

**Okanogan County Planning Commission  
Public Hearing  
Okanogan County Code Amendment 2023-1, Chapter 17A Zoning**

**February 20, 2024**

**In attendance:**

**Planning Commission members**

Chair: Salley Bull (District 3)

Vice Chair: Phil Dart (District 3)

Dave Schulz (Member, District 2)

John Crandall (Member, District 2)

Verlene Hughes (Member, District 1)

Recent appointee (District 1)

At Large Position: Vacant, unfilled

**Planning Director:** Stephanie (Pete) Palmer

**County staff members** (numerous)

**The Public**

These notes were taken by an Okanogan County Watch volunteer. Every attempt is made to be accurate. Notes are verbatim when possible, and otherwise summarized or paraphrased. Note takers comments or clarifications are in italics. These notes are published at <https://www.countywatch.org/> and are not the official county record of the meeting. For officially approved minutes, which are normally published at a later time, see [https://okanogancounty.org/offices/commissioners/commissioners\\_proceedings.php](https://okanogancounty.org/offices/commissioners/commissioners_proceedings.php)

The time stamps refer to the times on the AV Capture archive of the meeting on this date at [https://www.okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live\\_streaming\\_of\\_meetings.php](https://www.okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live_streaming_of_meetings.php).

**Summary:**

\*Director Palmer states the goal of having Planning Commission is to end public comments on Zoning changes tonight and deliberate at a future meeting, (closed to public testimony.) Planning Commission's recommendations would be passed on to the County Commissioners, who would hold a final public hearing.

\* Planning Commission decides to continue this hearing in 3 weeks at Agriplex, due to no room available tonight to accommodate those attempting to attend.

\* Publication of a new Legal Notice for the continued hearing is promised by the Planning Commission.

\* Most of public signed up to testify tonight choose to wait until the future continued hearing to testify. Most who testify express discontent with the fairness of the process.

\* Some attendees testify on items that are not a part of the proposed changes at tonight's hearing, and confusion develops over a new "Blue Line" document not available to the Commission or the Public until tonight's hearing.

**Public hearing begins:**

**0:00:00 - 0:30:24** Planning Director Pete Palmer opens meeting, reading legal notices and explaining that the Planning Commission's goal will be to hear public comment on proposed changes to the County Zoning Ordinance tonight and then to closed public testimony on the issue. It is proposed that at a future meeting, the Planning Commission will deliberate upon the public comments and develop a recommendation to the County Commissioners regarding approval of the Zoning changes.

**00:30:24 - 43:19: Planning Commission discusses a continuance of the hearing** in 3 weeks at the Agriplex, where sufficient seating is available.

**Vice-Chair Phil Dart** expresses feelings about the unfairness of having a meeting where so many people need to stand there crowded, with no seating. He advocates for setting the meeting at a future date when people can be comfortable in expressing their opinions. Says that he wants to hear what the people are saying.

**Voices from the audience** point out that some people have already left because there is no space. Planning Commission agrees.

After debate and discussion, the Planning Commission decides to continue the hearing until a date 3 weeks from today at the Agriplex. However, online testimony will not be available due to inadequate internet access in that building. This upcoming continued hearing will be legally advertised again. Those who wish to stay and testify this evening will be allowed to do so. (Some voices and comments cannot be heard well enough with the current sound system. )

**00:43:19 - Public Comments:** The public was invited to give comments tonight or to wait until the continued hearing in 3 weeks. They cannot testify both times. Most choose the latter, since among other issues the "Blue Lined" document that was not presented to the Planning Commission until just before the meeting, and everyone does not have an actual copy. There are difficulties with the sound system, which are addressed periodically.

**The below comments are summarized. Others who were called upon chose to wait until the next hearing. Many do not identify the location of residence.**

**Shane (Math?) :** There's a difference between the approach of West Siders vs people who live here. Not sure what we are trying to solve here. Where does it lead? Does it stop with meters on our wells? This can lead to restrictions. Doesn't end in a good place. No one Shane knows thinks this will be to our benefit. (Much applause)

**Robin Stice:** - Agrees with Shane. A 3-year rebuild plan for homes is too short. You need to think about 5-years. There are funding issues. People have insurmountable family things. Fire issues are a concern regarding space for firefighters, getting in and out of the property,. She has been a wildland firefighter and seen many problems with getting in and out of properties and congestion of vehicles. There needs to be two ways to get to a building, with adequate parking. (Substantial applause.)

**0:50:02 - Lorelei Pene (?)** Opposes changes. The procedures are slimy. These changes will be detrimental. Commissioners need to remember who they work for. They will be accountable, come election time.

**0 :51:37 - Trinity Stucker** - May I testify later if I testify now? (Answer: One time only is allowed.) I will withhold until next meeting, then.

**0:52:22 - Dick Ewing,** Testifying for Farm Bureau: (People complaining about sound system.) Mic replaced. Cites SEPA. Zone code does not comply. Already designated water should not be restricted. County's job to assure availability, not use water as a weapon. Reviews figures regarding acre/ft limitations. Need reconsideration about the water resource to provide for multifamily homes and other necessary uses.

(Discussion as to who relinquished their time for Ewing, who continued after the 3 minute limitation.)

**David Freels - Brewster** Concerned that gravel pit situation is still not corrected in the copy he has seen. A huge concern that they will be taken away - you can't do this to us (overcome by emotion.)

**Rocky DeVon - Oroville** - Many "hats" - Wa Realtors, Remax in Oroville, family has ranched since 1888. Contrasts the schedules /situations of the officials and the meetings they hold with the working people (who are busy working and cannot always attend during working hours) Cites WA state being the worse-housed state in the country. We need housing. Contrasts current situation with past history. Most ranchers are gone. Can't afford to ranch, and now with these changes they won't be able to sell their property. Private property rights are the foundation of the United States. One acre minimum changed to 2 acre minimums takes away 1/2 of your property's value. Stop treating us like we are Seattle. (Applause)

**Karen McKenzie - Okanogan.** Supports Dick Ewing. There are 487 changes in permit requirements here (in response to the county saying there are no changes.) How can this be enforced? What does it mean for the people? Citizens need to be able to give input. They may have constructive input. What is the purpose? Proper notification must be done. There are numerous mistakes in the permit section. Should never be done in a hurry. I do not accept the zone code document as amended. (Applause)

**1:08:13 - "Point of Order:"** Question from the audience asking for clarification of who can testify when, what the meaning is of the red line copy vs the blue line copy. Palmer attempts to explain the confusion and the recommendations that will be made, states that there will be

another public testimony and a hearing before the County Commissioners. Once again goes over "red line copy" vs "blue line copy." The blue line copy will address the gravel pits, and there will be a public comment period (written) for 30 days that will be attached to the documents. The Commissioners will decide upon this after the red line copy issues have been decided. People can comment to the Commissioners in re both the red line and the blue line after the Planning Commission's extended hearing.

**1:11:18 - Questions from audience. "Who are those people behind the rail?"** Palmer quickly names staff and officials standing behind the rail. Hearing pauses to move podium due to problems with visibility. **Another question:** You have 75 comments on 'this.' Are they taken into consideration? " (Answer by Palmer: Yes,) "That's a lot of comments."

**1:12:54 - Bob Tollefson** - Lifelong county resident. Owns several gravel pits. County doesn't know how much it costs us to do this. Without gravel, you won't build anything, including roads. By changing R-1 to R-2 zoning, you are confiscating my livelihood. Used to have 35 employees and now we only have 2. Everyone has been run out by regulations. You have taken our ability to make a living here, and grandchildren can't stay or move back. (Applause)

**John Dahl - Oroville.** Looked through the document. Went to definitions, looking for legal language. There are things I am not seeing in the definitions - like "shall" and "shall not." Inclusive and restrictive wording. It's either a massive oversight or a power grab. You have a problem right there. Secondly, code enforcement personnel cannot trump my private property rights. And county code enforcer cannot enter my property without my permission or a warrant. If they do, they are inviting upon themselves legal actions. You need to make this clear to those who enforce. We are watching you. I moved away from Skagit county, etc. to get away from that. Pay attention. We are all watching you. (Much applause.)

**Question by "Craig."** What are the changes as to wells in Wauconda?

**Palmer** - no changes in regard to wells - Anything changed is because of the "stipulation." (*Probably referring to court action by Yakama nation.*) Any well-drilling or on-site permitting is done by Health Dept or Dept of Ecology.

**Isabelle Spohn - Twisp.** Due to testifying virtually, says she has never seen the blue line copy. Requests that the blue-line red-line issue be explained again before deciding whether to testify tonight. Decides to testify, considering that comments to the Commissioners will be allowed, but audio system not working well. Cites her previously written comments addressing the change permitting huge resort-like single family homes in the lower Methow on 5 acres. Says that wildfire, fire fighters' lives, and residents' lives, are the most important issue in this ordinance. Points out that the Community Wildfire Protection Plan hasn't been revised since 2013 and lists 5 goals of the current Comprehensive Plan regarding wildfire that this zoning revision does not address. She states that implementation of these goals and objectives could save lives (but the zoning changes does not include them.) Applause.

**Cliff Berry** - Ex-Naval citizen. On fixed income. Every time costs are raised, has less ability to pay for things he and his family need. Has been all over the US and heard meetings like this

many times, where people (mostly environmentalists) tell us what we can and cannot do. Talks about "rock pits" - my property has two of them. Now, a CUP will be required for me to just take a shovel and get dirt/rock for my plants. Take the Methow for example. They have destroyed it. It used to be one of the best fisheries in the state. It's really OUR decision what we do with our property. If you make a call to 911, the average response time is 44 minutes. We need to get a handle on this stuff. I appalled you because you have to listen to the laws that come from the other side of the mountain where we left, because we don't want to live in that crap. (Much applause.)

**Question from Audience:** (Woman) If all this happens like you said, does this mean that more people will come? Where you split the lands in half, etc? They say (????) Will we get more people in our county?

**Salley Bull** - "We are still growing, yes."

(**Woman**)- Oh, well, shit. Well, I'm against it!!! ( Much laughter, and a joke from audience - too unclear - to "Laurie.")

**Public comments end.** There will be a continuance, and advertised the two required weeks.  
Question - Will it be this time of day? (Audience agrees)

**Bull** - "Yes."

**Audience:** Regarding the commissioners? Will it be during the day when everyone is working?

**Bull** - I don't know, maybe we can twist their arms.

**Air quality issues:** everyone is talking. Someone speaks about notification to public on this type of issue. Cannot be heard. Too loud. Someone asks for order.

**Palmer:** Nichole wants to know if county can use the EMS service. EMS has concerns about too many messages and people thus giving up on listening to messages if it is used too often.

**Bull** - (Regarding a question about using e-mail notifications on hearings, etc.) Legal notifications are on our website (apparently referring to Planning Commission page on County website) and in the Gazette and Chronicle.

**Someone** complains out loud: Who cares? No one reads the Gazette. They have 2 (or 3?) employees.

**1:33** - Crowd breaks up

**1:38:06 - Meeting ends by turning off the sound.** (Adjourning the meeting had been apparently forgotten)

