

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES



HYBRID/REMOTE AND IN-PERSON AT THE MILL

September 17, 2025

CALL TO ORDER: 6:00 PM by Chair Janice Huxford

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Janice Huxford, Commissioner Bruce Morton, Commissioner Mike Duerr, Commissioner Nathan Packard, Commissioner Connor Davis and Council Liaison Ryan Donoghue

MEMBERS ABSENT: Vice-Chair Jennifer Davis was absent. Chair Huxford announced Commissioner Murika Matz has resigned from the Commission. Commissioner Packard moved, and Commissioner Duerr seconded, a motion to excuse Commissioner Jennifer Davis's absence. The motion passed unanimously.

STAFF PRESENT: Principal Planner David Levitan, Senior Planner Amber Brokenshire, Planning Director Russ Wright, Administrative Assistant Dawn Erickson

OTHERS PRESENT: Intern Cameron McTee

Chair Huxford called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call: As noted above.

Guest business: None.

Approval of Minutes: The August 18, 2025 meeting minutes were approved as written. Commissioner Packard made the motion, and Commissioner Connor Davis seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion Items: Principal Planner Levitan reviewed the critical areas best available science (BAS), gaps analysis, and discussed potential code amendments after reviewing recommendations from the city's consultant. The gaps analysis identifies code areas that need to be added or modified, while the BAS review provides the technical foundation for any updates. Of particular note was a memorandum from WDFW regarding guidance issued in 2020 reframing protection of riparian areas (where there is an interface between land and a river or stream), which emphasizes a shift in terminology from the concept of "stream buffers" to "riparian management zones" (RMZs) and their ability to provide full function based on the site potential tree height (SPTH) of previous or existing trees on site. This approach would determine the buffer area using the average maximum height of the tallest dominant trees (200 years or more) for a given site class. Doing so would dramatically increase buffer size (quadruple or quintuple

existing buffers) and diminish potential buildable lands. Staff are already conversing with WDFW and consultants on alternatives that provide adequate water quality and habitat protections.

Gaps analysis identified definitions/general provisions that need updating to match RCW, or BAS (allowed activities within CAs), and relatively minor updates to wetland sections

Discussion among staff and the commissioners centered on:

- A distinction between native trees vs. non-native trees
- Modification requests/success in other jurisdictions
- Potential for partnering with other jurisdictions
- Unincorporated Snohomish County ordinance (Principal Planner Levitan will investigate)
- Concern for housing/employment being sacrificed for natural preservation, conflict with GMA's original intent
- Potential for site-specific reviews
- Previously disturbed areas being exempted from this policy
- Providing a minimum 100 ft buffer achieves about 90% of desired effects
- Fish-bearing vs non-fish-bearing streams
- Finding a balance in our urban environment
- What kinds of uses would be allowed in riparian zones (Principal Planner Levitan will look into this)

Principal Planner Levitan noted that the major task is that the CAO lacks CARA regulations, so staff must create a new section to address permissible uses, monitoring requirements, and best management practices. There are several good examples of CARA regulations that the city can utilize as it develops code language. CAOs do not apply to areas within shoreline jurisdiction, which also applies to some of the city's streams (governed by the Shoreline Master Program).

Principal Planner Levitan said that staff will brief the City Council in October, and a draft of the updated code language will be shared with the commission later this fall. Still, the update will likely extend into 2026 so that Surface Water's developing basin plan analysis can be incorporated.

Planner Levitan summarized staff takeaways from this discussion: 1) There is a consensus that 235' buffers would not work for residential and employment growth; 2) It is essential to look at other jurisdictions that have proposed alternative approaches, and 3) ensure we have regulations that reflect Lake Stevens and have as much environmental protection as possible.

Chair Huxford pointed out that any changes in regulations in the industrial centers will hugely impact existing businesses.

The conversation shifted to emergency housing/shelters protective buffer recommendations. Principal Planner Levitan provided maps showing how eligible areas throughout the city would be affected using buffer widths (from schools, parks, commercial childcare, etc.) of 300', 500' and 1000'. After discussion, it was generally agreed upon among the Commissioners that the 500' protective buffer from schools, parks and other shelters, in conjunction with maximum occupancy and property management regulations, would be sufficient from a health and safety perspective. Commissioner Morton stated he does not support enforcing the buffer around parks and other shelters, but endorses the 300-foot buffer. Chair

Huxford pointed out that these facilities need to be located near essential services for those using the facilities

Commissioner Reports:

- Commissioner Duerr commented that Zply Fiber is destroying the sidewalks at the north end of the lake where they are working. Director Wright said he will check with Public Works to ensure Zply is proceeding as they should.
- Commissioner Packard reminded everyone that budget discussions at City Council are currently in progress. He also encouraged attendance at a Town Hall event on October 6th.
- Commissioner Morton commented on the nice new pavement on Vernon Rd and Main St
- Commissioner Packard asked about the sidewalk widths on Main St., which are encouraging trucks with boat trailers to park 3-4 feet up onto the sidewalk. Director Wright stated that the sidewalks are extra wide to accommodate a future bike path on the sidewalk. Commissioner Connor Davis pointed out that this use of the parking spaces on Main St. prevents people from shopping downtown.
- Chair Huxford said she had met with Public Works Director Halvorson regarding the Machias Cutoff at S Lake Stevens Rd. She also said the mayor is considering hiring a consultant to investigate a possible solution, but a pilot is being considered first. Public Works is currently focused on quieting traffic.

Director's Report

Director Wright discussed a summary of Hearing Examiner cases that Planning & Community Development has had YTD. Commissioner Connor Davis asked about the status of the museum project, which Director Wright stated it is under permit review, with an expectation to put out RFBs in October, followed by a 7-9 month construction window.

Adjourn: Motion by Commissioner Morton, with a second by Commissioner Duerr, to adjourn the meeting at 7:16 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully,

Dawn Erickson, Administrative Assistant