



City of Seattle Seattle Planning Commission

Linda Amato, Chair
Barbara Wilson, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION DECEMBER 11, 2008 APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

COMMISSIONERS IN ATTENDANCE

Vice-Chair Chris Fiori, Josh Brower, Tom Eanes, Jerry Finrow, Colie Hough Beck, Mark Johnson, Martin Kaplan, Kay Knapton, Amalia Leighton, M. Michelle Mattox, Kevin McDonald, Leslie Miller, Michelle Zeidman

COMMISSION STAFF

Barbara Wilson-Director, Robin Magonegil-Administrative Assistant, Katie Sheehy-Planning Analyst, Diana Canzoneri-Demographer

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

Chair-Linda Amato, Tony To

GUESTS

Councilmember Sally Clark; Ray Gastil, DPD

IN ATTENDANCE

Christine Lock, Dan Nolte, Bob Corwin

Please Note: Seattle Planning Commission meeting minutes are not an exact transcript but instead represent key points and the basis of the discussion.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chair Chris Fiori called the meeting to order at 3:04 pm.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

▪ Minutes approval

Commissioner Hough Beck corrected an error on page six.

ACTION: Commissioner Kay Knapton moved to approve the November 13, 2008 minutes. Commissioner Jerry Finrow seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed unanimously.

- **Chair's Report**

Vice Chair Fiori noted the upcoming meetings: next Tuesday, December 16 will be the Executive Committee meeting; next Thursday, December 18 is the Land Use and Transportation Committee meeting; Tuesday, January 6 will be the next Housing, Neighborhoods and Urban Centers committee meeting; the Thursday, January 8 will be the next Full Commission meeting. He noted that there would not be any meetings between December 18 and the new year.

Vice Chair Fiori thanked Commissioner Josh Brower for hosting the very fun and festive Commission Holiday Party. He noted that everyone had a very good time and the food and drink were terrific.

- **Staff Report**

Ms. Wilson provided a brief update about the recruitment of new commissioners. She asked for volunteers to help review prospective applicants, particularly for interviews that would be scheduled on Friday, December 19. She noted that there would be eight interviews, which would take most of the day. Commissioners McDonald, Kaplan, and Mattox indicated that they would be available in the morning, Commissioner Miller would be available after 1:00 pm and Commissioner Johnson would be available all day.

Commissioner Finrow asked how many positions are open. Ms. Wilson stated that there are four – two that would be appointed by City Council, one by the Mayor's Office, and one selected by the Commission itself.

Ms. Wilson noted that while Commissioners Eanes and Mattox would be leaving, they have agreed to continue assisting in an ex-officio capacity. Commissioner Eanes will help evaluate the Multifamily Code legislation and Commissioner Mattox will continue to serve on the Yesler Terrace committee. Ms. Wilson thanked them for continuing to work on behalf of the Commission.

Ms. Wilson stated that the incentive zoning legislation passed out of the Planning Land Use and Neighborhoods Committee yesterday, although a few details are still being worked out. She noted that Councilmembers appreciated the Commission's comments on this topic.

Ms. Wilson indicated that the Backyard Cottage User Guide will be printed later this month and hopefully released in January. Ms. Wilson also confirmed that it had been reviewed by code compliance specialists, the City's Legal Department, and many others.

UPDATES & DISCUSSION

- **Alaskan Way Viaduct & Seawall Replacement**

note: this item was moved up on the agenda to accommodate Commissioner Eanes' schedule.

Recusal & Disclosure:

- Commissioner Hough Beck recused herself from the discussion.
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Vice Chair Fiori asked Commissioner Eanes to provide a brief update about the Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement project. Commissioner Eanes stated that he has attended most of the Stakeholders Advisory Committee (SAC). About three meetings ago, they provided the results of their traffic analysis, which are available on the project website. The increase in traffic on downtown streets was higher as a percentage for the surface options than any other scenario, he indicated. For example, the increase in traffic was about fifty percent on University Street. Commissioner Eanes said that he does not think the impact on livability has been adequately addressed. He noted that reductions in on street parking have been evaluated in terms of total number of stalls but not pedestrian amenities. The most recent meeting focused on economic analysis and focused more on the impacts during construction, which would ultimately have a small impact on the regional economy. Commissioner Eanes further stated that Gehl Architects evaluated the urban design and livability aspects of the scenarios. That report was critical of all options, particularly the surface and elevated ones. He noted that the team is supposed to announce their alternatives today and the Governor should make a decision by the end of the year. He also indicated that the SAC feels that the process has moved too quickly—now that all of the information is available, there is less than a month to make a decision. There is a fair amount of dissention.

Vice Chair Fiori asked if there needs to be further analysis. Commissioner Eanes said not necessarily, but that it would be interesting to know what the impact on downtown traffic would be *without* making it easier for traffic to get through downtown. We would be the only city in the world trying to increase traffic downtown.

Vice Chair Fiori thanked Commissioner Eanes for his update.

- **Seattle's Transit Communities**
 - staff report

Recusal & Disclosure:

- Commissioner Leighton disclosed that she is the manager of the Pedestrian Master Plan for her firm, SvR.
- Commissioner Eanes disclosed that his firm, Hewitt, is the architects for the RapidRide, several light rail stations and regularly work on mixed use projects.
- Commissioner Brower disclosed that his firm represents owners of multi-family and mixed-use property.
- Commissioner Kaplan disclosed that his firm works on multifamily projects.
- Commissioner Hough Beck disclosed that her firm works on transit oriented projects throughout the city.
- Vice Chair Fiori disclosed that his firm owns property in proximity to light rail stations and represents other firms that own such property.
- Commissioner Johnson disclosed that his firm regularly works on transit projects, including with Sound Transit.

Ms. Wilson asked the Commission to review the outline of the proposed report. She noted that the schedule has slipped by about a month because of the time it took to schedule the roundtable. One clear message we heard at the roundtable was that NOW is the time to address this topic,

particularly because of the imminent light rail system in southeast. She asked the commissioners for their comments.

Commissioner Johnson indicated that the regulations and processes need to be clarified and streamlined. A planned EIS could be really helpful.

Commissioner Miller said that it was nice to City staff talking a lot about how to create communities, rather than just transit stations and acknowledging that City-citizen communication around planning was limited (and adversarial at times). The question still remains for the City—we know we're not doing the best job now, but how can we fix it?

Commissioner Hough Beck stated that we need the infrastructure to support the future development. Budgets are tight, so how can we pay for this? We also need to look at the capacity and identify what it will take to support increased densities. It is a huge challenge and also, hopefully, a great opportunity.

Commissioner Leighton added that this is about planning for the future, not just for the people who already live in these neighborhoods, but for those who will move to them. Not everyone will want to live in a single family home. How can we help illustrate what forms new development could take? Maybe changes need to be made to the regulatory process.

Commissioner Kaplan said that we have to communicate why we invested so much money in these transit projects and explain why it is appropriate to plan for increased density. The politicians need to clearly communicate the objectives that will help clarify where we are going and why.

Commissioner Zeidman noted that Councilmember Conlin asked for us to look at new growth targets and provide a philosophy for why things should change.

Vice Chair Fiori asked what we do want to recommend. Do we want to establish a rationale about why to do best practices? Some of these items are really detailed.

Commissioner McDonald said that if our timeline was March 2010, we could really drill down into these details. Given that we do not have that much time, we should focus on a vision statement and two or three things that flow out of that—a box of tools and techniques that will work in Seattle. We could also recommend further actions, e.g. zoning changes, which will increase density that supports the transit investments. We should keep it at a higher level given the short timeframe and then could follow up with further suggestions for work plan items.

Ms. Wilson noted that staff has conducted a pretty thorough review of the City's plans and policies. It seems that these are pointed in the right direction. Mr. Roberts and Ms. Sizov have already done a lot of research about best practices and Ms. Sheehy has started to compile metrics. We want to know whether or not you want us to keep up with this work; whether or not this would be helpful to include in our report.

Commissioner Brower agreed that he likes the idea of articulating a vision. He indicated three specific elements (1) figure out what everyone is doing; (2) consolidate this in one place; (3) outline what else needs to be done. This could include zoning changes, incentive zoning, and infrastructure. Elected officials are looking for a measure of political cover.

Commissioner Finrow noted that he did not attend the roundtable. He said that there is a discrepancy between what people in the community think about transit and density and what staff and elected officials think. He suggested that it might be helpful to find out what concerns community members actually have.

Ms. Wilson said the roundtable was intended to learn about what the Commission's stakeholders need related to creating good communities around our transit investments.

Commissioner Kaplan noted that it sounds like the neighborhood plan update process will focus on community concerns and ensure that they are involved. He suggested that perhaps the Commission could release two reports: one that focuses on the three neighborhoods that will be addressed in the first round of neighborhood planning with the understanding that the second report would include lessons learned from the first round.

Commissioner McDonald suggested that the report could be a tool for the neighborhoods to use when they update their plans.

Commissioner Brower said that a lot of what Commissioner Finrow brought up is being addressed by the NPAC, although they have only had one meeting.

Commissioner Johnson suggested that it would be helpful to illustrate what different densities look like. Provide people a sense of what development could look like under the current code.

Planning Director's Update

- Ray Gastil, DPD

Vice Chair Fiori welcomed Mr. Gastil, who said he is looking forward to the Commission's report and was pleased to attend the roundtable. He spoke briefly about the neighborhood plan update process that will begin in earnest early next year. This is an important opportunity to achieve real density and lay the foundation for transit oriented communities in Seattle's neighborhoods. He also said that it will be important to clearly articulate this vision of Seattle's Transit Communities and show people what they could look like. The Commission's report could be used as a resource for the communities.

Mr. Gastil then asked the Commission for their thoughts about streetcars. The City Council recently passed legislation to expand the system, but it was not discussed at the roundtable. Ms. Wilson noted that the Commission has not taken a position on this issue.

Commissioner Eanes said that he has two, somewhat conflicting, opinions: he has always liked fixed rail transit, but it is a lot of money. It seems that trolley busses or BRT would be a better investment.

Mr. Gastil said he was surprised to hear that merchants on Capitol Hill were concerned about moving the streetcar route from Broadway to 12th Avenue. Commissioner Knapton responded that from a business perspective, changing the alignment would divert potential customers from their doorstep. Having customers right in front of their businesses would make up for the disruption of construction.

Mr. Gastil asked if it would matter to a business owner if services were provided by bus or streetcar. Commissioner Kaplan responded that the streetcar attracts people who would not ride a bus. He noted that there is a perception that the South Lake Union route was only built to suit one land owner.

Commissioner Zeidman noted that streetcars attract more 'choice' riders while buses more typically serve people who do not have other options.

Commissioner Hough-Beck, who lives and works in South Lake Union, said that the streetcar has increased tourism immensely and that a lot of commuters use it too. It is a nice, predictable alternative.

Commissioner Johnson indicated that the newness of the vehicles is part of the attraction and that the newer Sound Transit and Community Transit buses provide a much more comfortable ride.

Commissioner Finrow said that streetcars are part of a broad strategy of choice; Seattle does not have enough transit choices. Adding BRT, streetcars, light rail are each part of what it takes to create rich transit communities like in Europe. He believes that streetcars do have a place in Seattle and would add to the choices for transit. He cited Northgate as the best example of how to make smart decisions -- build the community investments first and the private development will follow. Seattle should be more proactive about infrastructure investments that help build communities.

Vice Chair Fiori noted that loading on buses during peak periods is a challenge because people cannot get on or off fast enough. Real time communication and WiFi can also be used for buses. Mr. Gastil suggested that this would be a helpful topic for the Commission to weigh in on in the Seattle's Transit Communities report.

Councilmember Clark's Update

- Councilmember Sally Clark

Vice Chair Fiori welcomed Councilmember Clark and noted that the Commission is very glad to have her join them today.

Councilmember Clark began by saying that particularly with the incentive zoning legislation, the Commission's feedback has been invaluable on multiple levels; the Commission has really played a constructive role for the Councilmembers. She expects the full Council to vote on the incentive zoning legislation within the next week. While some people think 17 percent of the bonused units is too aggressive, particularly with the current market, it is what is currently proposed. Regarding neighborhood plan updates, she indicated that the process needs to move forward in a grounded way that will be different from the previous work. She thanked Commissioners Brower and Knapton for joining the NPAC and noted that there are a lot of smart people and a lot of new faces in the group.

Councilmember Clark then addressed the Dravus rezone and stated that while there were a lot of politics involved, Council did try to adhere to the Commission's suggestions. She said that most Councilmembers did not think that the Mayor's office made a strong case for including a LID [local improvement district]. Councilmember Clark particularly thought that the process had gone on too long and needed to be resolved.

Regarding the Multifamily Code Update, Councilmember Clark said the legislation has not yet gone to Council, but that she expects to spend a lot of time working on it in 2009. The proposal will likely be reviewed through a series of smaller, more manageable sections. She would like to create a transparent process that will allow for meaningful community feedback, which is also how she would like to address the South Downtown legislation that is also expected to go to Council in 2009.

Councilmember Clark went on to address the Comprehensive Plan amendment process. She again thanked the Commission for their recommendations both about the process and for the amendments they proposed this past year. It has been a challenge for Council to review the proposed amendments during the budget process, which is why they are looking at how it can be improved. As we head into 2011, there will be a lot of discussion with the potential to educate people and make improvements to the Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Finrow liked the idea of creating a new process for the Comprehensive Plan. He also observed that many people wonder about how it actually gets implemented. Councilmember Clark agreed that it has been an ongoing discussion, particularly because it seems to be used to justify almost anything.

Commissioner Brower brought up the concern about how the language of individual gets changed during the amendment process so that, by the end, it might not have the same meaning that the proponent intended. Councilmember Clark responded that they are trying to address that concern in a way that does not just add more time and complexity to the process.

Commissioner Kaplan noted that it could be a challenge to bring new Councilmembers up to speed if the amendment process is already well underway. Councilmember Clark said that that is a great question but that she does not have a great answer to it yet.

Vice Chair Fiori asked if Councilmember Clark had any priorities for the Commission to address during the next year. She noted that the multifamily code will be very important. Also perhaps backyard cottages; industrial lands, particularly in south downtown and Georgetown; and the neighborhood plan updates and status reports. She also indicated that a number of transportation projects, such as the viaduct, will be important issues next year.

Vice Chair Fiori thanked Councilmember Clark for her time and said that the Commission looks forward to their continued work together next year.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chair Fiori adjourned the meeting at 5:03 pm so that Commissioners could attend a meeting about the final recommendations for the Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall replacement.