



City of Othello
Planning Commission Meeting
July 20, 2026
Anne Henning

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Rob Simmons called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Chair Rob Simmons, Daniela Voorhies, Maria Martinez, Chad Robbins, Donald Burks, Jose Garza

Excused: Ruth Sawyer (ill)

Staff: Community Development Director Anne Henning

Attendees: Aren Murcar (consultant with SCJ Alliance); Bob Carlson; Genna Dorow representing Terra Gold Farms; Jake Mendez Jr.; Kenya Luna; Sandi Duffey, Adams County Emergency Management; Martin Crowley, representing the Local Emergency Planning Committee; Council members Chris Dorow, Alma Carmona, and Kelli Camp (remote)

PUBLIC INPUT

Jake Mendez, Jr. spoke in opposition to data centers, with concerns about whether jobs would be short term vs long term, full time vs contracted, potable water use, peak water withdrawal on hottest days, and energy use. He stated the City should focus instead on ASR, the swimming pool, and lights at Lions Park.

Bob Carlson wanted to enlighten the Commission that at the last Council meeting, Council was thinking about selling the parking lot north of the library. Mr. Carlson remembers that a long time ago, there were businesses on the west side of First Ave. that didn't have enough parking, so they were allowed to use the City parking lot. Then the City made it a "no place to park zone", he believes that was because of the availability of the City parking lot. He feels parking should be provided by the businesses.

Kenya Luna had questions about data centers and was generally opposed to them, with concerns about cooling needs, water use, strain on the power grid, use of diesel for generators, air quality, permanent jobs, and noise pollution.

Sandi Duffey, Adams County Emergency Management, spoke about the LEPC, Local Emergency Planning Committee, which meets every other month to discuss hazardous chemicals. She stated that the zoning being proposed on the north side of Lee Road scares her. Light Industrial right across the street from Residential. Light Industrial can contain hazardous materials. It's not a matter of if, it's when. Prevailing winds are from the south west. Those winds will blow right into the residential area. The City has already allowed all the businesses on the west side of Broadway and housing on the east side. In their meetings, LEPC discusses the hazardous materials located on Broadway and what is the City going to do when there is a release of these chemicals. The area that might need to be evacuated could be up to a half mile. She would like the City to think about the liability they are accepting if they allow the zoning to change. There is already a high possibility for this to happen. Accidents happen, valves fail, people have bad days, things break. When that chemical comes out of its containerized unit, it can be within the city in a matter of minutes, which does not provide enough time for people to evacuate or shelter in place. That is the problem with allowing Industrial next to Residential. She distributed a map showing existing chemical

facilities and the radius around each. She stated she does not feel it is right for the City to put residents at risk.

Martin Crowley, Vice President of the Local Emergency Planning Committee and member of the State Emergency Response Commission, talked about a presentation last April from an attorney who speaks on the subject of municipal liability who said if planning is not done properly and things happen, municipalities expose themselves to liability. Planning Commissions, City Councils, and County Commissions need to take into considerations the “what ifs”. He works for a company that transports hazardous materials, and while his company would be happy to sell more anhydrous ammonia, he hopes it would not be right near where people are going to live. If there are new locations with hazardous materials, they should be farther from residents. Buffers are the way to go. The residential areas have grown toward the railroad tracks where the industries located. He didn’t want to see poor decisions that resulted in people being hurt.

Chair Rob Simmons mentioned that many of the items in the packet tonight are informational and not something the Commission is going to take action on tonight.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE – FUTURE LAND USE MAP - WORKSHOP

The City’s consultant, Aren Murcar with SCJ Alliance, led the discussion of the Future Land Use Map. He mentioned that he plans to have a draft map for review at the September Commission meeting.

He explained that the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Code work together but serve different functions. The Future Land Use Map relates to the Comprehensive Plan, and the Zoning Map relates to the Zoning Code. This distinction is important. Future land use types are broad categories of growth with flexibility, since we don’t necessarily know what the future will bring, but we want to be able to guide that growth somewhat. The land use designations will describe the general nature of development that the City envisions over time without designating specific zoning districts. The designations are not legal districts and are not defined in the code, but zoning decisions that the City makes in the future must be consistent with them. In contrast, zoning districts are legally designated areas in the Othello Municipal Code with specific use and development regulations.

Next, Mr. Murcar summarized the results of the community survey and public outreach so far:

- Support for growth if paired with expanded services and jobs for existing residents.
- Desire to maintain the small-town, family-oriented character, but also expand local options and economic opportunities.
- More shopping, dining, education, and tourism.
- Housing affordability and strain on services/infrastructure were the top concerns about growth.
- Infrastructure capacity (water/sewer) and protection of prime agricultural land were primary constraints on where new growth should occur.
- Existing annexed and utility-served areas, and near Walmart and East Main Street toward SR-17 were felt to be logical places for growth.
- Balance between preserving small-town character and embracing growth for economic opportunity.
- Growth should be deliberate and well-located, not open-ended.
- Maintain the community that we know but also seize opportunities.

Mr. Murcar also shared finding from the Land Capacity Analysis that was done earlier this year and last year:

- Projected surplus within City limits of 825 housing units by 2047 under current zoning and trends, but likely deficit of 425 units affordable to households at or below 80% area median income.
- Most of the vacant developable land within current city limits is concentrated in R4 zoning in the northeast.

Commissioners asked what could be done about the deficit. Council member Alma Carmona mentioned that the Commission previously had recommended changing the zoning in some existing neighborhoods to allow more development by going from R-2 to R-3, but the Council at that time didn't want to change the zoning of existing neighborhoods.

Mr. Murcar stated that the land capacity analysis was the best projection of what might reasonably happen. He also mentioned that as a partially-planning jurisdiction, Othello has more flexibility in annexation and changing the growth area than fully-planning communities do.

Next the Commission discussed land use categories and how to relate zoning districts to land use types. Mr. Murcar presented two alternatives: Alt. 1 had just general categories of Residential, Residential Mixed Use, Commercial, Light Industrial, General Industrial, and Urban Reserve. Alt.2 divided Residential into Low and Med-High Density. He mentioned it can be hard to predict what density future developers will prefer. Commissioners were in favor of keeping the categories general, so Alt. 1.

Then Commissioners looked at the Future Land Use Map to begin discussions about possible changes. Mr. Murcar mentioned that the growth area is quite large, it would double the size of the city. The Comprehensive Plan is for 20 years, so the full growth area is a lot more than would be needed in that time. He explained the possibility of an Urban Reserve designation to show areas that aren't expected to develop in the next 20 years.

Commissioners looked at the commercial nodes designated on the 2015 map. They are mostly at major intersections.

Ms. Henning mentioned there is not currently a designation or zone for public lands, such as the Fairgrounds, City Hall, schools, utilities, or the cemetery.

Council member Chris Dorow recommended looking at Urban Reserve for areas that the Commission doesn't think should develop next, and to encourage areas closer to the city to develop first. Mr. Murcar said that areas designated Urban Reserve could be re-evaluated in 10 years to see if the City at that time is ready to say what they should be designated as. It can be re-evaluated sooner if a landowner has interest in changing it, through the Comprehensive Plan Amendment process. Commissioners discussed designating everything south of Bench Road as Urban Reserve. Ms. Henning asked whether the Hwy 24 (Broadway) corridor should be designated Commercial since it might be ready to develop sooner. Genna Dorow recommended designating existing commercial areas as Commercial, such as the area around Bench and Hwy 24. Commissioners agreed and added the commercial lots southwest of Bench and Hwy 24.

Council member Dorow suggested that Residential all the way to Hwy 17 might not be the best planning, due to noise and the value of visibility for Commercial. Commissioners were inclined to mirror the zoning to the north, which is Commercial along Hwy 26. Mr. Murcar mentioned that the designation map doesn't

currently have a mixed use designation, but that might be a possibility. It could be defined so that at annexation, it could be zoned as higher density Residential or Commercial.

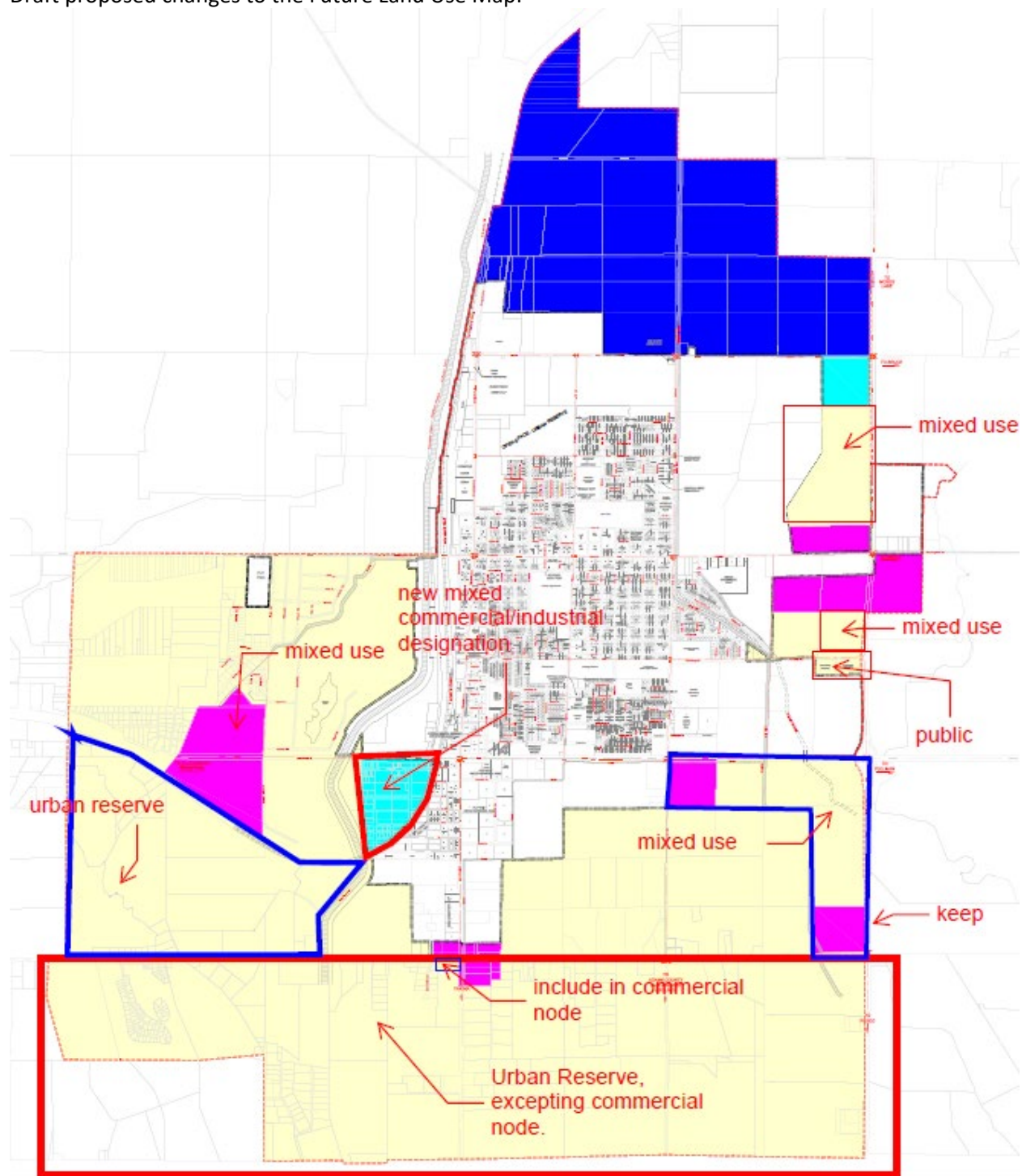
Jake Mendez asked if there was any consideration for event venues like concerts. He mentioned Moses Lake gets revenue from concerts, venues, and parks. He felt that could be added as a way to bring tourism. Commissioners discussed this could be added to the definition of mixed use, along with other facilities such as a sports complex.

Commissioners looked at the existing commercial designation west of town, abutting Hwy 26. Genna Dorow provided history from her time on City Council that this designation likely was because of the access to the railroad along the southern boundary of the commercial designation. Commissioners discussed that rail access can be beneficial for industrial uses, but didn't think industrial was suitable for this location since it was already surrounded by residential uses. Commissioners felt mixed use would be appropriate. They felt south of the railroad and west of the canal could be urban reserve. The sliver of residential east of the canal and west of the Industrial designation should stay Residential since it has existing homes. Commissioners discussed defining a new zone which would better fit the existing uses such as the wrecking yard and shed fabrication without allowing hazardous materials in proximity to residences, maybe a second kind of mixed use for Commercial/Industrial, in addition to the previously-discussed Residential/Commercial. Commissioner Jose Garza mentioned there is only one access to this area.

Commissioners looked at the Commercial designations east of town, at Main Street and Hwy 17. Mr. Murcar noted that it doesn't appear to line up with any existing commercial uses, it was maybe intended to create a commercial corridor along Main Street. Commissioners determined that the current Residential designations along Hwy 17 should be Mixed Use.

Commissioners reviewed the draft proposed changes so far and determined it was adequate for future discussions.

Draft proposed changes to the Future Land Use Map:



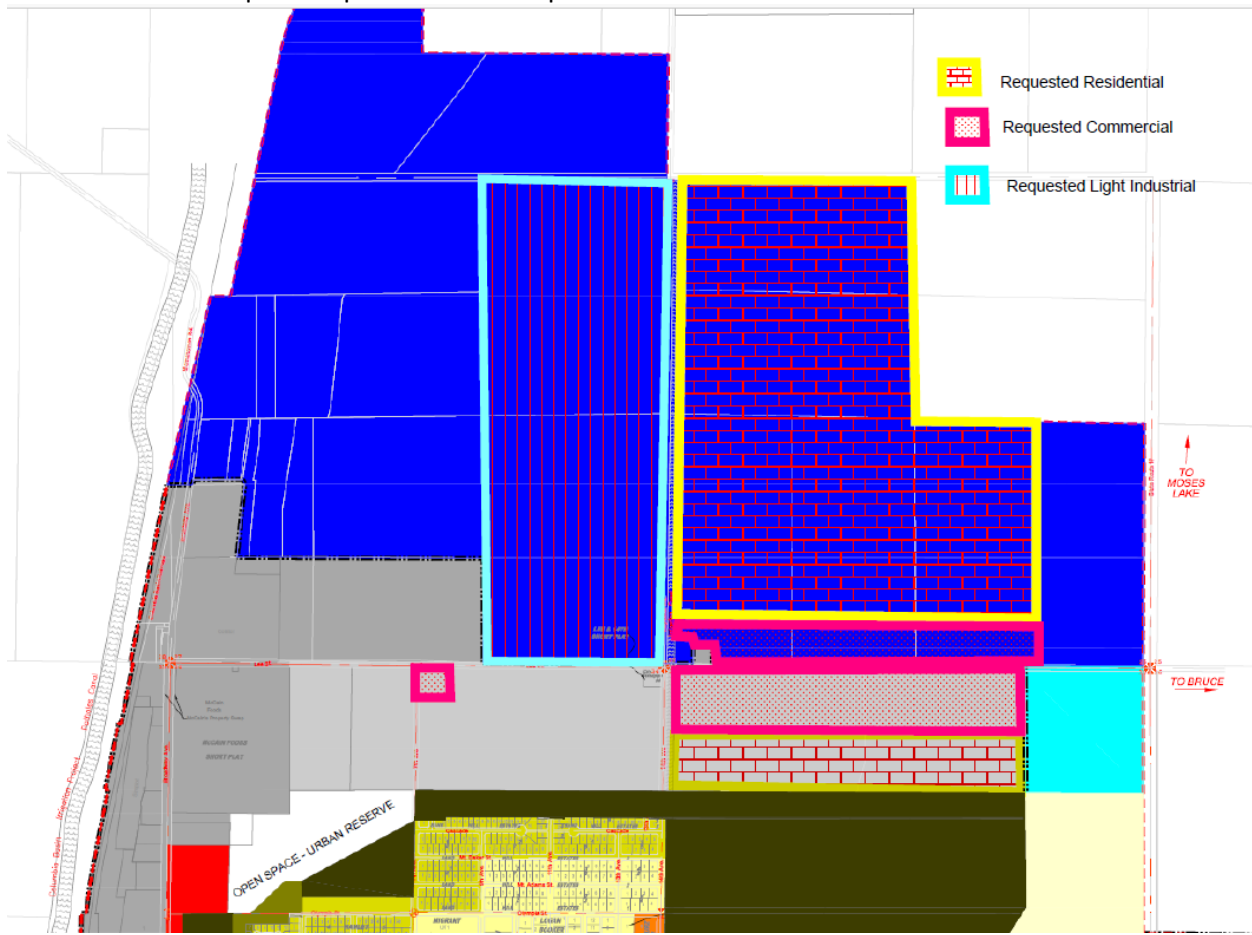
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FUTURE LAND USE MAP AMENDMENT REQUEST - DISCUSSION

There has been a request for changes to the designations north of the city, and also within city limits. Chair Simmons asked the proponent to explain the requests so the Commission could ask any questions and then mull it over and discuss further next meeting. Genna Dorow, representing Terra Gold Farms,

presented the proposed changes. She stated the whole area is designated Heavy Industrial, and the land owners are not interested in having heavy industrial uses around their residence, which is just outside the growth area. They are proposing:

- Heavy Industrial changed to Residential east of Reynolds Road and north of Lee Road.
- 660' width of Heavy Industrial changed to Commercial north of Lee Road (in the growth area), because they didn't think Residential coming all the way to Lee Road and turning off of Lee Road would be a good idea.
- 660' width of Light Industrial changed to Commercial south of Lee Road (in City limits).
- Heavy Industrial changed to Light Industrial west of Reynolds Road so there would be a buffer between the proposed Residential to the east and the existing Heavy Industrial to the west.
- A small square of Light Industrial changed to Commercial at the SE corner of Lee and 7th Ave.
- Light Industrial changed to Residential between the existing Residential in City limits and the requested Commercial along Lee Road (in City limits).

Staff had drafted a quick map to show the requests:



Chair Simmons requested clarification of whether the requests were inside or outside the city. Mrs. Dorow answered that the property owners want the future land use map to be changed because right now they get people wanting to purchase the land for heavy industry, and the owners are not interested in selling it for heavy industry. They would like to see the future use map reflect the uses they would like to see there. Ms. Henning pointed out the property owners would need to also work with Adams County,

because it is the County zoning that actually controls what happens outside City limits. Mrs. Dorow clarified that they would be working with the County also. Council member Carmona noted that the second map in the packet conflicts by showing the changes all the way to Hwy 17; Ms. Henning said she made the maps in a hurry and the second map is incorrect. The requests were only for the properties owned by Terra Gold Farms. Commissioners discussed that making changes to the west would affect how the properties to the east should be designated.

Chair Simmons stated that he had some questions about the requests but he will save them for the next meeting. Commissioners agreed they would wait for the next meeting to further discuss this request, given the time. Mrs. Dorow stated she would be at the next meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:09 pm. Next meeting is Monday August 17, 2026.

Robert M Simmons, DC
Robert M Simmons, DC (Aug 20, 2026 21:11:09 PDT)

Date: Aug 20, 2026

Rob Simmons, Chair

Anne Henning

Date: 8-20-26

Anne Henning, Community Development Director

2026.07.20.Minutes

Final Audit Report

2026-08-21

Created:	2026-08-20
By:	zuleica morfin (zmorfin@othellowa.gov)
Status:	Signed
Transaction ID:	CBJCHBCAABAAdegUnCNyafTiJsdTRXoybJoMIFDh5qGc

"2026.07.20.Minutes" History

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2026-08-20 - 11:12:11 PM GMT
-  Document emailed to rmsimmonsdc@gmail.com for signature
2026-08-20 - 11:14:34 PM GMT
-  Email viewed by rmsimmonsdc@gmail.com
2026-08-21 - 4:10:31 AM GMT
-  Signer rmsimmonsdc@gmail.com entered name at signing as Robert M Simmons, DC
2026-08-21 - 4:11:07 AM GMT
-  Document e-signed by Robert M Simmons, DC (rmsimmonsdc@gmail.com)
Signature Date: 2026-08-21 - 4:11:09 AM GMT - Time Source: server - Signature Appearance Selected: TYPE
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2026-08-21 - 4:11:09 AM GMT