



City of Seattle
Seattle Planning Commission

Michael Austin, Chair
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, June 11, 2020
Online Meeting
Approved Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Michael Austin, Sandra Fried, David Goldberg, Grace Kim, Rick Mohler, Julio Sanchez, Amy Shumann, Lauren Squires, Jamie Stroble, Rian Watt, Patti Wilma

Commissioners Absent: Kelly Rider

Commission Staff: Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; John Hoey, Senior Policy Analyst; Connie Combs, Planning Analyst; Robin Magonegil, Commission Coordinator

Guests: Katherine Idziorek, Patience Malaba

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

Chair Michael Austin called the meeting to order at 3:06 pm 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.

Chair Austin shared the Commission's Color Brave Space norms and asked the Commissioners to each read one of these norms.

Put Relationships First

Work to build community and trust (with an awareness of power dynamics).

Keep Focused on Our Common Goal

Advance equitable planning of socially and environmentally just communities.

Notice Power Dynamics in the Room

Be aware of how you use your privilege: From taking up too much emotional and airtime space or disengaging.

Create a Space for Multiple Truths & Norms *Speak your truth and seek understanding of truths that differ from yours (with awareness of power dynamics).*

Be Kind and Brave (Lean Into Discomfort)

Remember relationships first, and work to be explicit with your language about race, class, gender, immigration, etc.

Practice Examining Racially Biased Systems & Processes

Individual actions are important, and systems are what are left after all the people in this room leave.

Look for Learning

Show what you're learning (not what you already know). Avoid playing devil's advocate (the devil has enough advocates).

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Chair Austin provided a preview of the agenda and announced that the next meeting will be held on June 25. This meeting will also be held online.

Briefing: Childcare Near You Legislation

City Councilmember Dan Strauss; Lish Whitson, City Council Central Staff

Councilmember Strauss introduced himself and thanked the Planning Commission for taking the time for this briefing. Mr. Whitson stated that Councilmember Strauss has requested broader access for childcare facilities across the city. There is a need for childcare for many families as access is limited. There are two regulatory bodies that regulate childcare facilities, the Washington State Department of Children Youth and Families and the City of Seattle. The City primarily regulates childcare facilities through business licenses and land use regulations. There are a range of different state-licensed childcare facilities. Family Home programs allow up to 12 children, based on age, staffing and expertise, and are treated as a home occupation under Seattle zoning. Childcare centers are regulated for different numbers of children based on space and staffing and are subject to standards for space and operation. Other facilities are not licensed but are regulated as childcare centers under zoning. These include facilities that offer cooperative care for less than 4 hours a day, government-sponsored centers, and drop-in childcare centers.

Childcare centers are currently discouraged in Seattle's single-family zones. In Downtown, they are incentivized through the zoning code. Mr. Whitson reviewed Seattle's childcare regulations for home occupations (family care centers), single-family zones, multi-family zones, commercial zones, industrial zones, Downtown, and Seattle Mixed zones. He presented recent data for supply and demand for childcare facilities. Most data for childcare centers is collected at the county level. There are approximately 16,400 spaces in 910 childcare centers in Seattle. According to the Center for American Progress, fifty percent of Seattle's Census Tracts meet the definition of "childcare deserts", and twenty-four percent of Seattle's Census Tracts contain no childcare centers. Mr. Whitson shared data on recently permitted childcare centers between 2015-2019. The time to approve childcare centers averaged 161 days, while the longest approvals were childcare centers in single family zones that needed conditional use approval, which took 248 days on average.

Mr. Whitson provided an overview of the Childcare Near You legislation. The details are as follows:

Home occupations (Family care centers)

- Remove limit on the number of children
- Allow childcare in accessory buildings

Single Family zones

- Permit outright
- Remove dispersal requirements

Multifamily zones

- Remove dispersal requirements
- Exempt childcare from floor area limits in midrise and highrise zones

Commercial zones

- Remove size limits (10,000 square feet in NC1 and 25,000 square feet in NC2)

Seattle Mixed zones

- Allow at street level along key pedestrian streets
- Provide floor area incentives that currently apply to preschools to all childcare centers

Future Steps

- Review incentive programs that mitigate increased height and density through provision of childcare space

Councilmember Strauss stated that this legislation is important to him because he has heard from so many people that they have to sign up for childcare years in advance or even go out of Seattle for childcare. The current childcare challenges externalize the costs, including time without family and time on the road caught in traffic. He believes that all Seattle families deserve to have childcare options near where they live and work. Families should be able to drop off and pick up their kids easily. He stated that this legislation is just a start. There is a much longer path to create accessible and affordable childcare for all.

Mr. Whitson thanked Gordon Clowers of the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) for assistance in drafting the legislation.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners expressed hope that the outcome of this legislation will be more childcare facilities, and that the cost of childcare may come down. Most families feel that they have already paid a lot for childcare by the time their children reach school age.
- Commissioners expressed support for revising the regulations for childcare in single-family zones, especially as this would allow walking to these locations. Commissioners asked whether increasing development capacity in single-family zones had been considered as an incentive to develop childcare facilities. Councilmember Strauss stated that the first priority is to remove conditional use regulations in single-family zones. This legislation will set up conditions for increasing density.
- Commissioners expressed support for childcare facilities in Downtown, as they support ground-level pedestrian use, but there are privacy and safety concerns about pedestrians looking at the

children. A childcare example in Post Alley at semi basement level allows pedestrians to see activity in the facility without identifying individual children.

- Commissioners inquired whether there have been any discussions about the relationship between this legislation and the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on commuting, living, and working in the future.
- Commissioners asked whether the Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) has been involved with this legislation. Councilmember Strauss stated he has mentioned the legislation to DEEL and will follow up with the department.
- Commissioners asked whether Councilmember Strauss has considered looking at incentives in equity areas (areas with high displacement risk and/or low access to opportunity) or areas near transit corridors. He stated that land use legislation takes a long time to develop. He has been working on this bill since February and wants to keep the scope of the legislation as tight as possible. This bill will make technical changes to expand access to childcare. Changes to zoning could be considered at a later time.

Briefing: Station Area Planning (West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions)

Lauren Flemister, Office of Planning and Community Development

Ms. Flemister provided an overview of the Sound Transit 3 (ST3) Planning Workgroup supporting light rail expansion in Seattle. The Planning Workgroup includes co-planning, station area planning, and design guidance functions. She described the impacts of COVID-19 on Sound Transit's program. The Sound Transit Board will consider their revenue shortfall and prioritize projects in construction or under contract. This will result in realigning project schedules and could impact projects in Seattle in the planning phase. The West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions (WSBLE) project may pause during the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) phase. The scope and type of community engagement has been affected significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in communities that are harder to engage. The economic impacts of COVID-19 will impact the City's ability to contribute a strong package for third-party funding.

Ms. Flemister described the City's and Sound Transit's Co-planning: Sound Transit is determining station locations, routes, and alignments. The City is conducting station access planning, will review zoning in the station areas, and determine what happens in the right-of-way. The stations are Sound Transit's responsibilities, while the City regulates the area around the stations. The station context has mixed responsibilities and varies from station to station but is generally one to two blocks around each station. The City is responsible for all utility updates, road and sidewalk updates, and public space improvements. The two organizations have been thinking about the best way to work together. Inter-agency workshops have included Sound Transit, the City, Metro, and the Port of Seattle at some station areas.

The DEIS is about midway through development and will likely be completed in 2022-2023. The DEIS will be published by the middle of next year. All of the Agency Workshops are complete. It has been challenging, as these have had to switch to a virtual workshop format. Other inter-agency work will be held online, most likely with an interactive portal to review different segments along the alignment.

The City and Sound Transit will design a co-planning program for the Final EIS to be completed between 2021-2022/23. This will include land use issues, rezones, and issues beyond the immediate station area.

Ms. Flemister stated that community engagement in Chinatown/International District (C/ID) has been challenging, especially with the COVID-19 stay at home restrictions. The community wants to work with the City but is now unable to engage in face-to-face and traditional public meetings. The City will start a planning process for the Jackson Hub area. This will include establishing guiding principles, a context action plan, and overall project coordination in the Jackson Hub area (including Pioneer Square, C/ID, the Port of Seattle). Planning efforts will need to adjust the schedule to ensure the community has sufficient opportunity to engage.

Early station area planning efforts include C/ID and Jackson Hub, Westlake, and Delridge. Full station area planning will start after the EIS is completed. The Industrial/Maritime Strategy has been paused but will be starting again soon. Efforts will be coordinated in the Interbay, Smith Cove, Ballard, and SODO station areas. These efforts will become more specific when thinking about transit-oriented development and rezones. Community workshops this summer will incorporate industrial and maritime stakeholders.

Ms. Flemister stated that the City and Sound Transit have made an agreement to complete a Racial Equity Toolkit for their work together moving forward. Sound Transit will also complete an Environmental Justice analysis in the EIS. A Charter between the City and Sound Transit establishes a common understanding of how to work together and what is hoped to be achieved. A Design Guidance working group has wrapped up its vision and principles and are now developing design objectives, guidelines, and design standards. Another group is working with the Seattle Design Commission and SDCI to determine a review process for station designs and guideways.

The 130th Street and Graham Street stations might be subject to revenue constraints. The City will engage with the 130th Street station area community later this summer and early fall. A rezone is anticipated across the street from the station location in 2021 to indicate transit-oriented development potential of this area. Ms. Flemister stated that there are not a lot of updates about the Graham Street station. The main concern with this station is protecting it from further delays. This is a priority for the City, but Sound Transit will make a decision based on revenue.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners requested clarification about the 130th Street and Graham Street stations, asking if there is a chance that those stations will not be built at all or just have their timeline extended. Ms. Flemister stated that a timeline shift would be likely. Commissioners expressed appreciation for hearing that the Graham Street station has strong support from the City. The community has worked on and advocated for that station for a long time.
- Commissioners asked whether any decisions have changed regarding consideration of elevated or partial elevated alignments given the potential budget constraints. Ms. Flemister stated that is a Sound Transit Board decision and will likely depend on financial forecasts.

- Commissioners inquired whether the City is coordinating with the public development authority in Interbay. Ms. Flemister stated that the City has not initiated transit-oriented development coordination in Interbay. The station location is not yet known, but the City will coordinate at the appropriate time.
- Commissioners requested more information on the concept of complete communities and asked if that concept is connected to the Racial Equity Toolkit. Ms. Flemister stated that as stations come into our built-out city, the City will need to help Sound Transit figure out how to integrate their service into the surrounding communities, especially in communities of color. Sound Transit's investment should enhance those communities. The City will encourage Sound Transit to include retail opportunities, work with community partners for transit-oriented development, and incorporate space for small businesses. She stated that the Graham Street station area would be an obvious place to serve communities of color.
- Commissioners requested an update on how the status of the West Seattle Bridge may affect the WSBLE project. Ms. Flemister stated that in the short-term, the City and Sound Transit are trying to determine how best to respond to the bridge closure impacts. For the long-term, there have been conversations about a combined automobile/light rail bridge. The Mayor's Office is very interested in this idea, but Sound Transit has concerns about the cost and environmental review implications for such a bridge.
- Commissioners asked for clarification about the extent of the planning area for the 130th Street station. Ms. Flemister stated that the station area will include both the walkshed and the transit service area to the east and west of the station. This is a fairly large planning area.
- Commissioners requested guidance on the best way for the Planning Commission to use its voice to ensure communities of color are not left behind again. Ms. Flemister recommended that the Commission share its input with the City Council, the Mayor's designated representative to Sound Transit, and the Sound Transit Board. She stated that this is a time to be thinking about how transit investments will be made regionally. She suggested talking with other jurisdictions to find out what they are willing to support and how to best support communities of color. Commissioners stated that this may be a good time to connect with other Planning Commissions throughout the region to identify a combined strategy.

Commission Business

Chair Austin and Executive Director Murdock introduced the Commission's draft statement about systemic and institutional racism in response to police actions. They stated that this is not a typical statement or process for the Commission, but this is an opportunity to speak with a collective voice on a very important topic. The Commissioners had a conversation about the intent of this statement and offered recommendations on how to improve the statement.

The Commissioners stated that they felt it was important for this statement to reflect that the Planning Commission is an independent citizen advisory body, not a regulatory body. The intent should be to convey solidarity with the community and a call for action from the City's leadership, but also to communicate the Commission's commitment to do its own work to address systemic and institutional racism. The Commissioners reinforced that the message does not need to be perfect, but it is important to make sure that anything said cannot be construed as harmful to the Black community.

Several edits were suggested by Commissioners and were incorporated into the draft statement. Executive Director thanked the Commissioners that contributed to this statement. She emphasized the timing for this statement in anticipation of the general strike against systemic racism on Friday, June 12th. Chair Austin stated the importance of this statement and recognized the Commission's commitment to address these issues moving forward.

Public Comment

Executive Director Murdock read the following public comment statement, which was provided by email.

Thank you for your review of Sound Transit and the City's station area planning efforts. We wish to expand upon the public comment made during your February 27th meeting – the earlier comments were reflective of Ms. Flemister last update and your 2/13 Industrial and Maritime Strategy discussion– where we provided station area thoughts, materials and illustrations for consideration. As you may recall, the Stack family represent a longstanding business and ownership in the SODO neighborhood. Presently controlling 7.5 acres of land (yard space and older buildings) adjacent to the SODO light Rail Station at 6th and Lander. One of the Stack buildings was removed to accommodate the current SODO Station. Currently, we are a member of the Mayor's Industrial Lands committee and longtime contributor to Sound Transit's efforts. The SODO community and Stack Family are actively calling for density and true Transit Oriented Development around the SODO Station. We want to see it become a world class transit hub that encourages neighborhood activity, vitality and supports family wage jobs. This would call for mixed-use commercial/residential zoning established in a walk zone around the station and along the light rail line. The revised zoning should allow for commercial office, technology and science-based space, along with residential housing all to ensure the success of the station area.

We've heard 'Maker Space' Industrial zoning opportunities should be included as well. 'Maker Space' alone will not justify the high cost of cleaning up the environmental issues in the SODO, nor the high cost of development and construction due the cost of land and challenging soils conditions. It can certainly part of the mix to preserve the SODO's industrial character, but a high percentage of mixed-use commercial/residential zoning must be included, or nothing will get built. (We have a list of specific ideas to share when you begin to consider the vision and new zoning possibilities in SODO.)

Please know we and the neighborhood coalition we've established is available to provide real life input and an area tour suggested earlier (either we lead or organized by others). Thank you for considering our thoughts.

Ted Lehmann and Mark A Weed

The meeting was adjourned at 5:11 pm.