



WASHOE COUNTY

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STAFF REPORT

BOARD MEETING DATE: December 16, 2025

DATE: November 7, 2025

TO: Board of County Commissioners

FROM: Chris Bronczyk, Senior Planner, Community Services Dept., (775) 328-3612, cbronczyk@washoecounty.gov

THROUGH: Kelly Mullin, AICP, Division Director, Planning & Building Division, Community Services Department, 328.3619, kmullin@washoecounty.gov

SUBJECT: Introduction and first reading of an ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) in Division Two- Area Plan Regulations to establish standards for permanent employee housing in the High Desert Planning Area; to allow permanent employee housing on parcels zoned General Rural (GR) within the High Desert Planning Area at a density of up to 1 dwelling unit per 40 acres as an allowed use; and to allow permanent employee housing on such parcels at a density of up to 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres with the approval of a special use permit; and all matters necessarily connected therewith and pertaining thereto.

And if supported, set a public hearing for the second reading and possible adoption of the ordinance for January 13, 2026. (All Commission Districts.) FOR POSSIBLE ACTION

SUMMARY

The Board is asked to introduce and conduct a first reading of an ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) in Division Two - Area Plan Regulations. These amendments are specific to Article 206, High Desert Area, and establish standards for permanent employee housing in the High Desert Planning Area. The amendments also include allowing permanent employee housing in the General Rural (GR) regulatory zone at a density of up to 1 du/40 acres by right, and allowing permanent employee housing in the GR regulatory zone at a density up to 1 du/5 acres with the approval of a special use permit.

Washoe County Strategic Objective supported by this item:

Vulnerable Populations: Expand appropriate housing options across our community.

AGENDA ITEM # _____

PREVIOUS ACTION

November 4, 2025. The Washoe County Planning Commission (PC) reviewed the proposed amendments to Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) and voted 7-0 to recommend approval of Development Code Amendment WDCA25-0010 to the Board. In doing so, the Planning Commission was only required to make one of four possible findings set forth in Washoe County Code Section 110.818.15(e), which are set forth below:

1. Consistency with Master Plan. The proposed development code amendment is in substantial compliance with the policies and action programs of the Washoe County Master Plan;
2. Promotes the Purpose of the Development Code. The proposed development code amendment will not adversely impact the public health, safety or welfare, and will promote the original purposes for the Development Code as expressed in Article 918, Adoption of Development Code;
3. Response to Changed Conditions. The proposed development code amendment responds to changed conditions or further studies that have occurred since the Development Code was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, and the requested amendment allows for a more desirable utilization of land within the regulatory zones; and
4. No Adverse Affects. The proposed development code amendment will not adversely affect the implementation of the policies and action programs of the Conservation Element or the Population Element of the Washoe County Master Plan.

However, the Board was able to make all four findings.

BACKGROUND

The applicant, BRDR Properties, owns 360 acres in the High Desert Planning Area, referred to as Iveson Ranch. They are seeking to utilize employee housing for proposed operations on the property. However, the development code amendment is not limited to the Iveson Ranch parcel, instead it will apply to the entire High Desert Planning Area. The applicant states that remote businesses in the High Desert Planning Area struggle to house workers because of distance and staffing challenges. To address this, the applicant is asking Washoe County to grant more flexibility for properties in the General Rural (GR) regulatory zone within the High Desert Planning Area to potentially allow increased density for permanent employee housing. The General Rural (GR) regulatory zone has a density allowance of 1 dwelling unit per 40 acres, and the proposed development code amendment would allow for permanent employee housing at a density of 1 dwelling unit per 40 acres as a matter of right. The amendment would also allow for permanent employee housing in the GR regulatory zone at an increased density of up to 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres with the approval of a special use permit (SUP) on properties with an established business. This proposed change would only apply to the High Desert Planning Area, not countywide. Any request for employee housing at a higher density than the current allowed density of one dwelling unit per 40 acres would need to go through the SUP process to review and address potential impacts. The proposed code amendment would also clarify that this higher-density housing must be utilized for paid

employees (not volunteers) and must meet the existing standards of Article 313 (Employee and Cottage Court Housing).

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Proposed changes occur in Division 2 - Area Plan Regulations of the Washoe County Development Code. The changes are summarized below. A draft ordinance showing all proposed code amendments is attached as Attachment A.

Article 206 High Desert Planning Area

The proposed amendment only applies in the High Desert Planning Area, and would allow company towns and permanent employee housing in the General Rural (GR) regulatory zone to exceed the standard density of one dwelling unit per 40 acres if approved through a special use permit by the Board of Adjustment, up to a maximum density of one dwelling unit per five acres. It also creates new standards for permanent employee housing, stating that this housing is limited to legally employed workers (not volunteers), must comply with Article 313 of the Washoe County Development Code. Overall, the change creates a discretionary path to increasing onsite employee housing in remote areas while allowing the County to place reasonable conditions on its use and intensity and allowing for staff review to mitigate future potential issues.

FISCAL IMPACT

No fiscal impact.

PUBLIC WORKSHOP

A public workshop to discuss the amendments took place on Tuesday September 23, 2025. The workshop lasted 36 minutes. The workshop was remote (zoom meeting) and six citizens attended. The applicant's representative also presented the project to the Gerlach/Empire CAB on Thursday, October 9, 2025.

Questions and comments were related to the maximum density allowed the number of units that Iveson Ranch needs, and if there is any remediation if the housing is no longer necessary. There were also questions about why the applicants could not go through a specific plan process. Additional statements regarding housing being in short supply in Gerlach were also made.

The applicant stated that attendees seemed to be supportive of more housing in the region and seemed to be supportive of the maximum density of 1 du/5 acres. A summary of the workshop is attached as Exhibit B in Attachment C – Planning Commission Staff Report.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board of County Commissioners introduce and conduct a first reading of the attached ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) in Division Two - Area Plan Regulations as set forth in WDCA25-0010. If supported, the Board is asked to set the public hearing for second reading and possible adoption of the Ordinance for January 13, 2026.

POSSIBLE MOTION

Any member of the Board may introduce and conduct the first reading of the proposed ordinance. However, a possible motion would be:

“Move to introduce and conduct a first reading of Bill Number [insert Bill number provided by County Clerk], which is an ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) in Division 2 - Area Plan Regulations to establish standards for permanent employee housing in the High Desert Planning Area; to allow permanent employee housing on parcels zoned General Rural (GR) within the High Desert Planning Area at a density of up to 1 dwelling unit per 40 acres as an allowed use; and to allow permanent employee housing on such parcels at a density of up to 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres with the approval of a special use permit; and all matters necessarily connected therewith and pertaining thereto.. Further move to schedule a public hearing for the second reading and possible adoption of the ordinance for January 13, 2026.”

Attachments:

- A. Working Copy of Proposed Ordinance
- B. Planning Commission Action Order and Resolution No. 25-15
- C. Planning Commission Staff Report for WDCA25-0010
- D. Planning Commission Staff Presentation
- E. Planning Commission Minutes
- F. Recording of November 4, 2025 Planning Commission Public Hearing