Outlook

Re: September 8, 2026 Planning Commission meeting - follow up email

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From Mark Hofman <mhofman@cityoflfp.gov>
Date Wed 9/9/2026 11:55 AM
To Mark Wierenga <markw@vandervort.com>
Cc Brian Highberger <brian@uprightconstruction.com>; Brian O'Connor <BrianO@vandervort.com>; Gordon Stephenson <gordon@rpaseattle.com>

Good morning,

Thank you all! Really appreciate your willingness to attend and comment at last night's PC meeting. It's one of the better meetings we've had on the housing subject and it is very much appreciated. It will prove helpful in a variety of ways.

I'll have a short read this week of the items and comments below and will share all w/commissioners, likely this week.

Thanks for sending them in. Have a great week

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From: Mark Wierenga <markw@vandervort.com>
Sent: Wednesday, September 9, 2026 8:25 AM
To: Mark Hofman <mhofman@cityoflfp.gov>
Cc: Brian Highberger <brian@uprightconstruction.com>; Brian O'Connor <BrianO@vandervort.com>
Subject: September 8, 2026 Planning Commission meeting - follow up email

Hello Mark,

Good to see you last night at the commission meeting. As discussed, I'm attaching a short list of the code sections that we believe need clarify in order to help all of us get project running more smoothly in LFP. Please distribute this to the council members as needed.

I would not say that this is exhaustive, but really just based on our latest experience. And I think that the real struggles have to do with definitions and measurements. Here's our quick summary:

- Yards: How do we know where to locate them? On a simple, street-related site that is not a corner site, it's pretty clear that the front yard is adjacent to the street. When we have an access driveway that serves many sites, the code does not clearly tell us how the yards need to be oriented.
- Impervious surface: What counts as an impervious surface? Are there any discounts if using certain types of materials (such as impervious paving), or decks (drip-thru wood

construction)? If discounts, would they be rated as a percentage of the area? We have heard that LFP uses the KC drainage manual for this, but even our civil engineer is not quite sure how to apply it. A very short addition to the definitions section would clarify this pretty easily, we think.

- Building coverage: What counts against building coverage? The footprint of the building where it meets the ground? Any wall edge regardless of relation to grade? Underground structures? Decks that are elevated above grade? If so, how much? What about roof overhangs? Are they discounted up to a certain dimension? Or fully discounted?
- Building height: The code directs us to measure from undisturbed soil. This sounds like it might be the same as existing grade (pre-development). Is this the case?
- Tree canopy: The code has language about how canopy coverage is calculated when a tree trunk straddles a property line under the "canopy coverage" definition. It states that 50% of the canopy is counted on the subject site. What it does not address but implies is that if the trunk is offsite even by an inch it would not count as canopy coverage even though we would have to protect the tree and not build within its critical root zone or plant new trees below its canopy. According to the code, trees that have trunks off-site cannot count as on-stie canopy regardless of the size of the canopy? This seems very unrealistic. There are instances where tree canopies from off-site trees cover very large areas of a site. Are we expected to plant trees under the canopy of this off-site tree just to count on-site canopy? This seems like a bad forestry practice. Canopy should be counted on-site regardless of the location of the trunk.

Also, there were some questions posed by Marty Ross, which I have put some thought into:

Q1: Regarding hurdles to construction of middle housing in Lake Forest Park: how would you rank the importance of clarifications/improvements needed between height limits, lot coverage maximums, parking requirements, and allowable types?

If the goal is to get more affordable housing in LFP, then it seems like the key goals would be:

1. Increase density allowances beyond the state mandate for LFP. This might only be for certain targeted zones. Right now, it's possible to build two dwellings on a single lot (or one primary dwelling plus two ADUs). Since land prices are so high in the city, it seems like the only way to counteract this is to allow more dwellings on a given lot.
2. Allow a higher lot area percentage for building coverage.
3. Allow a higher lot area percentage for impervious surfaces. As we mentioned, impervious surface limits can be especially limiting since driveway / access standards require so much pavement area. One way to counteract this might be allow full or partial credits for pervious and/or textured pavements. Also, credits for drip-through decks are helpful.
4. We had a discussion about housing types last night. I'm not sure that duplexes/stacked or apartments are a big help in LFP, especially with the 2-3 unit limit per building lot. Given the history and feel of our city, I would think that a true cottage code would be helpful. At a very high level, I think it would include these features:
    a. At least three cottages per site
    b. Density allowed to be at least 1 unit per 1,600 sf of lot area
    c. A central landscaped open space feature
    d. Reduced parking requirements (one car per dwelling or less)
    e. Increased building and impervious coverage limits
    f. Size limits for dwellings (1,500 sf or a sliding scale up to 1,750 sf)
    g. Height limits for dwellings (two stories)

Q2: What neighboring cities get middle housing right and how?

Vandervort Architects has worked on middle housing projects in Seattle, Shoreline, Kenmore, Bothell, Lynnwood, and Kirkland. Every city has a different way of applying the middle housing code, and the values of the various jurisdictions come through with each of their code requirements.

The critical commonality with the successful implementation of middle housing codes is that the rules are clear and evenly applied. If there are questions about the code, the best jurisdictions have a process for making determinations and providing answers for applicants. It seems that code questions are gathered by planners and zoning reviews and discussed at a weekly meeting. With this method, tough zoning questions can be answered within a week or two of being asked. Seattle and Shoreline are particularly good at this process.

Some other observations about middle housing projects in the various jurisdictions we have worked in:

Seattle: Clearly, Seattle is looking for as much density as possible with their application of the code. All formerly single family zones have been consolidated into a single zone category (NR). Setbacks have been reduced, height limits and lot coverage limits have been increased. There is a lot of flexibility with the types of housing that can be built (single family homes, AADUs, townhomes, apartments, etc). The code is generally very clear and easy to apply.

Bothell is similar to Seattle in that development limits have been significantly opened up with few constraints on development. They tend to manage certain areas of the city with development districts / standards.

Shoreline also has a lot of housing types that can be proposed as middle housing. A tiered zoning format has been maintained, which is an interesting twist. Areas targeted for lower density have limits on lot coverage and height, producing new development that will be more in scale with existing low-density neighborhoods. The higher density zones allow for yields that are more robust. In these zones, we find that the possible yields are difficult to attain given other code constraints.

We have limited experience in Kirkland but I think it is somewhat similar to Shoreline in that they look to limit height and bulk in certain areas of the city and really promote it in others.

Lynnwood has established a good process for pre-application conferences and their staff are easy to get in touch with and will provide clear answers.

Let me know if you have any questions or would like to discuss further.

Regards,

Mark Wierenga

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