



City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

Rick Mohler and Jamie Stroble, Co-Chairs
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, March 25, 2021
Approved Meeting Minutes

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- Commissioners Present:** Mark Braseth, McCaela Daffern, Roque Deherrera, David Goldberg, Matt Hutchins, Katherine Idziorek, Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson, Patience Malaba, Radhika Nair, Alanna Peterson, Dhyana Quintanar, Julio Sanchez, Lauren Squires, Jamie Stroble, Kelabe Tewelde
- Commissioners Absent:** Patience Malaba, Rick Mohler
- Commission Staff:** Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; John Hoey, Senior Policy Analyst; Connie Combs, Planning Analyst; Robin Magonegil, Commission Coordinator
- Guests:** Bin Jung, Office of Housing; Nick Welch, Office of Planning and Community Development

Seattle Planning Commission meeting minutes are not an exact transcript and represent key points and the basis of discussion.

Referenced Documents discussed at the meeting can be viewed here:

<http://www.seattle.gov/planningcommission/when-we-meet/minutes-and-agendas>

Chair's Report & Minutes Approval

Co-Chair Jamie Stroble called the meeting to order at 7:36 am and recognized that we are on indigenous land, the traditional and current territories of the Coast Salish people. Land acknowledgement is a traditional custom dating back centuries for many Native communities and nations. For non-Indigenous communities, land acknowledgement is a powerful way of showing respect and honoring the Indigenous Peoples of the land on which we work and live. Acknowledgement is a simple way of resisting the erasure of Indigenous histories and working towards honoring and inviting the truth. Co-Chair Stroble asked fellow Commissioners to review the Color Brave Space norms and asked for any additions or amendments to those norms before stating the expectation that everyone practice those norms.

ACTION: Commissioner David Goldberg moved to approve the March 11, 2021 meeting minutes. Commissioner Mark Braseth seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

Announcements

Vanessa Murdock, Seattle Planning Commission Executive Director, provided a brief review of the

format for the online meeting, and noted that due to the online format, public comment must be submitted in writing at least 8 hours before the start of the Commission meeting.

Commissioner Katherine Idziorek announced that she has accepted a faculty position in Charlotte, North Carolina and will be moving away from Seattle later this year. She has decided to step down from the Planning Commission effective immediately to focus on finishing her PhD dissertation. She thanked the staff and fellow Commissioners for their excellent work.

Briefing: Mt. Baker Station Planning Area efforts

Bin Jung, Office of Housing; Nick Welch, Office of Planning and Community Development

Mr. Welch provided some background and history of the Mt. Baker station area planning process. This area has been the focus of several community planning projects. Since completion of the light rail station, the North Rainier Neighborhood Plan, the Mt. Baker Town Center Urban Design Framework, and the Mt. Baker Station Area Design Guidelines have all been completed. The Design Guidelines identified existing conditions and planning and design strategies including a shopping district with complete walking and bike infrastructure. The Design Guidelines discussed connecting the town center to neighborhoods to the east and west and encouraged green spaces around the station and connecting the superblocks around the station. The Mt. Baker Station Area Vision emphasizes a vibrant and welcoming gateway; equitable development without displacement; safety, connectivity, and accessibility; and an inviting central public space.

The Station Area Context includes a network of green spaces with a gap at Rainier Ave S & Martin Luther King Jr Way S, Franklin High School, key neighborhood sites including redevelopment sites, and affordable housing investments from the Office of Housing (OH). In 2019, an Urban Land Institute Technical Advisory Panel made the following recommendations:

- Redevelopment of the former University of Washington (UW) laundry site
- Relocation of the King County Metro bus transit center to the west for a better connection to the light rail station
- Emphasis on pedestrian safety improvements, creating a pedestrian refuge

Mr. Welch stated that the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) is coordinating with several agencies in implementing the Vision. These efforts include the following projects:

- Accessible Mt. Baker - Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT)
- Route 48 Electrification - Metro
- New Station Area Development - OH and Sound Transit, OPCD, Seattle Parks, others

Ms. Jung provided an overview of the station area development project. Development sites in the station area include three sites owned by the City of Seattle, including the former laundry site, and one site owned by Sound Transit, the Link tunnel entrance portal. The terms of the transfer from the State for redevelopment of the laundry site include affordable housing and an early childcare and early learning research facility. The project will address a potential opportunity for open space to fulfill a park gap and a longstanding neighborhood goal. Sound Transit plans to redevelop their East Portal site as affordable housing.

A Site Planning and Urban Design Strategy study is being completed by a consultant team working with interagency partners including OPCD, OH, the Department of Neighborhoods, Seattle Parks and Recreation, Seattle Public Utilities, Sound Transit, and Enterprise Community Partners' Home & Hope Initiative. Deliverables of this study will include a preferred site plan, street network proposal, open space plan, Green Stormwater Infrastructure recommendations, and urban design recommendations. The desired impact is to inform a future redevelopment request for proposals (RFP) and a long-term station area vision.

Ms. Jung stated that community engagement has been conducted mostly online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Engagement efforts are assisted by the Department of Neighborhoods' Community Liaisons, with assistance in several languages to reach out to local businesses and residents. The project team is hoping to convene businesses and residents into small focus groups. Ms. Jung shared the project timeline with several key milestones in 2021. The consultant team is drafting three approaches and will reach out to the community for feedback. The final report and engagement summary are scheduled to be released in June 2021. A multi-year, multi-phase redevelopment process will begin in Fall 2021.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners expressed gratitude to the project team for providing opportunities to collect input from communities of different languages.
- Commissioners inquired how the project team is planning on reaching out to youth that are heavily impacted by development in the project area. Ms. Jung stated that the project team reached out to Franklin High School and provided project information with a link to the website. A few responses were received. The project team may reach out again asking students to participate in a second community survey.
- Commissioner asked whether the project team has issued or plans to issue an RFP for an affordable housing developer. Ms. Jung stated that a product of this consultant contract is the semblance of a site plan that will provide a Phase 1 development RFP with more details.
- Commissioners asked how this project is related to SDOT's Accessible Mt. Baker project. Mr. Welch stated that this redevelopment opportunity will create a huge increase in residents in this area, which will create additional safety concerns. SDOT is involved and are key partners in the site planning study. All but two of SDOT projects in this area are funded and headed to construction next year. A pedestrian crosswalk under the pedestrian bridge and a protected bike lane on Martin Luther King Jr. Way S. are funded and moving forward. Bold changes are planned for the longer-term including the "bow tie" realignment of the intersection of Rainier Avenue S. and Martin Luther King Jr. Way S. These projects are considered feasible but are unlikely to move forward without some additional funding. The transit center relocation is similarly paused. SDOT still sees it as a big project and is working on design and feasibility studies to understand funding needs.
- Commissioners acknowledged all the planning work that has been done in the neighborhood and asked about additional opportunities for neighborhood planning and equitable development leading into the next Comprehensive Plan update. Mr. Welch highlighted the Racial Equity Analysis currently being conducted for the Comprehensive Plan update. This effort is looking at the growth strategy in urban villages to determine the distribution of benefits and burdens of growth. An Environmental Impact Statement will look at a range of growth strategy alternatives and will consider at least one alternative with bold changes, including more housing flexibility and choice in single family areas. An analysis of the Mt. Baker Station Area could include the area to the east of

the station, which has several small neighborhood centers. Other potential approaches will consider many factors and will address the history of racial disparities in housing and land use policy.

- Commissioners recognized a potential opportunity for an eco-district in the project area and asked what levels of sustainability are being included in the RFP. Specific ideas include housing near transit, a cohesive neighborhood center, and opportunities for zoning to include more space for small businesses and other commercial uses. Ms. Jung stated that affordable housing at this location will be built to the Office of Housing's green development standards. Runoff at this location goes into the Duwamish River, so it is likely that the RFP will include stormwater interventions recommended by Seattle Public Utilities such as bioswales. The project team will consider the possibility of a broader eco-district. Available spaces for small businesses will depend on how much space the early learning center will take up.
- Commissioners asked whether the project team will consider activating the space below the light rail station and guideway. Ms. Jung stated that the area under the light rail guideway could be better. The project team is working with Sound Transit on the East Portal site. Sound Transit is aware of the desire to activate that space. Opportunities include food trucks, a farmer's market, and other uses.
- Commissioners inquired about the project team's communication and relationships with private property owners in the project vicinity, including the Lowe's and QFC sites. Ms. Jung stated that conversations with private property owners have ebbed and flowed. Most property owners have been willing to talk but are hoping that the City will take the first step.
- Commissioners reflected on experience with the Capitol Hill eco-district and stated that community partnerships are key. Childcare should be affordable at the former UW laundry site and permanent supportive housing should be prioritized at the affordable housing site. Ms. Jung acknowledged the need for affordable daycare. This issue came up during the community survey. UW is doing their own outreach and research on programming. The project team has spoken with other providers about the need for affordable childcare.
- Commissioners inquired about whether the project team has considered sustainable building practices. The use of innovative construction techniques, such as cross-laminated timber (CLT), could help push the construction industry toward broader acceptance of these sustainable practices. Ms. Jung stated that the project team has talked about CLT in general but has not yet thought about specific construction methods for this site.
- Commissioners introduced the topic of integrated emergency planning and asked whether the concept of community hubs has come up in this project. Ms. Jung stated that there are several significant landslide hazards in the vicinity. The redevelopment will need to address how to shore up adjacent hillsides to address these risks.
- Commissioners stated that the Othello Square project is a great precedent for the Mt. Baker Station Area planning effort. Community assets, community services, access to transit, and commercial affordable space will be key considerations for this project.

The Commissioners thanked Ms. Jung and Mr. Welch for their presentation and briefing.

Public Comment

Executive Director Murdock read the following public comment, which was submitted via email.

My name is Ryan and I live in a single-family home in Seattle. I believe in an equitable city that should allow sixplexes by right across the city, including my lot. When we approach the future changes to our city, I want to make sure we reflect on areas of resistance and address them now. Neighborhood Conservation Districts were once explored by City Council about 5 years ago and they should be studied from the racial and social equity lens before ever being reconsidered. We have to ask ourselves who historic preservation benefits, what the outcome will be for racial and social impacts and if it is preserving the historic segregation of our neighborhoods and furthering the divide of our city. We need to move forward as a city and with that comes a realization that our own backyards must change. Please consider addressing historic preservation so the wealthiest, whitest and lowest density neighborhoods do not weaponize it to their benefit.

*Thank you,
Ryan DiRaimo*

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 am.