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County Seeks Public Comment on “Omnibus” Development Code Amendment Package

Port Townsend, WA—Jefferson County adopted the Unified Development Code (UDC) in December 2000 as the set of regulations to implement the 1998 Comprehensive Plan adopted under the State Growth Management Act (GMA). The UDC has been amended several times since adoption, but to date there has not been a full review of the code. Over the past couple years, County staff and a sub-committee of the citizen volunteer Planning Commission have developed an “Omnibus” code amendment package for formal public review and eventual consideration by the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC).

“This is the first complete survey we’ve done of the development code,” explained Al Scalf, Director of the County Department of Community Development (DCD). “We’re hoping that we gather a good deal of public comment to help improve this amendment package.”

The Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on the preliminary proposal on October 5, 2005, 6:30 PM, at WSU Community Learning Center in Port Hadlock. The proposal and associated environmental analysis under the State Environmental Policy Act is available for review on the County website, at the DCD offices, and at the County Library in Hadlock. Summary description of the content of the proposal and details on the public review process can be found in the Legal Notices section of the September 14 edition of *The Leader* and on the County website.

The full name of the amendment package is the “Unified Development Code Housekeeping Omnibus for Permit Efficiency” (UDC HOPE). The Omnibus was originally conceived to improve the development review process based the experience of implementing the UDC since its first use in January 2001. In addition to “housekeeping” corrections, a key objective is to realize potential for optimum permit processing efficiency and to expand business and development opportunities within the parameters of State law and local land use policy.

In 2004, the County Comprehensive Plan was significantly updated and streamlined. The preliminary Omnibus package includes changes that would improve consistency between the 2004 version of the Comprehensive Plan and the development code. The Omnibus also proposes to eliminate the “stand-alone” UDC in favor of full integration into the Jefferson County Code (JCC), which is the full body of code language used by the County to implement legislatively-derived goals and policies. The UDC would be maintained as Chapter 18 of the JCC.

Early stakeholder involvement in development of the proposal included discussion with the Land Use Planning and Economic Development Advisory Panel (LUDEPAP), including representatives from the Economic Development Council of Jefferson County (EDC) and others involved in economic development strategy and business development and operation. The LUPEDAP will be invited to continue participating in the discussion as the proposal goes before the Planning Commission and BoCC during the formal public process. The goal of the enhanced stakeholder involvement process is, at the end of the process, an amended code that reflects as

many insights and addresses as many concerns as possible, especially among those who are customers of Jefferson County development review services.

“The DCD process for developing the Omnibus was inclusionary,” said Tamer Kirac, EDC Executive Director. “This sort of input is invaluable. I wish a lot of decisions would be made this way, but a process like this takes time and resources.” DCD received a small grant from the State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development to develop and implement an early stakeholder involvement process.

The Omnibus proposal also includes code-related recommendations that resulted from a third-party analysis of permit processing constraints in the County DCD. The County contracted The Latimore Company LLC in August 2004 to study the review process for building permits, land use approvals, and related development services. They examined the relationships between three County departments (Community Development, Public Works, and Health and Human Services [Environmental Health division]). The purpose of the study was to identify constraints in the process and to provide findings and recommendations for system improvements.

Additionally, this project responds to issues identified in the June 2003 Jefferson County Economic Assessment completed by the University of Washington (known as the “Sommers Report,” after one of the principal authors, Dr. Paul Sommers). Among the identified challenges for economic development is a lack of unified economic development efforts between Jefferson County Community Development and other local entities (Executive Summary, p. 3). Among the identified challenges of operating a business is overly restrictive regulation (Exec. Sum., p. 4). Survey results indicate that the second most-identified barrier for maintaining and/or operating a business in Jefferson County is land-use regulation (69% of sample, Exec. Sum., p. 6). Two of the identified major shared goals between local economic development are “Work toward coordination and consistency (streamlining) of the permitting and regulatory processes” and “Act in compliance with the Washington State GMA” (Exec. Sum., p. 3). At least two identified issues in the Sommers report have been addressed through implementation of the stakeholder involvement strategy, by involving local economic development representatives in an early process for reviewing and potentially amending the County development code with the goal of improving the permitting and regulatory processes.

The Planning Commission will consider public comments on the Omnibus and recommend a proposal to the BoCC. The County Commissioners may hold an additional public hearing before taking legislative action later this year or early next year. Notice will be posted in the newspaper of record and on the County website. For more information about the Comprehensive Plan Amendment Cycle, contact the Department of Community Development, Long Range Planning, at 360-379-4450, via e-mail at planning@co.jefferson.wa.us or go to the County’s website at www.co.jefferson.wa.us.

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