



DRAFT
CITY OF WHITE SALMON
Planning Commission Workshop - Wednesday, October 11, 2023

COMMISSION AND ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL PRESENT

Commission Members:

Greg Hohensee, Chair
Seth Gilchrist
Michael Morneault
Ross Henry
Tom Stevenson (Arrived at 5:42 pm)

Staff:

Erika Castro Guzman, Project Coordinator

Planning Consultants:

Dan Nickel, Consultant Planner

CALL TO ORDER/ ROLL CALL

Chairman Greg Hohensee called the meeting to order at 5:32 pm. A quorum of planning commissioner members was present. There were no audience members in attendance.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. White Salmon Critical Area Update

During the work session, the Planning Commission discussed the agenda and suggested starting with input from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) since it had the greatest impact on the code.

Two options were discussed between the Commission and DCG/Watershed regarding the implementation of new riparian management recommendations. DCG/Watershed Consultant Planner Dan Nickel discussed White Salmon's stream classification and regulations. They debated whether to keep the existing 200-foot riparian buffers or adjust them based on the site potential tree height tool suggested by WDFW, which could result in buffers ranging from 150 to 195 feet.

DCG/Watershed discussed the importance of shading streams, input of woody debris, and site potential tree height for habitat and erosion control. The Planning Commission also considered the interplay between stream protection and existing practices and the use of the best available science to make informed decisions.

Commissioners discussed different options for managing stream buffers and development in specific areas. They considered keeping the existing buffer with adjustments for certain stream classifications, as well as using site potential tree height information to determine buffer sizes that would average between 150 to 195 feet.

Ultimately, the commissioners decided that the best option for the city would be to keep the existing (200 ft) buffers for Type S and use the average of the tree height potential for Type F streams.

As part of the Commissioner's discussion regarding edits, a number of recommendations and suggestions were made regarding changes to certain regulations and requirements. Staff agreed with some of the proposed edits, while others were deemed unnecessary or required further clarification.

The Planning Commission discussed various edits and clarifications to be made in the Critical Area Ordinance Update. They debated the use of "must" versus "need to," clarified the intent of a 500-square-foot expansion, and discussed the inclusion of third-party verification for designating species of local importance.

Tree preservation was discussed in further detail by the Commission, as well as the need to balance housing goals with tree preservation. Another possibility was to add language about the return of fish from the sea in a specific definition.

It was suggested by Commissioners Michael Morneault and Seth Gilchrist to clarify and improve the heritage tree ordinance, including defining a grove of trees and the requirements for tree removal, as well as the cost of hiring an arborist and potential inequity when it comes to tree removal.

It was controversial, however, to allow individuals to designate their own trees as heritage trees. During the discussion, tree protection ordinances were discussed in relation to the affordability of homes and the development cost of land. There was an acknowledgment that a balance needed to be struck between the preservation of trees for aesthetic and design purposes and the need for housing, but no clear resolution was reached. It was stressed that there must be a balance between protecting trees and allowing development, encouraging thoughtful consideration and planning.

It was discussed by the Planning Commissioners that the messaging and perspective around the heritage tree ordinance should be changed to make it less restrictive and more protective. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of properly caring for and replacing trees that are removed. They explored the idea of modifying the language to encourage tree preservation and increase awareness among the public, while also considering the input of the City Council and the need for effective tree protection measures.

DCG/Watershed discussed the process of updating the Critical Area Ordinance and creating a separate ordinance for heritage trees. Consultants recommended not delaying the revising of the Critical Area Ordinance by focusing on a new tree ordinance, since the final decision belongs to the City Council (tentatively November 15, 2023).

No formal action was taken.

The Planning Commission anticipates wrapping up final edits to the heritage tree ordinance and making a recommendation to the City Council on October 25, 2023.

Commissioner Ross Henry shared he will be unavailable from October 13 – November 10, 2023.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:14pm.

Greg Hohensee, Chairman

Erika Castro Guzman, City Project Coordinator