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Jefferson County Adopts Unified Development Code Amendments

Port Townsend, WA—The Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) adopted the Unified Development Code amendments on July 10, 2006 which went into effect on July 17, 2006. The amendments, known as the UDC “Omnibus,” are a comprehensive survey of the whole UDC and amend nearly every section of the code.

“The objectives for the Omnibus were to improve the efficiency of the permitting process and to foster economic development opportunities by making the UDC consistent with the County’s Comprehensive Plan,” said Al Scalf, Director of the County’s Department of Community Development (DCD). “The staff and Planning Commission members identified conflicts in language within the development code and the new amendments clarify those issues for Jefferson County residents.”

Since adoption of the UDC in December 2000, there has not been a full review of the code. Consequently, the amendment package was developed for public review and final consideration by the Board of County Commissioners. A public hearing on the Omnibus was held on June 19, 2006 by the BoCC. Discussion by the commissioners was held following the public hearing and continued on June 22, 2006. There had also been a public hearing on January 9, 2006.

There was a variety of small and substantive changes in the Omnibus, with many of the changes making the process for certain land use or development in the County easier to work through for the public and easier to implement by the County.

A quick summary of just a few of the major changes include:

Under a redefined “Development Permit Application,” DCD now can accept a “valid pending septic application” to fulfill part of the required information. Septic approval typically takes longer than other steps in the development process, often freezing a pending application. Acceptance of a “valid pending septic application” could expedite the permit process.

“Boundary Line Adjustments” (BLA) amendments will make it possible for the public to make reasonable adjustments to their property, including the ability to make adjustments across different Rural Residential Densities. Some BLA application fees for multiple adjustments have been modified so that individuals can apply for multiple BLAs at one time. However, standard application fee(s) shall apply to each BLA after the first two per additional parcel, lot, tracts. This makes applications more equitable, so someone making a simple BLA isn’t paying the same as someone making 10 BLAs.

The BoCC made a motion on February 14, 2006 stating, “In the future, such appeals will go directly from the Hearings Examiner to the Superior Court.” The Omnibus removes now obsolete references to the Appellate Examiner.

“Plat Alterations” will make it much easier for the public to make certain modifications. The ability to make plat alteration existed prior to the UDC, but was not included in the UDC adoption in 2000. This amendment resurrects that ability.

A few other amendments include language to clarify standards for “Food and Beverage Stands,” like drive-through espresso stops, “Definitions” that address junk vehicles and auto repair in rural areas, and “Cottage Industry” standards and regulations defining auto and truck repair services.

There are many more changes to the code, so for more information about the newly adopted UDC amendments, contact the Department of Community Development, Long Range Planning, at 360.379.4450 or via e-mail at planning@co.jefferson.wa.us. More details can be found on the County’s Web site at www.co.jefferson.wa.us/commdevelopment/UDC_Omnibus.htm.

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