



UNION COUNTY
Planning Department

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Union County Planning Commission Regular Session
December 15, 2025 Meeting Minutes
Misener Conference Room

Approved

ATTENDANCE

Present: Geoff Robinson, Joel Hasse, Mace Cadwell, Mat Barber, Stacy Warren, Amanda May and Chas Koenig on phone.

Excused: Sam Delano

Staff: Inga Williams, Philip Tracy, Pam Hall,

Mr. Hasse called the meeting to order at 7:05p.m.

- I. OLD BUSINESS**
There is no old business.
- II. NEW BUSINESS**
- III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
- IV. HEARING**

Application 2025-0043 Lay Accessory Farm Dwelling

Request for approval of an accessory farm dwelling for a relative of the farm operator. The applicant and property owner are Aloha Lay Credit Shelter Trust. The property on which the primary farm dwelling is located and on which the accessory farm dwelling will be located is described as Twp. 06S, Range 41E, Tax Lot 4500, with situs address 74619 Telocaset Lane. The zoning is UC A-2 Agricultural Grazing. The applicable land use regulation is UCZPSO Article 3. Ms. Williams presented the staff report. In her assessment, the application meets the requirements for an Accessory Farm Dwelling. The applicant Ron Lay is the farm operator and his grandson, Coleman Lay, will be living in the accessory farm dwelling. The application does meet the Farm Impact Test, a requirement for a conditional use in a farm zone. This test checks to see if the dwelling will cause significant

change or cost to the adjacent farm operations. After reviewing the information for this test, it does not appear that it will cause any significant impacts.

Mr. Hasse asked for the applicant to state name and address. Mr. Ralph Edwards of ADES is the agent and lives at 67364 Squire Loop, Cove, OR. Mr. Hasse asked if the Planning Commissioners had any questions. Mr. Hasse asked him "how many acres do the applicant's own"? Mr. Edwards responded in excess of 1200 and they do own property in Baker County. Ron Lay is getting older but still makes it up every day to attend to the 40 horses, then goes out and moves cattle. Mrs. Warren asks if the CC&R Deed is required and Ms. Williams stated she thought that they already have one recorded. There were no more questions or testimonies from the audience/phone. Mr. Hasse closed the hearing and asked for a motion. Mrs. Warren made a motion to approve the application and Mr. Barber seconded it.

Roll Call: Mr. Barber-yes, Mr. Cadwell-yes, Mr. Hasse-yes, Mr. Koenig-yes, Mrs. Warren-yes, Mrs. May-yes, Mr. Robinson-yes. Mr. Hasse stated the Conditional use application for Accessory Farm Dwelling has been approved and they will receive a written notice within 5 working days.

Application 2025-0044 Nielson Variance

Request for approval of variance to reduce the minimum lot size of the zoning district to allow for a partition of property. The applicant and property owner are Frederick L and Christie Lee Neilson. The subject property is described as Twp. 02S, Range 38E, Section 33, Tax Lot 1800, with situs address 62123 Chandler Loop. The zoning is UC R-3 Farm Residential. The applicable land use regulations are UCZPSO Article 30 and Article 8.

Ms. Williams presented the staff report for the Nielson variance. She went over the 4 criteria that need to be met for a variance approval and in her assessment the application does not meet the requirements. There is an unusual item, an inconsistency between the zoning and land use code, but it applies to many other properties in the area. It is a legally partitioned 10 acre parcel. The applicant's narrative does not address the criteria to allow the variance, they have not proven that a hardship exists. Ms. Williams recommends denying the application. She is happy to take any questions.

Mr. Koenig asks about a written testimony received and if the application moves forward, would an easement or road be put across the testifier's property. Ms. Williams stated that the applicant would need to dedicate right-of-way to increase the road width, not the person on the north of the road. There were questions on an easement/road but this is not what the planning commission is looking at now. This would come later depending on the outcome tonight.

Mr. Hasse asked the applicant to come forward, state name and address.

Mr. Fred Nielson 62123 Chandler Loop, La Grande, OR. Mr. Hasse asked if he would like to address any of the criteria that the Planning Director went over. He stated that he has 26 grandkids, most living in the Boise area, and they would like to be closer to them. They decided to put their home up for sale and his realtor suggested they might want to get a variance so the lot could be split into 2 five acre lots. Mr. Nielson said about a year ago his neighbors got a variance for their 10 acres and the application he filled out is basically the exact same application. Mr. Nielson hired the same guy to do his property as they did. Mr. Hasse asked how far his neighbors were from him and he said "right next door." He figured since the Planning Commission approved the neighbor's variance, he would give it a try for

his property. Nothing at this time is going to be built there but when they sell the home, it will be an option for the new buyers. Mr. Nielson figured it was the same as the Hagedorn's and they were approved.

Mrs. Warren stated she was conflicted because these variances went through 2 different planning directors before Ms. Williams and it was a way to let people do something they wanted to do. She said there have been 5-6 approved variances, we have set a precedent and we are not supposed to do this. Mr. Hasse states that we need to look at the whole area and re-zone it. Planning Commission has talked about re-zoning the area but it was never done. One of the road blocks was the roads and the infrastructure needed for a re-zone.

Mr. Cadwell makes a comment that if the Planning Commission does not approve the application, then it is setting the County up for a lawsuit since we approved the other applications around him. Ms. Williams states Mr. Nielson can appeal the decision to the Board of Commissioners and then to LUBA (Land Use Board of Appeals). It is not a lawsuit issue. Mr. Cadwell responds that we are discriminating against him and this creates a financial hardship. Ms. Williams refers to the expectation of development based on the current zone of 10 acres. Mrs. May agrees with Ms. Williams in that the expectation when he bought the land was zoning for 10 acres in which he just attested too.

Mr. Hasse would like to see the Planning Commission push this area towards re-zoning, whatever it would take to do this and divide it into 10 acres or 2 acres. Ms. Williams responds that it is 10 or 2 acres otherwise you are creating a zoning district that does not exist. Mr. Cadwell agrees that the push for re-zoning needs to be resolved but Mr. Nielson does not have time to wait for this. There is more discussions on getting the re-zoning started but also what do we do now? Mr. Robinson chimes in that he is having a hard time saying "No" to Mr. Nielson when he has voted in 2-3 other variances. At the time, the thought was that the re-zoning was going to happen and we didn't want to "throw up red tape." He is also having a hard time saying no when 2-3 of his neighbors were told "yes". Mr. Hasse agreed with this but then how do we justify it with the criteria that we have to meet?

Mrs. May asks what were the underlying circumstances in the other applications. I think we need to review the other ones to see what those differences were approved on. Mr. Robinson can remember one in particular that we had the same exact conversation and he doesn't think there were differences. We were believing that the re-zoning was coming. Mr. Robinson said about a year ago was the Hagedorn's variance. Mr. Nielson said he was at the hearing, it was approved and he asked then that if he could do the same thing. The answer was "yes". I did ask the question and this same exact discussion happened.

Mr. Hasse missed that meeting but thought from the old Planning Director that he was going to pursue the 2-acre zone. After the old director talked to the Union County Public Works Director, he let it go because the infrastructure won't support it. Mr. Hasse disagreed with this because we need more buildable parcels in the county for people moving in and who live here. There are not many parcels right now. Mr. Cadwell agreed and commented that the Planning Commission has been having this conversation for 5 years or so.

Mr. Hasse is torn—he doesn't disagree but the application needs to get pass the legal criteria. There was a suggestion to table the application so Mr. Nielson can have more time but he is not sure the application can be re-worded to fit the criteria. Mrs. Warren states the other variances were approved but there was staff saying just the opposite of what is today. If you are being led that this is the way to go and the zone is going to be changed—let them do it. Mr. Koenig asked the applicant if his property was in a flood zone. He said no. Mrs.

Warren asks Mr. Nielson if he is approved tonight, is he going to go ahead and partition it or not. Mr. Nielson says his realtor told him it would be more marketable if there were 2 parcels or it could be done if the buyers wanted.

Mr. Hasse asked if there was more testimony. Mr. Clyde Hall, neighbor to the west. He wanted the Planning Commission to know that he lost his hearing in the military. His main concern was were the access road was going because he would like to request it on the eastside. He has trees along the eastside of his property. He requests the access road be on the eastside of his neighbor's property. Mr. Hall wanted to know about the road on how wide it has to be, 30, 40, 60 feet. Mr. Hall agrees with Mr. Cadwell that there are not enough lots for people to build on. Mr. Barber asks Ms. Williams if we are worried about the road right now. Ms. Williams confirmed that the Planning Commission is only discussing a variance but if approved Mr. Nielson will have to come back with a major partition application. The Hagedorn's were going to go with a major partition but decided to go with the flagpole method, a minor partition. They did not want to put in the road infrastructure that the major partition needed.

Mr. Hall is worried that if the access road is on the west side of the property, how far would you need to dig down for the road. He has pine trees right there and he does not want them to kill the roots. Mr. Cadwell lets him know that rock could be put on top making the road 8 inches in depth. Mr. Nielson responds that if the road/easement was on the west of his property it would go through his barn and if on the east, it would go through home.

Mr. Hasse asked if there was more testimony.

Vanessa Hagedorn 62097 Chandler Loop. We live on the east side of the Nielson's property. When we got our variance, it was for the purpose of putting another home on it for our son could live close to us. It was not for development or anything else. We are not against Fred being able to do a variance but we don't know if whoever buys his property if they would want to further divide it. Mr. Hasse states that if the zone is changed to a 2 acre zone, the property could be divided into 2.5 acre lots. They would have to figure out the Access Road. Mr. Hasse commented that another option would be 5, 2 acre lots and Mrs. Hagedorn said "Yeah, I think that is what a lot of people out here don't want. Mr. Hasse agrees but that seems like the way things are going. Mrs. Hagedorn agreed with Mr. Hall that Chandler Loop would have to have some work done on the road, making it more accessible for traffic. I am just pointing out the difference between Fred and us, our son.

Mrs. Warren asks Ms. Williams if we do pursue a zone change, do we have to hold a public meeting with people in the area. Is this the first step? Ms. Williams said we need to send notices, we couldn't just change it. The first thing would be to get the approval from the Board of Commissioners to allow me to spend my time that way. Mr. Hasse asked if it is possible to create a 5 acre zone. Mrs. Warren said the county doesn't have one but could we? It may be a better alternative and would we have to change the comp plan? Ms. Williams responded that the Rural Residential Comprehensive Plan says you can do down to two acres but doesn't really give you an acre designation. She also let the Planning Commission know the State granted the Planning Department a \$60,000 dollars to start a Comprehensive Plan update and it is going to the Board of Commissioners on Wednesday to see if they accept it.

Mr. Hasse went on to the letter received from Mr. Barton. He talked about not wanting the Access Road on the west side like Mr. Hall. Mr. Hasse states the Chandler Loop is not really on the right-of-way which is not uncommon in the County. Mr. Hasse does not quite understand Mr. Barton's reasoning because of a Power Pole. Mrs. Warren points out that there are not a lot of options for the Access Road. Mr. Hasse would entertain a motion if

we can pull this off or put back on applicant for another chance. I am open to suggestions. Mr. Koenig replies that he wouldn't mind looking at the past 5 applications to see if they are similar circumstances and how they compare to this application. Mrs. Warren believes Jeff Hsu has done this one and couple of the others but not the initial one. Mr. Hall asks that if you do a road on the west side, he has two big Pine trees and the root system falls right underneath the 30 foot proposed road. What happens if my root system is killed and the trees die? Mr. Hasse told him he would have to talk to a lawyer because it is not anything the Planning Commission handles. Mr. Hall asks what the specifications are and suggests Mr. Cadwell might know. Mr. Cadwell responds he thinks they would just build the road over the top. Mr. Hasse also does not think there is a road standard for a private drive, a county road yes.

Mr. Barber states he has mixed emotions on this application because we have said yes on the other variances and set a bit of a precedent. The findings provided tonight are pretty clear that we can't do it unless we come up with another way to counter what the Planning Director is saying. Maybe taking it back to Jeff Hsu, County Surveyor, to see if he can find a better way or maybe Mr. Koenig can come up with other findings from the other applications. Mr. Barber would really like to say "yes" go for it but, I am struggling with how to make it happen.

Mr. Nielson says from what he is hearing that you want to change the criteria. Mr. Hasse clarifies that you need to address the criteria, it says that exceptional or extraordinary circumstances apply to the property which do not apply generally to other properties in the same zone of vicinity—conditions of lot size, shape, topo or other circumstance which the applicant has no control. Mr. Nielson gets this but the question is, I will use the Hagedorn's as an example. My application was filled out exactly like that application. If I start working on a new application now, I probably won't be able to get back in here until February. I'm kind of hoping the variance will be done by then and I don't know why I am being held to a different standard than a neighbor.

Mr. Cadwell replies that in all honesty this Planning Director has brought up stuff that hasn't been brought up in the past. Ms. Williams says she did make the same findings. She did an addendum to the staff report for the Hagedorns application and made pretty much the same findings as this one. Mrs. May responds: "I think that's moot, in all honesty. I mean, we all share the same responsibility to look at the same findings. And I don't know if I was present for the Hagedorn vote, I certainly don't remember it, but I am of the same mind that I think everybody else at the table is, that I would love to be able to say an easy yes, and this one just didn't make it easy enough.

Mr. Hasse asks the question "Do we want to make a motion or do we want to give him time. If he wants to, I do not have a problem with that or if he want to take it back to Jeff Hsu, County Surveyor. Mr. Robinson asks in lieu of denying it, can we make a motion to table it. Mr. Hasse replies if we deny it—it does not do us any good. I am hearing the applicant really not wanting to pursue what we are asking him to do. If he is willing to do that then, we can table it. If he is not then, there is no reason to table it. We might as well move forward with the denial. Mr. Robinson doesn't disagree with this but now we have 2 neighbors, one voted approved and one voted deny. I am a little uncomfortable with this. A tabling regardless if he ever comes back or not, would make me feel a bit more comfortable.

Mr. Hasse suggests, if we table it, it would give us time to look at the others applications and see what criteria was used to approve them. Mr. Robinson agrees with this. Mr. Hasse states this would give him an opportunity, if he decides to address the criteria. Mr. Barber makes a motion to table the application for the Nielson variance until the next Planning

Commission meeting January 26th and give time for the Planning Commission time to review the previous applications. It would give Mr. Nielson time to revise his application to better fit the criteria. We can look at it at our next meeting. Mr. Cadwell seconds the motion.

Roll call: Mr. Barber – yes, Mr. Cadwell – yes, Mr. Hasse – yes, Mr. Koenig – yes, Mrs. Warren – yes, Mrs. May – yes and Mr. Robinson – yes.

Temporary Workforce Housing

The Planning Commission invited County Commissioner Seavert to the hearing for the Temporary Workforce Housing Ordinance. Mr. Hasse said the Planning Commission was trying to figure out the Temporary Workforce Housing and just wanted to see where he was coming from on this. County Commissioner Seavert stated he was approached by management from one of our production facilities who has a relative (also a friend) and they were talking about what a challenge it is when they do these big remodels and investments at the great big facilities, bring in a crew of 40-50 guys and try to find housing for the duration of the project. So he approached me to see if there was an opportunity for the production facility to put in housing for the crew. Possibly looking at somewhere around 15-20 units of some sort. This could be more attractive to the contractors who are looking for housing for their workers before bidding on a project. There would have to be ample facilities, infrastructure and room for this.

County Commissioner Seavert inquired about it and it did not seem like Union County had an ordinance allowing housing in an Industrial zone. He doesn't believe it is a state zoning issue either and this is why it is in front of you guys. Mr. Hasse responded that the reason why we have said no to housing in an industrial zone is that putting housing in an industrial zone does not make for good neighbors. Industrial zones are there for a reason so they can be dirty and noisy, but, this is not what we are talking about. I do not have a problem with trying to figure out how we are going to work this out. I am in favor of this but how are we going to work it so it is fair, we do not want to cause ourselves something we don't want.

County Commissioner Seavert thinks with the current ordinance or proposed draft ordinance was to limit the time frame to just the purpose of the construction project. If the project was completed, then the residences would have to be removed. We are not using any permanent built on-site structures. I think they are looking at Manufactured Homes or other units on wheels. Mr. Hasse clarifies that they would need to come to us, explain the housing need and then we would approve the permit for a period of time. At the end of the project, the temporary homes would be gone.

Ms. Williams stated the time is for 2 years or the length of the project, whichever is more restrictive. They could ask for an extension if the project needed more time than the initial period. Mr. Hasse asked if this was a conditional use permit or outright use. Ms. Williams responds that it is a conditional use. County Commissioner Seavert says this makes sense because we need help with housing issues and we do not want to create more demand for rentals or an uptick in AirBnBs. I am not trying to take away business from others, especially our newest lodging facility but that can get expensive for contractors to budget, especially coming from out of state. I am just trying to promote another option for other facilities in the near future.

Mr. Koenig agrees this was a concern of his when the Planning Commission started talking about the temporary workforce housing. I called it circumventing private business that is already here in Union County. Mr. Koenig knows there is a demand for different projects/construction crews on housing but are we going to circumvent the new hotel or one of the RV parks? Mr. Hasse states we are not, you are not going to do this for 2-10 guys because it would be cheaper to rent a motel. This isn't going to be cheap. Mr. Koenig realizes this but, County Commissioner Seavert you have talked to a lot of folks, do you have a grasp on what our availability is in terms of being able to house people in La Grande? County Commissioner Seavert says he has not stats or facts to back it up but, in visiting with management, this is a big challenge for a lot of these big construction crews coming here.

Mr. Hasse says a lot of the older motels have gone to month to month and it appears they are full. County Commissioner Seavert thinks this Temporary Workforce Housing is going to be a specific reason to allow it to happen. Not every facility in the area is going to have this option or have the finances behind them to be able to bring in the housing. I do not see this happening often and obviously the infrastructure has to be in place for the conditional use permit or if there is to be a green space or certain distance away from the production facility. I do think it opens the door but doesn't just bust the gates wide open. It is an opportunity with a conditional use permit ad to go through an approval process with the Planning Commission.

County Commissioner Seavert comments that he sees a lot of out of state construction vehicles at our local hotels, grateful for this, but it is with a crew of 10-15 guys. He would really like to circumvent this problem and hire local but sometimes the skills are not here. Mr. Hasse agrees that in hiring someone local – they are not available. His nephew is a contractor and the other day I asked him for something and he is a year and a half out. It is a good problem but... County Commissioner Seavert gives an example of when Amazon came to town. They have crews that go around the country putting up facility and then moving on to the next one. It is one they have put up in the last 3 years with the exact floor plans, specs and specialized skills.

Ms. Williams brought up that the proposal is very specific that the housing is on the same property that the construction is occurring. Is there a need for the company to be on the company's property but the construction happens on another piece of land owned by them but working on a larger project for someone else? County Commissioner Seavert tries to clarify, so just say there is a big road project coming in for the State of Oregon and someone wanted to up their property for a situation like this? Ms. Williams replies, like the Bear Creek Bridge we approved in the Baum Industrial. County Commissioner Seavert's understanding, especially with this one, is the production facility, not the contractors working there, would supply the housing. So, it would not be some out of state company coming here bringing their 5th wheel trailers or anything like that. It is the business getting the work done who is going to supply the housing for the workers.

Mr. Hasse gives a hypothetical on the Bear Creek Bridge that was just approved, let's say they just got a big highway project. Would you allow them to house their people on that property they own in the Baum Industrial Park? This is where I see a little difference, but maybe not. It's a construction company wanting to build/put housing on an Industrial lot and that seems more permanent but I guess it isn't, we need more discussion on what is and is not allowable. If they do not have enough land, could they then lease land for housing near them. They could put in the temporary housing and put it back to normal when finished. Would we allow this and "why not." The land isn't used for anything, it is temporary for 1-2 years.

Mr. Koenig responds that the housing would be off site? Mr. Hasse said yeah it would be adjacent but off site, maybe completely off site, I don't know. Mr. Barber states that the specifications say located on the same parcel. Mr. Robinson chimes in that he thinks this is the crux of the TWH ordinance. The way it is presented and, Joel I think you are hitting on this, it's kind of an oxymoron. It's presented to make it easier for folks to bring in employees and have a place for them to stay so why create this option but make it really difficult to use. Do we create it or do we want to make it useable. This brings up another issue in my mind, when it starts getting tied, especially to these other properties, it feels a lot like a special interest. It ties it to certain companies and I want them to have that option but, not to only them. I think it needs to be open to all.

County Commissioner Seavert says his initial visualization of the ordinance would just to allow, for example, the Particle Plant to do just their property and I feel like through the conditional use permit approval, this would limit handing out conditional use permits to everyone in town. Mr. Hasse says "okay, this is fine and dandy" but does that limit us then for a neighbor of them, Borden Chemical, who wants to increase their production? The same thing then because they at that moment do not have the property to do it. So, they don't increase their production, we lose out on a business. I'm just a little bit with Mr. Robinson, I hate to tone this to one particular individual or company or whatever to make it work for them. If we are going to do it, let's see if we can't do it so it makes a good place to do business in Union County. I don't know. County Commissioner Seavert says that's not the direction you want to go with it, that wasn't my intent at all, I wasn't trying to narrow it down too tight to where it just fit only one glove that fits one hand.

Mrs. May can definitely appreciate the desire to keep all these conditional use applications off our plate, I appreciate this personally. I think broadening the spectrum like Mr. Robinson and Mr. Hasse were suggesting would kind of keep a couple of those applications down, maybe they wouldn't have to apply every single one. Mr. Hasse said, "I think I lost what you are getting at Amanda, sorry." Are you agreeing or disagreeing? Mrs. May responds that she is agreeing with you and Mr. Robinson. I think that keeping those restrictions too tight, doubles down our workload unnecessarily. Mr. Hasse agrees, it at least limits the ability to make this useful, I think that a conditional use permit helps a bunch. I mean I think it is tight enough. I do not believe people are going to run in here, putting up mobile home parks to house people for a year. It would cost a lot of money to put in a 10-unit Manufactured Home park with infrastructure. Mr. Barber responds that as far as that goes what's required. Do we have a dump station or does each individual site have to have a sewer. Mr. Koenig remarks that is what we looked at last month, each housing unit was hard wired to utilities. Mr. Hasse read from the draft –demonstrating adequate services, wastewater connected to a public system if available, otherwise, supplies approved well, tanks and sanitary systems to DEQ approval.

Mr. Hasse asks, "What is our next step?" Ms. Williams will draft an ordinance with a strikethrough and underline. She will check the overlay for the Baum Industrial Park which, may also require some adjustment. Mr. Hasse states there is a bunch of issues on lighting, landscaping and other things. Ms. Williams will check to see if this applies to temporary residences.

There was some discussion, for those who weren't at the last meeting, of how this came about and where did the draft come from.

Mr. Koenig states he likes the idea and concept and the craftiness that this brings to our valley in terms of jobs and share of home. County Commissioner Seavert agrees and the only thing that would make it better would be using local contractors. There still will be

money spent in the community and he likes that. He did not even ponder the idea of leasing properties elsewhere or anything like that, but that is your job!

More discussion and examples were talked about and the need for this Temporary Workforce Housing Ordinance. Mr. Barber remarked that it's the beauty of this, they have to come to us and they have to have a specific project.

There was discussion around a plan for decommissioning after the project is completed. There is language in the draft that if the temporary housing does not get removed, they have to provide us with a retainer so we can decommission it if needed.

The last thing brought up from Mrs. May was she could see 1 pitfall that someone could slide under the radar, offering a for-lease piece of property and some kind of mobile park pops up. She would like language in the ordinance that removes this scenario. Ms. Williams says she can put in the language that contractors need to be employed with the owners of the property.

Mr. Hasse adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted

Pam Hall