissioners

- [Bothell City Council Protocol Manual](#) (2023) – See "Councilmembers' Role and Relationship with City Advisory Bodies."
- [Gig Harbor City Council Guidelines and Procedures](#) (2024) – See section 5.16 "Communications with City Council" which describes the relationship between the council and advisory boards.
- [Lynnwood Municipal Code Section 2.24.090](#) – Allows council president to appoint a member of city council to be available to an advisory body to provide a constructive relationship without implying direction, review, or oversight
- [Snohomish Municipal Code Section 2.06.070 Code](#) – *Staff Liaisons*

Vacancies and Removals

Typically, cities, towns, and counties will have rules governing the conduct of their boards and commissions, including addressing vacancies and the removal of commissioners.

Any vacancies that occur during a term must be filled, and the appointee will serve for the remainder of the unexpired term. See [RCW 35.63.030](#) for cities and towns and [RCW 36.70.100](#) for counties and consult your local charter, codes, or policies.

The mayor or chair of the board of county commissioners, as appropriate, may only remove a planning commissioner for inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office, and only with the approval of the council/board of commissioners after a public hearing. See [RCW 35.63.030](#) for cities/towns and [RCW 36.70.110](#) for counties.

However, first-class cities, code cities, and charter counties likely have additional flexibility regarding removal of a planning commissioner. For example, some jurisdictions have adopted provisions allowing for removal after a specific number of unexcused absences, although other jurisdictions may consider too many unexcused absences to fall under "neglect of duty."

Examples of Attendance and Removal Regulations

- [Bainbridge Island Ordinance No. 2019-01](#) (2019) – Establishes uniform procedures for removal or resignation of advisory board members, as well as for demoting the chair of an advisory board.
 - [Edmonds Municipal Code Section 1.05.010](#) – *Attendance Required – Remote Participation Allowed*; sets expectations for percentage of meetings required as well describing expectations for remote participation in meetings.
 - [Pierce County Code Section 2.78.050](#) – *Removal from Office*; establishes grounds for removal, to be approved by a majority of the council.
 - [Quincy Municipal Code Section 2.30.060](#) – *Removal*; mayor can remove commissioners for "incapacity, incompetence, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office or for a disqualifying change of residence." "Neglect of duty" is defined as unexcused absence from two consecutive meetings or from four meetings in a year.
-

Similar Offices

Some board members, commissioners, and staff may perform similar, but distinct, responsibilities to those undertaken by planning commissioners. These include:

- The **Board of Adjustments**, which considers zoning adjustment requests.
 - The **Design Review Board/Architectural Review Board**, which reviews consistency with adopted design standards, and may be a sub-committee of the planning commission.
 - The **Historic Preservation Commission**, which is typically responsible for reviewing applications for historic landmark status and permits for the alteration of historic properties. For more information, see our page on [Historic Preservation](#).
 - **Hearing Examiners**, who consider site-specific rezones, special use permit approvals, variances, etc. as assigned by the council. For more information, see our page on [Hearing Examiners](#).
 - The **Zoning Board**, which considers applications of zoning ordinances and appeals of the zoning administrator's decisions.
-

Selected Court Decisions

Below is a selection of court decisions that are relevant to the role of the planning commission.

Brinnon Group v. Jefferson County (2011) – Held that the county’s legislative body can make changes to the comprehensive plan amendment recommended by the county planning commission without referring the proposed change or alteration to the planning commission for further public comment and redrafting before the revised plan amendment may be adopted if the public already has had a full opportunity to comment on the proposed change or alteration.

The court also held that a county planning commission's delay in providing the signatures of its chairperson and secretary on a comprehensive plan map containing revisions recommended to the county's legislative body for its consideration and approval as required by [RCW 36.70A.400](#) does not render the legislative body's approval of the plan void if the record shows that the delay did not prevent the legislative body from understanding the planning commission's recommendation.

Citizens to Preserve Pioneer Park LLC v. Mercer Island (2001) – Addresses whether the city council exceeded its authority, as an appellate tribunal, when it interpreted and applied zoning variance criteria regarding visual impacts differently than the commission. The court held that the municipal code did not preclude the council from finding facts, that the council was allowed to modify the decision of the commission, but that the council did not disregard or change the basic facts on which the planning commission relied.

Concerned Coupeville Citizens v. Town of Coupeville (1991), *review denied* – The court decided:

It is clear that under [RCW 35.63.060](#), a planning commission "may act as the research and fact-finding agency of the municipality." A commission acting in such a capacity, however, does not possess fact-finding powers that are final and unreviewable by the municipality. This is made clear by the terms of [RCW 35.63.120](#), which empowers the council or board to "modify or disaffirm any decision of the commission."

Buchsieb/Danard, Inc. v. Skagit County (1982), *affirmed* (1983) – Held that the Planning Enabling Act, [chapter 36.70 RCW](#), provides that reports and

recommendations of the planning commission relating to plats, subdivisions and other "official controls" are advisory only, the final decision as to such controls resting with the county board.

D.E.B.T., Ltd. v. Board of Clallam County Comm'rs (1979) – Addressed whether the board of county commissioners had authority to reject the recommendation of the planning commission and require that the proposed development comply with the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). The court noted that [chapter 35.63 RCW](#), which authorizes the creation of planning commissions and the adoption of comprehensive plans by municipalities within the state, gives to planning commissions only the power to make recommendations to the board of county commissioners ([RCW 35.63.060](#) and [RCW 35.63.100](#)). The adoption or rejection of such recommendations is in the sound discretion of the board, and the board may disaffirm any decision of the planning commission ([RCW 35.63.120](#)).

Lutz v. Longview (1974) (abrogated on other grounds by *Yim v. City of Seattle* (2019)) – Addressed the separation of functions and powers of the planning commission and the city council, holding that a city council cannot delegate its legislative authority to adopt zoning modifications (where the city council allowed the planning department to adopt a new public utility district zone that differed from existing zones) to the planning commission.

Chrobuck v. Snohomish County (1971) – Confirmed that the appearance of fairness doctrine applies to planning commissions, requiring that their quasi-judicial proceedings, including their hearings and fact-finding processes, be fair and impartial.

Recommended Resources

In addition to MRSC's resources on [Planning & Growth Management](#), [Economic Development](#), and [Climate & Environment](#), below are some other organizations and resources for planning commissioners and staff that work with these commissions.

Washington State

- [American Planning Association \(APA\), Washington Chapter](#) – Includes events, trainings, professional development, and other resources
 - [Welcome Planning Commissioners and Elected Officials](#) – Page for new

or potential planning commissioners

- **Department of Commerce:**
 - [Short Course on Local Planning](#) – Includes dates of scheduled workshops and videos of past courses
 - [New to the Planning Commission? FAQs](#)
- **Jurassic Parliament** – Useful resource on how to run local government advisory commission meetings
- **Planning Association of Washington (PAW)** – Grassroots educational organization serving the needs of planning commissioners, elected officials, tribes, special purpose districts, and more

National

- **American Planning Association (APA)** – Includes publications, trainings, and applied research
 - [Planning Commissioner Training Series](#) – Three-part training course that covers preparing for and managing planning commission meetings, and making legally defensible decisions
- **Congress for the New Urbanism** – Provides resources, education, and technical assistance to support walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods
- **Planetizen** – Public-interest information exchange for the urban planning, design, and development community
 - [Planning Commissioner Training](#) – Includes 10 courses on the essentials of citizen planning
- **Western Planner** – Publication of planners' networking group that represents 13 state planning associations in the western U.S. and Great Plains

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