



RESIDENTS COALITION *of Chelan County*

Leavenworth advised to focus on policies that promote attainable housing affordability rather than further density increases

The Leavenworth city council voted unanimously at its June 10th meeting to accept as complete work performed by BHC Consulting that resulted in draft Land Use and Housing Technical Appendices for the 2026 Comprehensive Plan Update. Key take aways from the technical appendices should shift the way the city is seeking to provide more housing for locals.

The appendices conclude Leavenworth’s codes as currently written, and the city’s boundaries as currently configured, provide all the capacity necessary “to meet its housing needs across all income levels and for their emergency housing target”. (Appendix B §B.1.) The consultant’s “Land Capacity Analysis estimates sufficient capacity for infill to meet demand.” (Appendix B §B.4.) Therefore, no new code amendments increasing densities, or modifications to city or UGA boundaries, are needed to satisfy projected housing demand. In fact, current zoning regulations and existing boundaries are sufficient to satisfy anticipated housing needs well before the end of the 20-year comprehensive plan window: “with a high number of units in the construction permit timeline, Leavenworth could meet the housing target before the 20-year timeline.” (Appendix B §B.1.) Leavenworth’s consultant advised “due to recent increases in the rate of housing growth, and the number of units in the permit pipeline, Leavenworth will exceed its growth target far before 2046 . . .” (Appendix B §b.2.)

The consultant’s analysis and the technical appendices it prepared clearly signal it is time for a change in direction away from code amendments that allow increased densities but fail to impose conditions or provide incentives for affordable housing. Rather than adopting code changes that simply increase allowable density, or seeking to modify UGA boundaries, the city needs to focus on pursuing “policies that promote attainable housing affordability”. (Appendix B §B1.) The city’s consultant stressed adding density alone will not create affordable housing: “Ensuring that housing is affordable not only requires the zoned opportunities, but also the policies and incentives to achieve affordability.” Inclusionary zoning is one of those policies and **RC3** has been urging the city to adopt inclusionary zoning for several years.

The data provided by the city’s consultant shows that existing housing is more affordable than newly constructed housing will be without some type of subsidization



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or affordability requirement. “The contract rent data revealed that nearly half of existing households pay rents that fall into the lowest income brackets, likely because much of the current housing stock is naturally affordable. However, new development is unlikely to achieve the same affordability levels.” (Appendix B §B.3.) The consultant recommends the city implement tools designed to assure preservation of existing older homes: “[A]s the existing housing stock ages, the city should consider incentives to ensure existing, older housing units are maintained and not lost due to redevelopment into new, less affordable, market rate housing.” (Appendix B §B.2.) The approach also requires the city adopt “anti-displacement policies” to protect residents in existing older housing units. BHC’s work the comprehensive plan appendices memorialize the importance of adopting code provisions designed to protect existing older homes in Leavenworth: “as the existing housing stock ages, the City should consider incentives to ensure existing, older housing units are maintained and not lost due to redevelopment into new, less affordable, market rate housing.” (Appendix B §B.2.)

The council did not formally adopt the appendices, and modifications may be made as the comprehensive plan update process proceeds. However, the results of the work performed by BHC Consulting sends a strong signal that the city should shift its focus away from simply increasing allowable densities toward implementing policies that will require or incentivize the construction of affordable housing in new developments.