



Planning board backs staff stance on land use

County works to address issues with growth plan

By JAKE THOMAS
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Clark County came one step closer to coming into compliance with a decision issued earlier this spring by a state land-use board that found that the county's Comprehensive Growth Plan was in violation of state law.

On Thursday evening, the Clark County Planning Commission, a volunteer advisory board, voted to approve staff recommendations to the county's comprehensive plan. The recommendations are in response to a decision issued by the Growth Management Hearings Board last month that found that the plan violated the Growth Management Act by facilitating sprawl, not adequately preserving farmland and improperly creating a rural industrial land bank.

The Clark County council will have final say on the changes next month.

"It's more than just a theoretical situation," said Bill Wright, a member of the commission, noting the plan's impact on the county.

Christine Cook, senior deputy prosecuting attorney, further explained that being out of compliance with the Growth Management Act could make the county ineligible for various loans and grants from the state.

In March, the county prevailed on 18 of the 25 issues brought against its comprehensive plan. The decision found that the county improperly expanded its urban growth area, improperly undesignated farmland outside of La Center and Ridgefield as well as for an industrial land bank. Last month, the county council voted to appeal these issues to Superior Court, while choosing to comply with other parts of the decision.

The decision concluded that the county's plan violated state law by reducing the minimum lot size of agricultural lots from 20 acres to 10 acres, and of forest lots from 40 acres to 20 acres. To signal its intention of coming into compliance with the decision, the county council approved an emergency moratorium last month on the acceptance of most new land division applications for lots zoned AG-10, FR-20, R-20 or R-10.

In addition to some technical changes, the planning commission voted to recommend changing the minimum lot sizes for agricultural, forest and some rural lots back to their original designations. It voted to remove 17 parcels of land from Battle Ground's urban growth area. It also voted to recommend changing the maximum lot size for a proposed rural industrial land bank to 700 acres. Gordy Euler, county planner, explained that the last measure was intended to address how the rural industrial land bank was challenged on grounds that it did not have a maximum size as required by state law.

Toward the end of the meeting, Karl Johnson, a member of the commission, explained that crafting the comp plan was "messy" and conducted quickly. Now, he said the county had to fix it.

"What I can say is that there is a lot of forces that govern this process," he said.

Before voting for most of the staff recommendations, Wright lamented how the Growth Management Act limits private property rights. But he said the law is still a "fact."

"Regardless of our own political persuasions, spitting in the wind is still spitting in the wind," he said.

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