



# City of Seattle Seattle Planning Commission

Grace Kim, Chair  
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

## SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION FEBRUARY 11, 2016 APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

### COMMISSIONERS IN ATTENDANCE

Lauren Craig, Molly Esteve, Sandra Fried, Yolanda Ho, Grace Kim, Amalia Leighton, Kara Martin, Marj Press, David Shelton, Patti Wilma

### COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

Michael Austin, Jake McKinstry, Tim Parham, Spencer Williams

### COMMISSION STAFF

John Hoey, Policy Analyst; Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

### GUESTS

Nick Welch, Office of Planning and Community Development;

### IN ATTENDANCE

Cindi Barker, Jasmine Marwaha, Aly Pennucci

*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

#### **Chair's Report & Minutes Approval**

- Chair Grace Kim

Chair Kim called the meeting to order at 4:31pm.

Commissioner Ho moved to approve the January 28, 2016 minutes. Commissioner Martin seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

Chair Kim reminded the Commission of upcoming meeting dates and encouraged them to spread the word about the openings on the Planning Commission before the February 26 deadline.

#### **Briefing and Discussion: Removing Barriers to Backyard Cottages**

- Nicholas Welch, Office of Planning & Community Development

If you would like to view the Powerpoint presented on Removing Barriers to Backyard Cottages, it is included in the supporting documents found in the minutes' section of our website.

## **Presentation overview:**

Mr. Welch provided an overview of the Office of Planning Community Development's work on identifying ways to create more Detached Accessory Dwelling Units, more commonly known as backyard cottages. He described the benefits of backyard cottages, including affordable housing options in single-family neighborhoods and sources of additional income for homeowners. He also identified some barriers to permitting and building backyard cottages, such as current building code requirements and development standards. Mr. Welch shared a summary of public feedback received during two recent public meetings in response to questions about potentially changing the land use code and associated development standards.

## **Commission Discussion:**

Commissioners asked for more information about the current owner-occupancy requirement. Mr. Welch stated that the current land use code requires a homeowner to live in either the primary structure or an accessory dwelling unit (ADU or DADU) at least six months of the year. He said that this requirement received the most public comment during the recent public meetings. Public feedback included concerns that removing the owner-occupancy requirement would result in developer speculation or maintenance issues on those properties with a backyard cottage and no resident homeowner. Mr. Welch stated that Portland does not have an owner-occupancy requirement and allows both the accessory dwelling unit and the main house to be rented. Despite this, a survey of ADU owners found that 64% occupy their properties anyway. The vast majority of accessory units in Portland are built by current homeowners. Commissioners discussed the unlikelihood of a developer choosing to raise a current single family structure in order to build a new house with a backyard cottage, as a larger home without a backyard cottage would likely have a greater financial return.

Commissioners expressed a concern that backyard cottages are cost-prohibitive to build and are not affordable to a wide range of homeowners. Mr. Welch stated a general estimate for building a backyard cottage is approximately \$300 per square foot, or between \$200,000-250,000. The City is working with a local bank to identify potential financing mechanisms, such as a construction loan or a hybrid loan, that would facilitate development of more backyard cottage units. Commissioners also suggested providing any additional incentives and resources such as a clearinghouse of existing backyard cottage projects, designers, and builders, as well as pre-approved designs or plans for a variety of backyard cottages on different lot sizes.

Vanessa Murdock facilitated a discussion with the Commissioners about each of the potential building code requirements and development standards under consideration by OPCD staff. The Planning Commission will be drafting a letter on this subject and reviewing the draft at its next meeting on February 25<sup>th</sup>. A final letter will then be made available for public comment before being considered for adoption at the Commission's March 10<sup>th</sup> meeting.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Cindi Barker encouraged the Planning Commission to consider the following issues in their discussion of backyard cottages: minimum lot size and developer speculation on single-family lots; flexible parking standards in non-Urban Village neighborhoods without frequent bus service; short-term rentals such as Airbnb and their experience in Portland; and access by the Fire Department to lots without alleys.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Kim adjourned the meeting at 5:30pm.