



The Enterprise

USFS hits plans for Husum-BZ rezoning

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In a two-part meeting that stretched to nearly five hours, the Klickitat County Board of Commissioners heard voices from all sides last week regarding proposed zoning changes for the Husum-BZ Corner area.

Supporters of the new zoning proposals contended that the changes would impact only a small portion of the planning area and that growth would be limited to about 15 new homes per year. Further, they noted that the changes would give property owners more flexibility in using their land.

Those objecting to the plan voiced concerns that additional two-acre zoning could lead to substantial new housing development in the Husum-BZ Corner area. That growth, they contended, could sharply impact groundwater, traffic, and other resources, thereby harming the area's rural character and diminishing the quality of life for residents.

Over the course of the last several years, the Husum-BZ Community Council has been holding meetings and workshops as the elected council members worked to fashion an updated zoning plan. In July, the proposed final plan was unanimously approved by the Klickitat County Planning Commission and sent on for review by the County Commissioners.

The Sept. 6 hearing, held at a packed Pioneer Center in White Salmon, drew well over 100 citizens. Commissioners Ray Thayer and David Sauter were present for the meeting, while Commissioner Don Struck -- who owns property in the Husum-BZ area -- recused himself and was not in the hearing room.

Both the U.S. Forest Service and the city of White Salmon expressed objections to the zoning plan in its current form.

Last week, the White Salmon City Council voted 5-0 to submit a letter regarding the zoning plans to the Board of County Commissioners. The Sept. 6 letter, signed by Mayor Francis Gaddis, was read into record during the hearing by White Salmon City Council member Timi Keene.

Excerpts from the letter included:

The city has never been consulted to offer input or to benefit from explanation of the intent or effect of the plan if implemented;

The sub-area boundaries include a large portion of the critical aquifer recharge area for the city's municipal and groundwater source ... Potential impacts to the city's water quality, water supply, and the service district's immediate and long-term ability to serve must be estimated and addressed;

It appears the prior Husum-BZ Corner sub-area boundary has been adjusted at its southernmost extent ... It takes in some of White Salmon's Urban Growth Boundary ... The proposed plan cannot be adopted as currently shown.

White Salmon Public Works Director Mike Wellman informed the County

Commissioners that the city has no water to spare for new development. Wellman explained that when the city's wells went on line in 2001, they produced about 2,400 gallons per minute. Now, he said, that figure is down to about 1,100 gallons per minute, because the aquifers the city draws from are not recharging adequately.

Daniel Harkenrider, area manager for the U.S. Forest Service, said his agency could not accept the zoning plan as presented. In a written statement he read to the County Commissioners, Harkenrider explained that the proposed changes would impact a decision by the Congress of the United States.

"As you know, the White Salmon River was designated a Wild & Scenic River in order to protect water quality, resident fisheries, scenic quality and recreational opportunities on the river," Harkenrider testified. "The White Salmon River designation requires that river managers and local jurisdictions protect the river's 'outstandingly remarkable values.' A slow degrading of these protections is not acceptable ... The proposed shift to a two-acre minimum within the resource lands designation may have significant adverse effects ... I am asking the county to drop the proposed sub-area plan changes within the White Salmon River corridor boundary."

In the first part of the meeting, the County Commissioners heard an appeal of proposed amendments to the Husum-BZ sub-area plan filed by Trout Lake resident Pat Arnold and an organization known as the Friends of the White Salmon River.

Jerry Smith, chair of the Husum-BZ Corner Community Council, opened the session by pointing out that the council has been working on the revised plan since 1997.

"It has been a continuous agenda item since 2003," Smith said. "There has been much input, and there is nobody who has not had the opportunity to be heard."

Arnold explained that she appealed the Klickitat County Planning Department's "determination of non-significance" (DNS) regarding proposed Husum-BZ zoning changes because the documents the DNS was based on contained insufficient information and did not meet state requirements.

She said that in many areas, there were no specific answers to questions about issues such as groundwater or other resources.

"The information and analysis on these points and many others just isn't adequate and the DNS should be withdrawn," Arnold said.

Brett VandenHeuvel, an attorney supporting Arnold's appeal, said rezoning would have a dramatic effect and the county's DNS was in error.

"The plan failed to analyze the maximum build out, failed to consider alternatives, and failed to assess the impacts. It failed to discuss groundwater at all, failed to mention the Wild & Scenic River, and failed to mention Condit Dam," VandenHeuvel explained. "The county's position is, the impacts are, quote, 'unknown,' 'varying,' or will be 'looked at on a case-by-case basis.' The law on this subject is very clear, and the county frankly has it wrong."

Husum resident Jim Rhoads said VandenHeuvel's assessment was incorrect.

"There is no shovel in the ground," Rhoads explained. "If something does come out that is project related, there are plenty of safeguards and there is a review process. The DNS is a checklist to make sure there is nothing obviously wrong now. Later on, if there is a subdivision, that is the time there will be further review. In short, I support the county's position on the DNS."

The second part of the meeting was an "open record hearing," in which testimony from the public was taken. The hearing was designed to consider the recommendations of the Klickitat County Planning Commission to approve proposed rezoning amendments. After a brief recess, the commissioners opened the floor to public testimony.

Jerry Smith opened the session with a description of the boundaries of the Husum-BZ area.

"Our planning area covers 68,000 acres, and the projected growth within that is possibly 300 homes over 20 years. That's not a lot of growth; it's about 15 homes a year," Smith said.

Smith added that many issues being raised were outside the control of the local council.

"We heard about traffic, wildlife, rafting use -- we have no authority over that," Smith said. "Our authority is only on local zoning issues within the planning area. Wildlife -- that's the Department of Fish & Wildlife, we have nothing to do with that; no authority. Rafting -- that's the U.S. Forest Service. We don't control that. Traffic -- that's the Washington Department of Transportation."

Smith pointed out that the proposed amendments to the sub-area plan were passed with a unanimous vote by the county's Planning Commission.

Rhoads added that the resource land acreage, which was originally 18,839 acres, was reduced by only 2.9 percent and remains well over 18,000 acres.

"The change is a minuscule part of the whole," Rhoads said. "The fears of rampant development are not founded on facts, but fancy. This plan represents many years of work by responsible elected officials and many citizens, and I urge its adoption."

Public comments reflected a diversity of opinions about changing the area's zoning.

Some feared the proposal to alter zoning patterns would destroy the rural character of the area.

"We like having space," said Fred Wendt. "If we go to cookie-cutter neighborhoods, we'll lose the quality of our valley."

Others backed the plan the council members had drawn up.

"I trust the council members, and have no reason to think they want anything but the best for the community," said Roxie Klemmer. "I support them fully."

Paul Poknis, president of the Fordyce Water Association, said he did not see where the necessary water for new development would come from.

"We're pretty much maxed out on water," Poknis said. "We will not expand the system at the expense of our current customers."

Jacob Anderson said he supported the proposed zoning plan.

"What the Community Council has done is a great thing," Anderson said. "If

retirees need money, they can divide their land. Isn't that a great thing? I'd like to say thank you to all the council has done for the community."

Ann Berg saw dire problems with water supply in the area.

"The city of White Salmon thought they had two wonderful wells, but those wells are not recharging," Berg said. "With predictions of less snowpack and warming conditions, to proceed with this plan is not only sheer folly, but completely irresponsible."

Nancy Richardson said she hoped to see the rezoning plan approved.

"My husband and I would like to divide our land, and we fully support this plan," she said.

Edward Cornell blasted the Community Council for saying they have no responsibility for any problems rezoning may bring.

"The board has shrugged off its responsibility, saying the river, traffic, fire danger, water, are all someone else's responsibility," Cornell said. "The purpose of planning is to try to resolve issues by looking at alternative solutions."

Leslie Jackson said the council could not claim that its planning decisions did not bring direct impacts.

"The council says they don't control the highway, but the county and the Community Council control density. Traffic on SR 141 and Alt. 141 is increasingly dense in the last two years," Jackson said.

The County Commissioners will accept written testimony on the zoning plans until Sept. 21. The commissioners also announced there will be another hearing on the topic at the Pioneer Center in October; the time and date has not yet been scheduled.