

Town of La Conner

Town Council Special Meeting
October 28, 2022, 3:00 p.m.
By Zoom

Present: Councilmembers, Taylor, Carlson, Dole, Chamberlain and Wohleb

Also Present: Administrator Thomas and Finance Director DeGoede., Planner Davolio and Public Works Director Lease.

This meeting was held electronically on Zoom. Information to join was posted at Town Hall and on the Town Website.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Hayes. This meeting is not a replacement of the canceled October 25, 2022, meeting, due to COVID. It is specifically for the approval of time sensitive issues, such as the claims and payroll that was to be approved by Council at that meeting. However, if Council chooses, we can open it up to public comment as well.

It was the consensus of the Council to hear public comments.

Resident Jim Matthews commented on 1) he is against the tiny home project as it is and decreasing the agricultural setback 2) he is not for applying the special public safety tax to pay for maintenance of a Town building 3) wants more transparency of project bids 4) wants more decision-making power for the Planning Commission on conditional use and projects.

Resident Rosalinda Guillen commented on 1) her disappointment of all the construction that has been allowed in Town and lack of consideration of the environment 2) she would like more decision making and power for the Planning Commission in motions of reconsideration 3) is against the tiny homes project as it is now and decreasing the agricultural setback, 4) she is not in favor of using the public safety tax for maintaining a Town building.

Planning Commissioner Bruce Bradburn stated the proposed change of the Planning Commission's authority was never voted on nor a recommendation of the Planning Commission.

Resident Linda Talman wanted to know what the topic of this meeting was. It was confirmed it was for approval of the claims and payroll of the October 25th canceled Council meeting and to discuss Planning Commission Procedures. She also wanted to know what the issue was with the scheduling of the Special Planning Commission meetings.

Resident Debbie Aldrich urged Council to read her email and spoke against decreasing the 25-foot agricultural setback. She also endorses more power in decision making for the Planning Commission in issuing conditional use permits.

Consent Agenda of the October 25, 2022, canceled Council meeting:

This includes the Minutes of the October 11, 2022, Council meeting, as well as the claims and payroll for the October 25th, 2022, meeting.

Councilmember Dole moved to approve the Consent Agenda of the canceled October 25, 2022 meeting. Motion seconded by Councilmember Wohleb. Motion carried 5/0.

Planning Commission Procedures LMC Chapter 15.130:

Mayor Hayes explained several Councilmembers and Planning Commissioners expressed concern on the scheduled Special Planning Commission Meeting. Not because of citizens wanting to discuss topics, but because of how it was formed and the Agenda items.

Councilmember Dole discussed his concerns of the Agenda that included items that were not legal, such as term limits. Also, it includes items that do not pertain to the Planning Commission's purview, such as admin and attorney separation, accountability to code and transparency. A special meeting should be on a special purpose or action item. Administrator Thomas further explained there was intent to identify language amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, but there was no language presented for other members of the community, that may be affected, to have the opportunity to participate in any meaningful fashion. Another concern is lack of participation of the community due to these meetings scheduled during the holiday season. We want to be sure everyone has an equal opportunity to participate.

Councilmember Wohleb asked for clarification on how the special meeting was decided with the Planning Commission and who did the agenda that normally is done by the Planner or the Planning Commission Chair.

Planner Davolio explained the Agenda in question was submitted by a member of the audience. She asked for a special meeting to discuss the items on the Agenda. The Planning Commission did vote in favor of the special meeting of November 1, 2022, however after he reviewed the agenda, he found many of the items were outside the purview of the Planning Commission, so that is why the Agenda now states simply for general discussion. There is no specific item for action or anything similar.

For further clarity, the Planning Commission Meeting started with four Commissioners. The Chair was not able to attend. By the end of the meeting there were only three Commissioners remaining to vote when the special meeting was approved. Procedures were not followed and the current Agenda is very vague and does not qualify for a special meeting.

Councilmember Chamberlain and Dole feel many of the items on the Agenda could be discussed at a Communication Forum for public input. Because this is an ad-hoc committee, there would be more latitude for discussions and focus groups. Also, they encouraged the Planning Commission to consider thinking through other options, such as a forum.

Planning Commissioner and Chair Marna Hanneman discussed her concern of the lack of process followed with the scheduling of the November 1, 2022 special meeting, and future planned special meetings. Councilmembers Chamberlain and Dole started a very well received Communications Committee, and that is where these ideas should be brought up. This is not about hijacking the Planning Commission to do what you want them to do, especially when two Commissioners were absent, to include the chair. This was not the proper process and not the direction the Town should be going.

Councilmember Dole moved to direct the Planning Commission to only conduct special meetings called by the chair, the chair pro-tem or requested by three commissioners; the same as the Town Council. Motion seconded by Councilmember Wohleb. Motion carried 4/0 with Councilmember Carlson abstaining.

Administrator Thomas explained, because of this motion, the November 1, 2022 Special Planning Commission meeting would not take place until the directed process has been followed. What was not a part of the motion was the suggestion that further discussion could take place through the public outreach committee. Councilmember Chamberlain has started on establishing a date for that.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 3:28 p.m.



Maria DeGoede, Finance Director



Ramon Hayes, Mayor