



**PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**Draft Meeting Notes July 16, 2025**

<b><u>Commissioners present:</u></b>	Jason Evans, Joel Metlen, Gary Walvatne, David D. Jones, Kathryn Schulte-Hillen, and Tom Watton
<b><u>Commissioners absent:</u></b>	Kris Kachirisky
<b><u>Councilor present:</u></b>	Carol Bryck
<b><u>Public testimony:</u></b>	Terrance Shumaker, Nicole Jackson, and Russ Axelrod
<b><u>Staff present:</u></b>	Planning Manager Darren Wyss and Management Analyst Lynn Schroder

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The meeting video is available on the [City website](#).

**1. Call To Order and Roll Call**

Chair Metlen called the meeting to order at 6:00pm. Planning Manager Wyss called the roll.

**2. Public Comment related to Items not on the Agenda**

None.

**3. Approval of Meeting Notes: [05.21.2025](#) and [06.18.2025](#)**

Commissioner Evans moved to approve the meeting notes for 06.18.2025. Commissioner Walvatne seconded. **Ayes: Watton, Schulte-Hillen, Walvatne, Evans, and Metlen. Nays: None. Abstentions: Jones. The motion passed 5-0-1.**

Commissioner Watton moved to approve the meeting notes for 05.21.2025. Commissioner Walvatne seconded. **Ayes: Schulte-Hillen, Walvatne, Watton, and Metlen. Nays: None. Abstentions: Jones and Evans. The motion passed 4-0-2.**

**4. Work Session: [Proposed CDC Clean-Up Amendments](#)**

Planning Manager Wyss noted that some individuals may be present to testify on Topic Four of the proposed CDC amendments, which addresses the Limited Land Use decision-making process. The City recently received revised guidance from the Department of Land Conservation and Development that contradicts earlier communications. As a result, further consultation with the City Attorney's Office is necessary to fully evaluate the new direction and determine the most appropriate approach for updating the development code to comply with state requirements. Given this, Wyss recommended removing Topic Four from the current amendment package and proceeding with the proposed density-related code updates. The Planning Commission will discuss limited land use decisions at a future date after consulting the city attorney.

Public testimony was provided by Russ Axelrod, Terrance Shumaker, and Nicole Jackson. Public testimony expressed concern about the proposed removal of the Planning Commission from key land use decisions. Speakers emphasized the importance of maintaining opportunities for public input and ensuring transparency in the development review process. Nicole Jackson testified that the process for street vacations should not be moved to the Municipal Code.

Wyss presented the staff report on the proposed density-related amendments to the West Linn Community Development Code (CDC), focusing on clarifications to minimum and maximum density calculations and lot configurations.

Topic One addresses the lack of clarity and consistency in how density is calculated under the current Community Development Code. At present, the definitions of “acres gross” and “acres net” appear in only one section of the code, contributing to confusion and inconsistent application. The proposed amendments would eliminate these terms and introduce a more widely used and consistent approach to defining and calculating density. Currently, there is no single, clear, and objective section that explains how to determine both maximum and minimum density. These changes aim to streamline the code language, enhance clarity, and ensure density requirements are applied uniformly across all development projects.

Commissioner Walvatne asked for clarification about how the proposed changes to definition of “acres net” and “acres gross” will be applied throughout the code. Wyss explained that changes in the definitions eliminate duplicative terms.

Commissioner Walvatne asked how the density changes effect trees. Wyss explained that the proposed amendments clarify how density is calculated. The process begins with the gross developable area, from which specific types of land—identified in the code as Type I and Type II lands—are subtracted. These include land dedicated for public parks, public rights-of-way, and proposed private streets. The result is the net developable area. The code currently allows, and will continue to allow, applicants to optionally subtract areas containing heritage trees, significant trees, or tree clusters from the net developable area if they choose. This optional deduction provides additional flexibility for preserving natural features within the development site.

Topic 2 seeks to clarify the Partition Minimum Density Exemption that has been interpreted by some applicants to mean that if a proposed partition includes only three parcels, the project is exempt from minimum density requirements—regardless of the maximum density allowed.

Topic 3 focuses on the layout of streets and lots/parcels during development to ensure that future changes or issues can be effectively managed. The CDC is not clear and objective regarding the referred lot shape. This has recently led to a variety of creative lot/parcel configurations. Consistent lot sizes and shapes contribute to cohesive neighborhood design and a stronger sense of community. The amendments address these concerns through provisions related to lot size, shape, and the alignment of side lot lines.

Commissioner Walvatne expressed interest in including a tree code update as part of the current code amendment package. In response, Wyss explained that while the tree code update is on the Planning Commission’s docket, it has not been prioritized by the City Council. He also noted that the update is expected to be a substantial, in-depth, and time-intensive process.

**5. Work Session: [West Linn Waterfront Vision Plan](#)**

Public testimony was provided by Russ Axelrod, Terrance Shumaker, and Nicole Jackson. Public comments reflect ongoing concerns about aspects of the proposed development and the transparency of the planning process.

Russ Axelrod testified that, in his view, the community engagement process for the Waterfront Vision Plan has failed in public involvement and community-based planning. He urged the City and Planning Commission to pause the current schedule for advancing the plan to City Council. He recommended

taking the time to engage more fully with the entire community and prepare a revised version of the plan in 2026.

Terrance Shumaker testified that a key concern with the Waterfront Vision Plan lies in the design of the final survey questions and flawed survey results, leading to potential bias. He stated that the community overwhelmingly stressed the need to preserve a wetland in the pond district and that community feedback was not represented in the Vision Plan. He urged prioritization of environmental cleanup before advancing development plans in sensitive areas.

Nicole Jackson testified that most public comments regarding the Pond District supported preserving it as a natural area with minimal development. However, this feedback appears to have been largely overlooked, with only a brief acknowledgment in the Community Engagement Summary. She stated that the plan proposes medium-density development in a critical natural resource area, including the floodplain—contradicting most community feedback, which favored preservation. She also noted that the final survey was flawed.

Wyss presented the final draft vision plan, highlighting the guiding principles and community engagement efforts that have taken place since 2016. The waterfront is divided into three distinct planning districts, each with its own characteristics and access challenges. The final vision plan seeks to revitalize the area by promoting diverse land uses and improving access to the river.

The city has engaged the community for ten years, with the feedback distilled and incorporated into the final draft vision plan. Community input played a key role in shaping the plan, with a strong emphasis on environmental stewardship and transportation enhancements.

The working group reached consensus to advance the vision plan to City Council, accompanied by five recommendations. Members emphasized the importance of incorporating affordable housing and integrating Smart Growth principles to guide future development. Ensuring strong access to and throughout the project area was highlighted as a critical component. There was also a recommendation to strengthen the language around the reuse of existing structures to better reflect sustainability goals. Some participants requested additional time for the community to provide further feedback. Working Group member Schultz expressed objections, specifically calling for more certainty around the future use of the property. The representative from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde chose not to take a position on the plan.

Commissioner Evans clarified that the Waterfront Plan is just a vision plan and does not proposed changes to the development code. Wyss stated that the next phase would be to work with the community to consider rezoning of properties and changes to the development code that would align to the district visions. Evans pointed out that properties within the district can already be developed under the current zoning and development code, regardless of the proposed vision plan.

Commissioner Walvatne stated that the 2021 Willamette Falls Drive Concept Plan, which informed the Waterfront Plan, includes relocating the road onto the Mill Property. This new alignment would run directly behind five historic properties. He expressed concern that this could create an uncertain situation, potentially resulting in two roads: one in front and one behind the properties. Walvatne questioned how property owners would access their buildings under this configuration. He also noted that the 2021 concept plan plans for new round-about near the existing roundabout for the I205 exit. He noted having 2 roundabouts so close together would be like a roller coaster. He objected to moving WFD to the mill parking lot. He stated that the property owner should be developing the roadway, not the City. Lastly, he noted that the Willamette Falls Trust received \$45 million from the Oregon

Legislature to purchase property on the West Linn side of the Willamette River. He expressed that the Willamette Falls Trust is leaving out the Confederated Tribe of the Grand Ronde. He stated that these issues need to be worked out before the Waterfront Vision Plan can move forward. He also expressed frustration that the City has not adopted roundabout design manual similar to Bend. He did not believe the plan reflected the community vision for the Pond District related to housing density.

Commissioner Jones asked how public and Commissioner comments would be addressed. He noted his concern about whether all public input is being fully represented. He underscored the need for more conversation—particularly around the accuracy of the survey, representation of public comments, and FEMA code updates to create better community support for the Waterfront Plan.

Wyss responded that the federal directive regarding FEMA code updates has changed and is currently in flux. As a result, the July 31, 2025 deadline is no longer applicable. However, the City still plans to move forward with implementing the updates this fall. The floodplain is currently located within the Willamette and Tualatin River Greenway overlay, as defined in the existing code. Under these regulations, any development in these areas must include restoration and mitigation measures to address potential impacts. The upcoming FEMA code updates will reinforce this by requiring no net loss of habitat. Applicants will be required to conduct a habitat assessment and demonstrate that their projects will not harm salmonid habitat. While these FEMA requirements are new, the intent largely aligns with the existing code—just addressed in a different section.

Regarding community engagement, Wyss noted that it is thoroughly documented in Appendix A. He noted that the final survey was meant to be a broad temperature check, not a scientific survey. He emphasized that the City has been engaging the public on this project for ten years. While the community could continue to "plan about the plan," he cautioned that ongoing discussions without action would prevent the City from moving forward with implementation.

Wyss stated that after ten years of outreach, the project has reached final stage of adoption. Out of a city of 27,000 residents, only five public comments were received, which he suggested indicates broad community acceptance—or at least an absence of significant opposition.

He emphasized that the plan is well-informed and supported by a recommendation from the working group. He clarified that the Planning Commission's role is to provide a recommendation to the City Council, which will ultimately decide whether to adopt the plan.

Delaying adoption of the vision plan, he explained, would hinder efforts to revitalize the area in a way that promotes a diverse mix of land uses, enhances river and recreational access, and honors the area's heritage. Without the plan in place, properties remain subject to current zoning regulations which primarily designates the area for industrial use. Medium-density residential zoning exists at both the northern and southern ends of the site, along with a commercial zone located at the northern edge. Current land use designations hinder the site's potential for more diverse and versatile land uses including river access.

Commissioner Watton acknowledged that achieving unanimous community support for the plan is not feasible but emphasized that this should not hinder progress. He cited the example of the Wizer Block development in Lake Oswego, which faced strong public opposition in the early 2000s. Despite that initial resistance, the project was ultimately completed and is now widely supported by the community.

Commissioner Evans echoed Commissioner Watton's statement, emphasizing that it is the Planning Commission's responsibility to evaluate whether the City has fulfilled its role in developing and presenting the plan. He stated that commissioners must ultimately consider whether the plan serves the best interests of the community. He stated that the City Council tasked staff with developing a vision plan, and staff has fulfilled that directive. The plan has now been presented to the Planning Commission for feedback, and he believes the Commission's role is to provide that input and help move the process forward.

Chair Metlen commented that, even though the document is a concept plan, there is inherent risk in using it as a foundation for decision-making without a thorough public process to vet key elements. He expressed concern that, without that process, some parts of the plan could be perceived as endorsements rather than preliminary ideas.

He pointed specifically to the section of the plan showing medium-density residential in the Ponds District. While it is labeled as being in the planning stage, he noted that it could easily be interpreted as a formal endorsement of future development—especially since the map itself shows that the area lies within the 100-year floodplain.

Metlen warned that this creates the expectation that development is not only possible but desired by the City, even though there are many regulations and constraints that may prevent it. He emphasized that the City may, in fact, be neutral on whether that development should occur, and cautioned that depicting it prematurely could be seen as a directive rather than a possibility.

Chair Metlen asked staff to respond to a comment regarding the need to change the Comprehensive Plan in the Ponds District. Wyss clarified that the Comprehensive Plan designation for the Pond District is already established and there is no intention to change either the current zoning or the Comprehensive Plan designation for existing residential zones. He further explained that the commenter's request to downzone property could raise potential legal concerns, including a possible takings issue. He stated that the City may need to include additional language regarding mixed-use development to strengthen the connection between the Comprehensive Plan and the potential changes to zoning and development codes.

**6. Planning Commission Announcements**

None.

**7. Staff Announcements**

Planning Manager Wyss reviewed the upcoming Planning Commission schedule.

**8. Adjourn**

Chair Metlen adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:10pm.