

Minutes
Cheney Planning Commission
Regular Meeting – By Phone/Video Conference

November 8, 2021

Commissioners Attending: Richard Mount, Vara Lyn Conrath, Natasha Jostad, Jake Vibbert, and Dan Turbeville.

Commissioners Absent: David Early (one position vacant)

Staff Attending: Brett Lucas, Todd Ableman and Susan Beeman.

Councilmembers Attending: Vince Barthels and Mayor Chris Grover.

Call to Order: Chairman Mount called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. and welcomed Mark Losh, new Executive Director of the West Plains Chamber of Commerce.

Approval of Minutes: Commissioner Turbeville made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 13, 2021 regular meeting as distributed. Seconded by Commissioner Conrath, and the motion carried unanimously.

Citizen Participation: None.

Information Item: #2021-12
Zoning Code Updates to Consider

Mr. Lucas reviewed a list of zoning code items proposed for consideration in the coming months. These included:

- Clarification that density calculations may not include public right-of-way.
- Consider language that would address shipping containers as livable units.
- Amend permitted uses in C-1, C-2 and MX zones to allow residential uses.
- Consider amendments to the use tables for the I-1 and BP zones. Mr. Lucas is preparing a matrix which compares our existing codes to nearby jurisdictions; consider whether amendments should be made.
- Consider whether shipping containers may be used for dry goods storage, with provisions for appropriate screening from the public right-of-way. There are an increasing number of requests to allow shipping containers to be placed as businesses try to respond to Covid-related supply chain disruptions.
- Consider amendments or updates to our code regarding wireless communication facilities. This section of code has not been updated since initial adoption about 20 years ago, and it does not address current technologies (whip antennas such as are being placed on city-owned utility poles, etc.)

- Addition of code language to regulate Airbnbs and other vacation rentals.

Mr. Lucas stated that he would possibly have some draft language for consideration by the Planning Commission in January or February.

Discussion followed. Chairman Mount asked if Ptera is up and running in Cheney now. Mr. Ableman said that they are currently running fiber as attachments on Cheney Light power poles. Avista Edge is also running a pilot program in Cheney, using antennas which integrate with our electric meters.

Commissioner Vibbert said that Ptera has a tower on his building at the business park, and it is working very well.

Commissioner Vibbert asked why we are trying to get involved in Airbnbs. Mr. Lucas explained that there is a lodging tax that hotels and motels are required to collect, and there may also be a need for safety inspections by the Fire Department. There could be some liability for the City if certain minimum safety standards are not met. Consideration at the Planning Commission level would be undertaken at the request of the Code Enforcement office.

Information Item: #2021-11
CDBG Project Proposals for 2022

Mr. Ableman explained that the City has not applied for CDBG funds since 2019. In previous years, the water mains on N 3rd ST were completed in two phases, and the mains on N 4th ST were completed in two phases. This year we are proposing to begin work on N 5th ST, but we also have a very concerning situation with the water main on Elm ST between N 6th and N 5th. Two high priorities of the CDBG program are street infrastructure and water infrastructure, so we capitalize on our street preservation program, which is funded by a local utility tax, and use that as a match to request funds to complete water main repairs and replacement.

Mr. Ableman said that we will be requesting around \$200,000 in this grant cycle, which will cover about 600' of water main work. In the last 20 years, we have received almost \$2 million in CDBG funds. Mr. Ableman added that for our request of \$200,000 for water main work, we typically provide around \$400,000 in matching value for residential street repairs.

Mr. Ableman noted that the map shows a section of street preservation work on Washington ST from SR-904 to W 6th ST. He explained that we are showing it on the map, but that section of street repair will be done using federal dollars, which may not be used to match the federal dollars allocated through the CDBG program.

Information Item: #2021-13
Economic Development Update

Mr. Lucas gave a report on spatial interaction modeling on the West Plains between 1960 and 2020. He showed a series of graphs depicting population growth in Cheney, Medical Lake, Airway Heights and Spokane, and discussed regional events that contributed to the population growth or decline in these cities. The construction of I-90 in the early 1960s impacted Cheney's growth as the freeway bypassed the town completely. Closure of three auto dealerships between the 1980s and 1990s also had an impact. He noted that Medical Lake's population has increased very slowly over the last 50 years, while the trend for Airway Heights has been a steep increase since 2000, in part due to the investment in casino development and siting of Walmart.

Mr. Lucas suggested that EWU is no longer a major driver; we have more people leaving Cheney daily to work elsewhere than entering Cheney to attend classes. In the last 2 years, Covid has also impacted population: how many people are now working remotely, and how many will continue to do so?

Discussion followed. Chairman Mount asked what kind of money the City has budgeted for economic development. Mr. Ableman said that there have been discussions at the Council committee level about adding a person or contracting with a firm for economic development activity.

Commissioner Conrath noted that this is not the first time the Planning Commission has indicated interest in directing some funding toward economic development.

Mr. Lucas noted that some areas have created Economic Development Corporations (EDCs) to help charge economic growth at the county or regional level. In addition to promoting those communities, EDCs have other tools, such as providing low-interest loans to help stimulate economic activity.

Mark Losh, representing the West Plains Chamber of Commerce, suggested that one aspect really lacking in this area is incubator spaces for new businesses. He said there are three of these facilities in Missoula, and they have waiting lists of potential tenants. We have a university which is turning out graduates who want to start businesses, and this is an idea that is really taking off in other communities.

Mr. Losh added that the West Plains Chamber is no longer housed in an office in Airway Heights, but has gone virtual. He works out of his home, which is in Cheney.

Mr. Lucas suggested that this is an area where the business park could really fulfill a need. Mr. Vibbert added that business incubator space is planned for Phase 2 of his project, right behind the storage units.

Discussion continued. Commissioner Turbeville stated that you can go from Spokane to Airway Heights on a four lane highway. He believes that until we get SR-904 updated to four lanes, we will remain a rural outlier.

Mr. Ableman said that Cheney is involved with the West Plains Transportation Network, working with T-O Engineers. We did a study about 10 years ago related to widening SR-904 and it got some attention, but no funding.

Commissioner Jostad commented that she think of recreation opportunities in connection with Cheney: Turnbull, wetland trails, the Fish Lake resort, which is kind of run down, but there's history there. Mr. Ableman agreed that we need to see a return to pre-Covid activity levels to bring people into the community regularly.

Mr. Losh commented that the town of Darby, Montana, raised enough money to rebuild their rodeo grounds, and now hosts 8 rodeos a year. Hamilton, Montana, has a brewfest every year that brings thousands of people into town, and \$20,000 to \$30,000 in profit to the Chamber of Commerce in that town. He offered to sit down and discuss some of these ideas with anyone who might be interested.

Information Item: #2021-014
Rental vs. Owner-Occupied Update

Mr. Lucas reviewed the results of some research he has been doing on home ownership versus rentals in college towns west of the Mississippi. The proportion of rental units versus owner-occupied in Cheney is about 70% to 30%. He explained that he wanted to see if this was unique to the Spokane/Coeur d'Alene market as well as in non-urban college towns in other parts of the country. He wanted to identify contributing factors, and some up with some action items that might help reverse the trend and bring more balance.

Mr. Lucas explained that his preliminary results indicate that Cheney is on the high end of rental units as a percentage of overall housing units in the Spokane area, along with Airway Heights. There is similar rental clustering in Ellensburg and Pullman, as well as in parts of Texas and Louisiana.

Mr. Lucas showed a series of maps depicting the percentage of owner-occupied versus rentals, average household size, and single family-duplex-multi-family breakdown.

Mr. Lucas reviewed his methodology for this analysis, and explained that he looked at several indicators in relation to the rental/ownership discrepancy. These included:

- Household median income
- Day/Night population and Day/Night population change
- Median age
- % Population in poverty
- % Population with a college degree
- Median home value
- Median rent

Mr. Lucas showed maps and charts documenting his findings, and noted that the highest correlation is between age and rentals. Common themes include a lower median household income. He added that his next steps will be additional data analysis, and clustering, with the hope of identifying some achievable solutions to help bring a better rental/owner-occupied balance.

Commission Reports:

Commissioner Jostad asked about construction at Sutton Park. Mr. Ableman said that a slide was installed last week as a replacement for one that was damaged by a fallen tree in a windstorm last spring. Commissioner Jostad said that a portion of walkway is still missing, and boards are not secure. Mr. Ableman said that he will check into this and report back.

Staff Reports:

Mr. Lucas reported that we may have some comprehensive plan amendments to consider in 2022; he is currently working with several citizens who are preparing applications.

Mr. Ableman reported that the yard waste area has been very active, and we are reaching capacity at our outdoor storage pad, so the yard waste bins are scheduled to close a little early this year, on Monday, November 15.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:33 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved By:

Susan Beeman, Secretary

Richard Mount, Chairman