



## White Salmon CityLab Board Meeting - DATE/TIME CHANGE

### A G E N D A

September 28, 2023 – 5:00 PM

100 N Main Ave and Zoom Teleconference

Meeting ID: 846 3637 8356

Tacoma Call In: +1 253 205 0468 US OR +1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

Zoom Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83483113958>

#### Call to Order

#### Public Comment

#### Discussion and Action Items

1. Housing Code Update Discussion

#### Adjournment

**File Attachments for Item:**

1. Housing Code Update Discussion



TO: CityLab Board Members  
CC: Marla Keethler, Mayor, City of White Salmon  
Troy Rayburn, City Administrator, City of White Salmon  
FROM: Michael Mehaffy, Structura Naturalis Inc.  
RE: Initial review and recommendations on zoning changes for implementing the HAP  
DATE: September 22, 2023

I have been hired to help implement the City’s adopted Housing Action Plan, which aims to add housing supply to meet growing demand, increase housing diversity, and offer more affordable homes, especially for workforce and moderate income residents. At the same time, we recognize that livability and quality will need to be maintained and even enhanced, and any impacts to existing neighbors will need to be mitigated with appropriate safeguards – developed and agreed to with, and by, the neighbors themselves. (I have referred to this as a “QUIMBY” approach – “QUality In My Back Yard.”

I have already taken the first major step in this process, to review the City’s zoning code and associated regulations, and to see not only where changes might allow additional housing, but also to comply with recent state laws that mandate changes to accommodate so-called “middle housing” (duplexes, multiplexes, rowhomes, ADUs, etc). A related State mandate is to provide “clear and objective” regulations for approval. These can be as prescriptive as the City and neighbors want, but must only be very clear in what they require.

After my preliminary review of the City’s zoning code and other associated regulations, I have developed a series of draft recommendations. I say that these are draft because in many cases, they need further consideration and vetting of potential problems or pitfalls, and or addition of supplemental recommendations. Even then, of course, I recommend that the stakeholders and members of the public have an opportunity to review and comment (and/or be surveyed) before these are formally proposed in the context of hearings and Council or Planning Commission actions.

As I have reported previously, the City has a number of options on ways to proceed in adopting the Housing Action Plan, and in particular making changes to the existing zoning code and related ordinances. **One option is to make incremental changes to the code** to streamline entitlement and permitting, and to make it possible for more projects to move forward consistent with more recent higher-density design standards (while maintaining safeguards on quality and mitigation of impact to neighbors and the public).

As I noted, some of these incremental changes have already been mandated by recent state laws requiring “clear and objective” standards, higher densities, and related provisions. This is a double-edged sword: while it does compel the City to take certain mandatory actions, it may also help the City to move more quickly on adopting the HAP, since these are elements that must be complied with in any case. That is likely to translate into reduced time for hearings and potential delays from stakeholders.

**A second option is to implement a broader zoning reform**, shifting to a more graphical form-based coding approach. (This could also include so-called “pattern books” or “pattern languages,” and also prototype plans.) This would likely require more time and more steps in the process. In addition, I would recommend that such a broader action include consideration of street and public space design standards, since they affect the overall walkability, access to services, character and livability as well.

**A third option would be to combine the first two**, starting with some “low hanging fruit” including immediate zoning changes and streamlining, while working towards more fundamental changes later in the process. This approach would have the advantage of moving more quickly on helpful streamlining, such as making it easier to approve accessory dwelling units, easing minimum building width requirements, etc.

**My recommendations follow the general approach of targeting the *impacts* rather than targeting the *use***, or other incidental aspects. This follows the broader shift within the profession away from complicated “non-agile” zoning that seeks to exhaustively list restrictions, and towards more “agile” performance-based zoning, that seeks to specify key performance criteria within a more streamlined coding environment.

Following this approach, I have identified a number of places where, with the best of intentions, the code has gradually become overly complicated and restrictive, and in that sense, “non-agile”. The goal is to streamline as much of this as possible, while ensuring that public good is maintained.

Following the idea of beginning with the “low-hanging fruit,” I have recommended four initial targets for zoning code reform. I stress that these are not the only targets that I would recommend, and I would keep in mind the longer-term goals even as you implement short-term goals. However, they might represent a first step in a longer process.

The four initial targets are:

1. Eliminate the minimum residential width requirement, and allow the building code and its provisions for “habitable spaces” and fire/life safety provisions to govern. (I have written a more detailed analysis of this issue which can be provided if desired.)
2. Allow residences in the Riverfront District zone, and more residences in the Commercial zone, according to a proportional formula that preserves capacity for employment-generating uses.
3. Consistent with the new state laws, increase the number and types of units that can be placed on a lot in all zones, including rowhomes, duplexes, multiplexes, cottages, and other “middle housing,” with appropriate mitigation of impacts on existing neighbors.
4. Reduce in all zones the setbacks, minimum lot sizes, minimum floor areas, maximum building widths, maximum lot coverages, minimum depths and widths, and maximum heights (with appropriate safeguards for viewsheds as well as sunlight on neighboring properties). These can be more consistent with the prevailing market trends and changing professional standards, which have changed significantly since these regulations were established.

I would certainly not advise that units be “jammed in” carelessly, or without the meaningful involvement of neighbors in evaluating and finalizing the specific provisions to assure quality. (Again, this is the “QUIMBY” model.) On the other hand, experience shows that it is certainly possible to have beautiful, livable neighborhoods with more and smaller residences, and more diverse residences, for different people at different stages of life. To achieve this goal, we need a proactive and not a reactive approach – and I do think the City has that opportunity before it.

I look forward to discussing these recommendations!