

Housing Action Plan Outreach Results

Cowlitz County Building and Planning

Outreach included 5 committee meetings, 11 individual interviews, and over 60 online survey responses. Participants said supporting market-rate projects, developing housing for seniors, and increasing the number of smaller units in urban areas were paths to support increased housing variety across cost levels.

Code Changes

- County code should be as flexible as possible to encourage housing development
- Reduce minimum lot size in Urban zoned areas to increase lot yield
- The front yard setback reduces the number of homes in an area, and increases costs
- Adjust zoning maps to reflect on the ground infrastructure improvements. Allow additional homes near public and private facilities, this would decrease the need for expensive wells and septic systems
- Increase the amount of land zoned Multiple Family
- Increase allowed density in Multiple Family zones
- Reduce required Right Of Way for private roads
- Staff should recommend code updates to the Cottage Housing and PUD ordinances

Process Changes

- B&P should review Stormwater/Private road plans
- Stormwater review process should be simple
- Increase speed of B&P permit review
- Make the permitting process accessible to common people
- Research the ability for the EHU to test well water
- Reduce B&P permitting costs
- Offer virtual consults, pre-app conferences, online permit submittals, and payments
- Identify permitting process for Group Housing with shared kitchen amenities
- Clarify Tiny Home permitting and design requirements
- Encourage dialogue between Planning Commission/BOCC
- Draft shared septic maintenance agreement

Outreach

- Identify staff to act as a Housing Navigator for Builders, they could answer questions, and set up meetings
- Send a quarterly update about changes in the B&P office to frequent permit users
- Host periodic, informal B&P open houses
- Actively market the benefits of building in Cowlitz County
- Encourage Beautification efforts to attract development
- Create an information dense 'Developer's Toolkit'
- Market the highly flexible ADU Code
- Collaborate with CWCOG/Woodland on Housing Action Plan
- Undertake robust outreach effort to disseminate this HAP
- Partner with Cowlitz Economic Development Council
- Encourage PUD to expand electricity to rural areas

Invest in the Future

- Focus on Market-Rate, For-profit, housing
- Create a housing specific geographic vision for County
- Encourage incorporation of county areas
- Support Housing for Seniors, this includes:
 - Zone for new senior housing and cottage housing
 - Run a potential project through a permitting process to identify expected timeline, cost, and procedure
 - Review existing senior housing, identify projects that already work
 - Send staff to a housing development training/business to learn how to support these types of projects
 - Promote Senior Property Tax programs
 - Support Housing in Place for seniors
 - Programming for seniors to age in place
- Encourage quality construction
- Create a Housing Trust Fund to build/finance housing
- Staff should identify land for development, prepare preliminary information and market this land to housing developers. If appropriate, staff could take this a step further and create 'Shovel Ready' preliminary configurations
 - Hall/Hansen RD area in Toutle
 - Design should focus on improving quality of life
- Fund infrastructure expansion to close-in rural areas
- Complete a utility survey to identify areas for development
- Support permit-exempt wells in the Lewis River Valley
- Encourage WAC amendment to allow one bedroom septic
- Cost sharing program for sewer/water expansions

Other

- County Code should support housing that is:
 - Quality, multiple story rental housing
 - Middle income housing
 - Safe, high quality, apartments for young professionals
 - Zero-lot-line developments
 - Encourage ADUs and starter homes
 - More homes of all sizes at a variety of price points
 - Low income home ownership and rentals
- Plan for telecommuters to live in Cowlitz County
- Inventory existing mobile home parks for expansion
- Transitional Housing
 - Provide programing to support people living in recreational vehicles and trailers
 - Provide free or reduced cost housing on sliding scale
 - Inpatient addiction and mental health facilities
 - Rental housing for newly independent adolescents
 - Innovative tiny house communities

Read the full outreach summary and more at the project website:

<https://www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/2800/Housing-Action-Plan>