

CLARK COUNTY COUNCIL EXTENDS MEETING TIMELINE REGARDING FREIGHT RAIL DEPENDENT USES

10/30/2018

Vancouver, Wash. – On Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2018, the Clark County Council formally decided to postpone public hearings regarding freight rail dependent uses until 2019.

Following the passage of Senate Bill 5517 in 2017, the county council has been working to implement freight rail dependent uses in Clark County. The bill amended the Growth Management Act to allow “freight rail dependent uses” and gives Clark and Okanogan counties authority to allow such uses adjacent to short line railroads.

On Jan. 9, 2018, the county council began implementation of SB 5517 by adopting the freight rail dependent use overlay, and amending the county’s comprehensive plan to create policies to allow for freight rail dependent uses. The overlay applies to properties within 500 feet of the county’s Chelatchie Prairie rail line between Northeast 119th and 149th streets in the Brush Prairie area, excluding land zoned R-5 or land within the Brush Prairie Rural Center.

After adoption of the overlay, the county began consideration of the appropriate development regulations and creation of a list of allowed uses. The county council formed the Freight Rail Dependent Use Advisory Committee, which provided recommendations to the council in June regarding the size of the overlay and potential allowable uses along the rail corridor. The public further provided input through a survey, an open house, emails and public comment.

Throughout this robust public process, a number of issues developed requiring further deliberation by county staff and the county council. To ensure that this economic development opportunity is realized to its full potential, while limiting any negative effect to the surrounding neighborhoods to the greatest extent possible, additional time is necessary to resolve many remaining questions.

“This is a significant land use decision,” said Council Chair Marc Boldt. “It is important that we do not rush to a conclusion. The county needs to get this right, not just done fast.”

The need for a delay into 2019 is brought about due to a number of factors:

- Schedules for the county councilors are very full in late 2018 due to budget hearings and the holidays.
- The depth of the issues involved requires in-depth review of each of the proposed allowable uses and their appropriateness in the area.
- The county has initiated discussions with the railroad operator regarding the lease agreement between the operator and the county to address and clarify existing lease terms.

“Economic development, particularly involving the creation of new industrial land in the rural areas, is a great opportunity. But the railroad lease must be fair, equitable and legal to ensure all parties are protected.” said Boldt.

The county council and county staff will continue working on gathering the necessary information to address the concerns raised through this process. In the meantime, the public is welcome to continue to provide input and ask questions. You can learn more about this project at www.clark.wa.gov/rail.

Residents also may contact any of the Clark County Councilors or County Manager Shawn Hennessee directly with questions or comments regarding the freight rail dependent use project or any other aspect of the Chelatchie Prairie Railroad at 564.397.2232.

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