

Housing Needs Assessment

Comments by Rich Peterson

First, I would like to offer some overview comments about the structure of the draft plan. I believe that the plan should be as simple and straightforward as possible while meeting the goals established for it. I think that any assertions presented that fall within the realm of debatable points should be supported by evidence, that all obstacles to housing affordability be explored, and that available solutions be considered according to their merits and weaknesses. Further, an objective reader without personal bias or prejudice should be able to conclude that the plan is, itself, objective and not agenda-driven.

Given the context above, my specific comments follow:

1. On several pages of both the staff report and the exhibits (pages 1, 2, and 7 – staff report and exhibit, page 7) there is mention of an inventory of “existing and projected housing needs.” A discussion of current rental unit availability should, I believe, be included. For the sake of accuracy, if, in fact, the available stock is the result of current economic conditions, and if that stock has a traceable wide fluctuation, then that should be stated.
2. In the staff report pages 2 and 3 “point form” statements, there are several assertions that don’t appear to be supported anywhere. Possibly, I just missed the substantiation. Also, some, if true, seem to be left hanging when additional discussion somewhere seems to be needed. Further, the second point on page 2 (3,500 people shortage) seems to be in conflict with point number three, page 2 of exhibit 2 where it states that 3,000 workers will be needed daily even if we build the houses.
3. Staff report page 3, point 2, states that our multi-family stock is well below the state average, yet I can find no further discussion about trying to increase multi-family stock. If it is a problem, shouldn’t it be addressed?
4. Staff report page 3, point 3: Is there support for this statement anywhere or is it just a “known fact.”?
5. Staff report page 3, point 4 is supported where? If this is true, then it seems that this is a major factor in explaining why people cannot afford homes here. Shouldn’t there be more exploration of the need to increase wages? Are wages predictably expected to remain comparatively low through 2025? Won’t market factors of supply and demand of workers drive wages up if our numbers of workers diminish? Why would 3,000+ workers be willing to bear the inconvenience and expense of a daily ferry commute to come here as described at the top of page 6, exhibit #1, if they could earn 30% more by working on the mainland where they live?
6. Staff report page 3, point 5 is confusing to me. I think what it is trying to say is that the majority of the working population cannot afford the sufficient units that are already here. All of the units here now are already owned by someone.

7. Ordinance page 3: I need to understand the organization better. It doesn't seem to follow correctly outline sequence.
8. If we adopt the ordinance with sections 1, 2, and 3 on page 3 as set forth, do the referenced documents become law too? Are they essentially a fait accompli?
9. Ordinance, page 4, first paragraph: explain "rural rebound."
10. Ordinance, page 4, final sentence: Where is the "table 3 above"? It appears to be omitted.
11. Ordinance, page 8, "District by District Forecasts" What are these districts?
12. Exhibit 1, page 11, 5.2.A #2 seems to describe projects like "The Oaks," yet it is my understanding that we do restrict this kind of development.
13. Exhibit 1, page , 5.2.A #3, I believe, should remain and not be stricken. Understandably a policy decision to be determined by the council.
14. Exhibit 1, page 11, 5.2A #4, again speaks to "The Oaks" – type developments in my opinion and seems contradictory to our reality.
15. Exhibit 1, page 12, 5.2.B #2: Seems to me to foreclose any further deliberation about a Housing Authority and just simply makes it happen.
16. Exhibit 1, page 13, 5.2.B #4, says we should establish what the voters turned down, in spite of that history,
17. Exhibit 1, page 13, 5.2.B #5, seems to say that we can impose a whole lot of conditions upon the Town of Friday Harbor. Are we serious?
18. Exhibit 1, page 13, 5.2.B #15: Where did the number 12 come from? This seems to limit the ability to build an "Oaks"-type development when earlier this seems to be encouraged.
19. Exhibit 2, page 2: Something is wrong with the numbers on points 3 and/or 5. It says to me that if we build 2,969 units we will have to import 3,000 workers daily, but if we build 2,689 (280 less), we can house them all.
20. Exhibit 2, page 7: I believe that at least one more premise should be added because it seems implied, i.e.

#9. That wages will continue to be so low that wage-earning families will not be able to afford housing. (I personally do not accept this premise).

21. Exhibit 2, page 10, the statement following table 5-3: "As can be seen from the table above...and local government is the county's largest single employer." This statement may be true but the referenced table certainly doesn't show it.

Finally, I believe it is important for advocates of affordable housing (and I believe myself to be one) to not overstate the problem. As early as 1906, the Friday Harbor Journal warned that as wealthy part-time residents and tourists continued to arrive in increasing numbers, “the man of moderate means will become dispossessed through the purchasing power of wealth.” In the intervening 103 years we have not only survived, but thrived without major government intervention in affordable housing efforts.

I have additional typographical suggestions that can be covered during the work session, and other issues may occur to me but as of now the above points comprise my concerns.