



The Enterprise

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Local hearings needed

Large-scale zoning changes are complex and raise many difficult issues, and that is certainly the case with proposed zoning changes in the Husum-BZ Corner area.

According to a memorandum produced by the county's Planning Department, hundreds of additional homes will need to be constructed in the Husum-BZ area over the next 20 years. Obviously, that is a huge increase over the housing that currently exists, and impacts are likely to be substantial.

That's why it is essential that the Klickitat County Board of Commissioners and Klickitat County Planning Department hold hearings on the proposed changes closest to the areas that would be most affected -- Husum, BZ, White Salmon, Bingen, and Trout Lake.

It is unfortunate that the official county hearings to discuss rezoning plans for the Husum-BZ area have been held in Goldendale, which sharply limits the ability of local citizens to attend and participate. Because of this, a group of local citizens had to take it upon themselves to hold a public forum on the issue at the White Salmon Community Library (the meeting was set for the evening of July 25).

Citizens shouldn't have to set up their own meetings on something that could have major local impacts. This topic was and is a natural for a full-blown, county-sponsored public hearing at the Pioneer Center building. After all, that was one of the spotlighted benefits of the new building: Meetings on issues affecting the western end of the county were to be held in the western end of the county, instead of always in distant Goldendale.

It's not yet too late for the Klickitat County Board of Commissioners to do the right thing and set up a Pioneer Center meeting. Although the commissioners have scheduled a Thursday, Aug. 9, date for a hearing and possibly a vote on a Husum-BZ zoning change proposal that would allow substantially more housing (at 1:15 p.m. at the County Courthouse in Goldendale), that vote could easily be tabled to allow for more citizen participation.

This issue is too important to rush into. Many people have unanswered questions and concerns about what the long-term implications of proposed zoning changes would be.

Perhaps the biggest concern is the water supply. Currently, White Salmon is literally running out of water in its wells as the city's aquifers -- located between White Salmon and Husum -- are not recharging adequately. Where will the water for hundreds of new homes and residents come from?

Traffic is another major issue. Nearly all the added hundreds of vehicle trips per day to and from the Husum-BZ area would have to come through White Salmon and Bingen on SR 141, or by way of Alt. 141. Will these highways have to be upgraded to accommodate the increase?

And how can the county's Planning Department contend that adding hundreds of new homes and residents will not have a significant impact on the area?

When citizens want public hearings in the area directly affected by potential changes and ask for more time to review the long-range impacts of rezoning, our elected representatives should be willing and even eager to grant those requests.

JB