



Spokane County Building & Planning

Zoning Text Amendment

Staff Report for ZTA-01-2024

July 23, 2024

Proposal

This zoning text amendment (ZTA) would allow for small-scale slaughtering operations in rural traditional (RT), small tract agriculture (STA), and large tract agriculture (LTA) lands in unincorporated Spokane County. It would specifically add language to chapters 14.300.100, 14.618.220, 14.618.230, 14.616.220, and 14.616.230. A full text of the proposed amendment is attached to this document as “Attachment A.” The Spokane County Board of County Commissioners initiated the ZTA on May 7, 2024. The planning commission is scheduled to conduct a public hearing on the proposal at the Planning Commission’s August 29, 2024, meeting.

Background

On September 7, 2023, a constituent of County Commissioner Joshua Kerns who lives near Elk, Washington, expressed difficulty getting an appointment with a USDA-inspected butcher (a facility that is beholden to USDA regulations for processing meat), noting that the nearest facilities of that description were in Chewelah, Washington, Moses Lake, Washington, and Ponderay, Idaho, none of which are in Spokane County. The constituent wanted a way to get locally processed meat available for purchase as just a few steaks, burgers, or other cuts of meat at a time, which would necessitate a USDA-inspected slaughtering facility.

Slaughtering operations exist in Spokane County, but they are mobile operations that can only process meat owned by other parties and sell it in halves or quarters. This constituent wanted a stationary facility where meat could be processed and sold in smaller cuts (requiring USDA certification) for local sale and consumption.

According to the Spokane County Zoning Code, slaughterhouses are currently not allowed anywhere in Spokane County. The size of the operation desired by the constituent could be described as “small-scale” or “boutique,” as its main customer base would all be Spokane County residents. Therefore, this amendment was initiated to allow rural Spokane County residents to produce, buy, and consume locally sourced meats.

Initiation Of Zone Text Amendment

The Spokane County Planning Commission was introduced to the ZTA during a Planning Commission workshop on March 28, 2024, and again reviewed it in a Planning Commission public hearing on April 25, 2024. After the public hearing, the Planning Commission formally recommended to the Spokane County Board of County Commissioners that the ZTA be initiated. The Board of County Commissioners was briefed about the ZTA on April 30, 2024, received the Planning Commission's findings of fact on May 7, 2024, and finally initiated the ZTA on May 14, 2024. Following its initiation, the ZTA draft text was circulated throughout the Spokane County Building and Planning office for review, and the ZTA draft text and the completed SEPA checklist were submitted to the Department of Commerce for a 60-day review period on July 17, 2024. On July 24, 2024, the ZTA draft text and the SEPA checklist were circulated to various agencies for comment.

Environmental Review

A non-project SEPA environmental checklist was circulated for review to agencies on July 24, 2024. Agencies had the opportunity to comment on the ZTA draft text and checklist until August 7, 2024. A Planning Commission public hearing for this ZTA is presently set for August 29, 2024.

Initiation Public / Agency Comments

Public Comment by Kevin Koesel, 5K Farms; March 28, 2024

Mr. Koesel, who attended the public meeting, submitted his comment on the Planning Commission workshop on March 28, 2024, via email that same day. In his feedback, he stated that while the Commission focused heavily on how to limit the size of potential slaughtering operations in Spokane County, he believed doing so was not necessary, as Spokane County does not, in his opinion, have the agricultural resources necessary to sustain a large slaughterhouse. He also cited the cost of energy and water rights being difficult to obtain as reasons why a large slaughterhouse would be unlikely, even if there were no size limits placed on them in the zoning code.

However, Mr. Koesel stated that if some sort of size regulation were necessary for this ZTA, the code should simply require that slaughtering facilities be separate from feed lots. Large slaughterhouses require on-site feed lots to be economically viable operations, so separating those uses would, in effect, curtail the development of large slaughterhouses.

Mr. Koesel finished his comment by stating that limiting slaughterhouse size by the number of animals would be problematic because different animals require different processing techniques and have different costs associated with them. Regardless, he fully supports the development of small-scale slaughterhouses in rural areas of Spokane County.

Public comment by Jay Allert, Allert Cattle Ranch; May 1, 2024:

“After reviewing, I would only offer a couple of thoughts:

It seems to me the requirement of being a part of a public water system could be a problem when the facilities are quite limited to very rural locations.

I understand trying to limit the size of the operations, but as a business guy, as I read that in conjunction with all the mandates and regulations involved with such operations, I go directly to scale and being able to have enough volume to pay for an expensive facility?”

Agency Comment by The Spokane County Public Works Wastewater System Division; July 25, 2024

This agency notified Spokane County Planning that it has no objection to the finalization of ZTA 0001-2024.

Existing Spokane County Zoning Code Language

No existing language from the Spokane County Zoning Code will be amended as a part of this ZTA. All language added because of this ZTA will comprise new passages and rows in some of the tables contained in the chapters mentioned in the proposal that will be amended.

Staff Analysis

Section 14.402.040

The county may amend the Zoning Code when, at a minimum, **one** of the following standards apply.

- 1. The amendment is consistent with or implements the Comprehensive Plan and is not detrimental to the public welfare.**

This amendment would introduce a land use that would serve the needs of rural residents, and is related to rural activities, as is stipulated in the Rural Land Use chapter of the Comprehensive Plan (RL.5a). It also aligns with the intended purposes of commercial development in resource lands, as stipulated by language in that same chapter: it encourages local production and consumption of food and farm products, and does not conflict with agricultural practices. While slaughtering and meat processing are intensive land uses, the small-scale nature of these land uses would ensure that surrounding agricultural and resource lands would not be negatively impacted. Additionally, the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife provided suggestions for language about the safe disposal of waste from slaughtering operations that were incorporated into the amendment text.

2. A change in economic, technological, or land use conditions has occurred to warrant modification of the Zoning Code.
3. An amendment is necessary to correct an error in the Zoning Code.

4. An amendment is necessary to clarify the meaning or intent of the Zoning Code.

5. An amendment is necessary to provide for a use(s) that was not previously addressed by the Zoning Code.

While slaughterhouses are generally addressed in the Spokane County Zoning Code, it only disallows them from commercial and industrial zones, and it provides no definition or size parameters for them. This new small-scale slaughterhouse use category, which can only exist on select rural and resource lands, would address the wishes of rural Spokane County residents to have close access to locally sourced and processed meats.

6. An amendment is deemed necessary by the Commission and/or Board as being in the public interest.

When the Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners heard this amendment, they were enthusiastic about the economic opportunities that this land use would provide for Spokane County farmers and ranchers. The Planning Commission unanimously recommended, and the Board initiated the amendment, sending it to the Planning Department for study and recommendation.

Conclusion

The Planning Commission, Board of County Commissioners, and members of the public have all shown enthusiastic support for this amendment. The Department believes the amendment would provide economic opportunities for rural Spokane County residents while ensuring that the intensity of this land use does not negatively impact the surrounding environment. For the reasons stated above in the staff analysis, these changes would be in accordance with Section 14.402.040 of the Spokane County Zoning Code, consistent with the Growth Management Act, the Spokane County Comprehensive Plan, and in the best interest in the health, safety, and welfare of the public.