

Town of Empire
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Board of Trustees & Planning Commission Joint Work Session Minutes
March 04, 2025 ~ 6:30 pm

Work Sessions do not have action items or voting. The Public can observe but cannot participate or comment at the Work Session.

1. Call Meeting to Order – Chairperson Randy Horning called the meeting to order at 6:34 PM. The meeting was held in person and through Zoom.

2. Roll Call – The Empire Board of Trustees requires a simple majority of four trustees present at the meeting for a quorum.

Present: Mayor Wendy Koch, Mayor Pro-tem Jacob Belcher, Trustee Randy Horning, Trustee Denise Tennant, Trustee Jessie Reiman and Trustee Stephanie Kline. Also in attendance is Town Administrator Jeannette Piel and Deputy Town Clerk Lisa Kunze.

A quorum was present.

3. Roll Call – The Empire Planning Commission requires a simple majority of three commission members present at the meeting for a quorum.

Present: Chairperson Kim Hubert, Sally Rush and Eileen Wheelock. Also in attendance is Zoning Officer Lon Fulton.

A quorum was present.

4. Approval of Agenda - March 04, 2025, Joint Work Session Meeting Agenda

MAYOR KOCH MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MARCH 4TH, 2025 JOINT BOT/PC WORK SESSION MEETING AGENDA, TRUSTEE BELCHER SECONDED THE MOTION, CLERK KUNZE CONDUCTED A ROLL CALL VOTE, ALL WERE IN FAVOR, MOTION PASSED.

The March 4, 2025 Agenda was approved.

5. Discussion: County Building Department Process

Town Administrator Piel: Originally we scheduled David Danielson and Amy Saxton to join us and tell us about the new Building Permit software, GovBuilt. Unfortunately, David had a conflict with some mandatory training and they couldn't make it tonight. I was, however, able to attend a meeting that they had with the Georgetown staff last week. Georgetown had the same questions about the process that we did. We will be much more involved in the process with this new system. Any time we need to approve something, the County can build that requirement into the system so the application cannot advance without our input. Lon and I will have logins to the system and we will meet with David to get started on adding in our approvals, and we will schedule a time for him to come to the Planning Commission and show how the system works. We will let the Board know that date as well if you would like to come.

Board of Trustee discussion included:

- Projects will be able to be tracked in real time.
- The Board will be presented with a new IGA for approval.
- Cost: a percentage based on the value of the project, like it is now. They anticipated similar costs with minimal new charges for municipalities.

- County will be developing this further; building permits are going out now from the new system.
- Permit holders also have access; they will create an account and the system is reportedly easy for owners, general contractors etc. to use.
- Program stops Developers from bringing partial projects; sends emails out to track completion of plans and forces Developers to present a full application.
- Will encourage “good” applications and avoid much of our frustrations with incomplete applications.
- The new system will help prioritize the importance of the ‘gatekeeping’ ability at the town; staff will have eyes on the plan to sign off.
- Solves many of the problems, we are more involved in the entire process; better record keeping (can’t blame others for dropping the ball).
- Program is user friendly.

6. Discussion: Vision for Housing and Land Use

Town Administrator Piel explained that tonight is about Vision, not writing a vision statement yet but taking some time to discuss what our overall vision is. We’ve taken many steps since 2021 already, as outlined in the attached “Steps Already Taken” handout.

Begin by defining what ‘affordable housing’ means to us, the officials of the Town of Empire. We are not setting immediate goals, but thinking about the vision for the next 20 years. Town officials, staff and residents all have important roles as outlined in the Vision, Mission, Culture handout, attached.

Exercise: Each official closed their eyes and envisioned 5 words that define affordable housing.

Randy: apartments, community living spaces, shops below

Sally: home where our community members can live in their homes, safely, and with reasonable cost.

Wendy: single family homes, various types, parents with 2.3 children

Denise: square footage that is manageable: a home that’s maintainable; saw different styles of homes; single families

Jessie: home and family; that’s maintainable to that family of medium income

Stephanie: my house, in H4H, deed restricted, single family residence

Kim: hard to define, if not impossible; we all have different situations for affordable housing...our incomes are very different, we have so much diversity in Empire; most people in town can’t afford things now, are maxed out.

Lon: increased density; taller or deeper structures; less single family detached housing; possibly 3d printed construction, and zoning.

Eileen: multiple sized homes, 1 to 3 br’s, some attached, some separate, space for community/playground; not cheaply built so they fall apart; sustainable for long term;

Jake: sustainable housing for undercompensated local employees

Town Administrator Piel then explained that tonight is for emotions, dreams, desires and aspirations that don’t even have to be realistic. ie., Heard a lot of single family houses mentioned in your 5 words; where will we put them? She will play devil’s advocate this evening to get to the deeper discussion and encourage honesty. She then read the current vision statement for the Town:

TOWN OF EMPIRE VISION STATEMENT, adopted in 2000:

The residents and the Town of Empire wish to preserve, protect, and enhance the historic integrity and small, mountain town atmosphere of Empire and the Empire Valley. Together they strive to guide future growth and development in town and the valley. The community desires growth that is *slow, managed, fiscally sound, and that does not impact the town in a negative way.*

Affordable Housing Definition: Prop 123 has defined it now with criteria, mainly for developers receiving grants or assistance. Not just smaller houses, so we have to be careful about using this term.

Sally Rush, former housing coordinator for Clear Creek County, implored the Board to look at housing with a new eye and define it for Empire, not defined by the state or the feds and to remember that we've talked about people struggling in different ways, with very little help from the County or anywhere, so how can we do 'housing' for 'all of us?' Can we make it more affordable for people to stay here?

Town Administrator Piel provided more background information:

1. Water capacity: Top number is 700 customers with present water rights (600 residents and 100/day in Visitor's Center.) Now we are at 350 people, and could be adding another 40 to 50 people with WFV. In 20 years, there is room for more houses, for another development.
2. Sewer plant. Is a physical restriction, would need to be expanded; we are at 50% now.
3. In 13 years, when Henderson stops, they will not need the same water rights; everybody in the area will be looking at this.

The Board then engaged in discussion with the following topics:

- The process and players in water rights.
- Possible annexation and laws surrounding.
- The 3-mile plan in our Comprehensive Master Plan; supposed to be paying attention, they have to notify the County and then Empire of any development that is happening within this area.
- Zoning: are we open to R3, Apartment Buildings? Most of the dreams listed earlier were single-family houses, we can still protect views with apartments on the edge of town.
 - a. Arts District: overlay zoning..
 - b. Current zoning allowed by Ordinance: Mobile Home (MH); Residential One (R-1), Residential Two (R-2), Multi-Family (R-3), and Residential Commercial (R-C).
 - c. Lot sizes.

What would we want the criteria to be?

- Maximum sizes for houses compared to others in neighborhood; especially for R-3
- Challenge is encouraging businesses, while also wanting to keep the historic look of the town by keeping single family homes in the commercial district...how do we do both? Ideas include residential on top, commercial on bottom; zoning a specific area of town; tax issues; STR 5% cap enforcement; looking at Silverthorne for long-term planning example; deed restrictions; utilities; density; parking requirements; fire mitigation; aging population and the shortage of workers now.
- Importance of developing this VISION of what the town wants to encourage appropriate developments.

Town Administrator Piel concluded with:

1. What does Empire want?

2. Empire has options working with the County through CCRHA.

7. Board of Trustees Upcoming Meetings and Topics

a. Upcoming Topics from Administrative Overview

Further discussion on the fines and permit fees for parking. Chief Lorenz cannot join us at the March Regular Meeting, but he will join us for the April Work Session so we can discuss enforcement. We plan on presenting a Resolution to declare our Elevation. I have not been contacted about either IGA, so those may be pushed to next month.

b. The Next Board of Trustees Regular Meeting is Tuesday, March 18, 2025, at 6:30 pm. In person with remote access.

c. The Next Board of Trustees Work Session/Training is Tuesday, April 01, 2025, at 6:30 pm. In person with remote access.

8. Adjourn Meeting

MAYOR KOCH MOTIONED TO ADJOURN, MAYOR PRO-TEM JAKE BELCHER SECONDED THE MOTION, CLERK KUNZE CONDUCTED A ROLL CALL VOTE, ALL WERE IN FAVOR, MOTION PASSED.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:13 PM.

(Chairperson Randy Horning)

(Deputy Town Clerk Lisa Kunze)