



## City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

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

### SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, April 14, 2022  
Approved Meeting Minutes

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<b>Commissioners Present:</b>	McCaela Daffern, Roque Deherrera, Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson, Rick Mohler, Radhika Nair, Alanna Peterson, Dhyana Quintanar, Lauren Squires, Jamie Stroble
<b>Commissioners Absent:</b>	Mark Braseth, David Goldberg, Matt Hutchins, Patience Malaba, Julio Sanchez
<b>Commission Staff:</b>	Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; John Hoey, Senior Policy Analyst; Olivia Baker, Planning Analyst; Robin Magonegil, Commission Coordinator

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

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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 3:04 pm. Co-Chair Stroble offered the following land acknowledgement:

*'On behalf of the Seattle Planning Commission, we'd like to actively recognize 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. She reminded the Commissioners that they have collectively agreed to abide by these norms.

<b>ACTION: Commissioner Roque Deherrera moved to approve the March 24, 2022, meeting minutes. Commissioner Alanna Peterson seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.</b>
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## **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 eight hours before the start of the Commission meeting.

## **2022 Leadership Slate**

Ms. Murdock stated that the Commission selects leadership, including a Chair or Co-Chairs for the full Commission and committees, annually. She announced that the following leadership slate is proposed for 2022:

- Co -Chairs: Jamie Stroble and Rick Mohler
- Housing and Neighborhoods Committee Co-Chairs: Matt Hutchins and Radhika Nair
- Land Use and Transportation Committee Co-Chairs: Alanna Peterson and David Goldberg

**ACTION: Commissioner McCaela Daffern moved to approve the 2022 leadership slate. Commissioner Roque Deherrera seconded the motion. The motion to approve the leadership slate passed.**

## **Update: Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections**

Nathan Torgelson, Director, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI)

Director Torgelson stated that the last time he provided an update to the Planning Commission was October 14, 2021, exactly six months ago. He expressed his gratitude that Mayor Harrell asked him to stay on as Director of SDCI. The department has a budget of \$112 million for 2022. The City Council provided additional resources, mostly related to tenant protection work. Director Torgelson stated that 2021 was the ninth consecutive year of high permitting volumes, inspection requests, code compliance cases, and inquiries from the public, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Permitting levels were down in 2021 but not significantly. SDCI received 506 Master Use Permit applications and issued 582. The net number of housing units added stayed strong at 8,756, an increase from 2020.

In December, SDCI piloted a Virtual Applicant Service Center (ASC) Counter customer experience, using a software product called ZenDesk that mimics in-person services that were provided at on the 20th floor of SDCI's offices in the Seattle Municipal Tower (SMT) prior to the pandemic. Members of the public and applicants can live-chat with a staff member and talk to a live person online to help answer questions and resolve permit issues. The goal is to replicate online all services that were physically provided on the 20th floor of the Seattle Municipal Tower. SDCI will have a larger public-roll out of this Virtual ASC in May. The department recognizes that some members of the public do not have online resources and continues to explore an in-person function on the 4th floor of SMT.

Director Torgelson stated that SDCI has added all the Rental Registration Inspection Ordinance (RRIO) properties to the Shaping Seattle website. The department has published a completely redesigned version of the Comment on a Project page to help make it easier for customers to understand what

they should do to submit an effective comment. SDCI has added a new function to create one point of contact for small businesses and arts and cultural organizations that are looking to lease space in the center city core. RRIO inspections have resumed after a pause during the Omicron phase of the pandemic. SDCI released the 2021 Tenant Services Grants Request for Proposals (RFP) on October 23<sup>rd</sup> and has awarded about \$1.72 million to community partners to perform eviction defense, assistance in the rental relationship (e.g., counselling and casework), and education and outreach. This year's RFP will also emphasize responding to tenant needs during the COVID crisis and recovery. A sizeable portion of the grant funding will support the City's right-to-counsel for eviction defense.

Director Torgelson stated that the City's tenant eviction moratorium has ended, but several protections are still in place, including:

- free legal assistance from the Housing Justice Project
- assistance for rent and utility payments due to COVID hardships
- rules limiting eviction of tenants with delinquent rent accrued between March 3, 2020 and up to 6 months after the end of the moratorium
- rules limiting eviction from September to June based on Seattle Public Schools calendar for households with students (childcare—under 18), educators and employees of schools.

SDCI continues to operate its vacant building monitoring program. The department received 12,000 code complaints, conducted 4,941 inspections (353 RRIO inspections and 4,588 Code Compliance inspections), and performed 68 clean-up and closure actions in 2021. The department created a new unreinforced masonry coordinator position and a new emergency management position.

SDCI has a new Design Review program manager, Shelley Bolser. Design Review Board and public meetings continue to be virtual, which allow the public to comment and follow specific projects from the comfort of their homes. SDCI is exploring how public meetings can continue to be virtual post-pandemic while allowing online access in public venues for members of the community who do not have access in their homes. A statement of legislative intent was recently passed by the City Council to look at ways to make the Design Review process more efficient. SDCI will begin to work with the Office of Planning and Community Development and a stakeholder committee on this work soon.

Director Torgelson stated that new energy codes went into effect on March 15, 2021. The City adopted new codes to further electrify buildings using clean energy and to ban fossil fuels for most building use. This includes a prohibition on the use of natural gas for space heating in new commercial and tall multifamily buildings and substantial alteration projects, as well as for water heating in hotels and tall multifamily buildings. City Council member Lewis sponsored legislation that expands this to all new commercial buildings, but not substantial alteration projects. New land use code amendments allow for greater rooftop equipment coverage in buildings downtown, with additional flexibility for Pioneer Square buildings. Recently submitted legislation for Seattle Central College will allow flexibility for the college to develop student housing without going through a Major Amendment process. The Harrell administration allowed SDCI to issue a staff recommendation for tree protection legislation developed under Mayor Durkan. The proposal increases the number of trees considered exceptional and provides

an in-lieu fee option. SDCI is in discussions with Sound Transit on the permitting process for the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions (WSBLE). SDCI staff have been involved in review of the WSBLE Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

SDCI held virtual home fairs on January 29 and 30 that attracted more than 400 attendees, many of whom saw several sessions over the two days. The home fair included sessions on landslide preparation, tree regulations, accessory dwelling units, earthquake home retrofits, rental housing, and floor area ratios in single-family homes.

#### Commission Discussion

- Commissioners congratulated Director Torgelson for his reappointment and expressed appreciation for the work of SDCI managing permits online during the pandemic.
- Commissioners expressed enthusiasm for the new unreinforced masonry and emergency management positions SDCI has created.
- Commissioners requested an update on the City Council deliberations on requiring rental registration applicants to provide information on rent levels. Director Torgelson stated that is a City Council directive, not an Executive directive. SDCI is looking at how to provide that information or whether it can only be provided voluntarily by landlords.
- Commissioners requested more information on how the in-lieu fee proposed with the tree preservation ordinance would be used. Director Torgelson stated that those details are still under development, including the appropriate fee structure and providing the nexus for where trees could be planted. It may make most sense to plant trees in the right of way or on public property (for example, parks) from long-term maintenance perspective. SDCI will be working with City Councilmember Strauss and the Law Department on those details.
- Commissioners expressed concern that the tree ordinance and Design Review process are often politicized from an anti-development perspective. An ongoing question is how to achieve the City's goals without using trees or Design Review to stop development. Director Torgelson stated that SDCI staff will be involved in the process to develop the Major Update to the Comprehensive Plan. One challenge is that several Urban Centers and Urban Villages have reached their growth targets. Once these targets are reached, SEPA thresholds are reduced significantly, and much smaller projects need to go through SEPA review. This leads to an increased workload as more projects go through SEPA review.

**Public Comment: Sound Transit West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions DEIS Comment Letter**  
There was no public comment.

**Action: Sound Transit West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions DEIS Comment Letter**

**DISCLOSURES/RECUSALS:** Commissioner Dhyana Quintanar disclosed that her employer, WSP, supports the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions project through a general engineering contract with Sound Transit. She recused herself from the discussion. Commissioner Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson disclosed that her employer, Jacobs Engineering, is part of the team producing

**the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this project. She recused herself from the discussion. Commissioner Alanna Peterson disclosed that her employer, Pacifica Law Group, does work for Sound Transit on land use and other issues. She recused herself from the discussion.**

John Hoey, Seattle Planning Commission staff, provided an overview of the Commission's final draft comment letter on Sound Transit's West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions (WSBLE) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Mr. Hoey reviewed the outline of the draft comment letter as follows:

- I. Introduction (Over-Arching Comments)
- II. Equity and Environmental Justice
- III. Climate Change
- IV. Transit-Oriented Development
- V. Stations in Industrial Areas
- VI. Transportation, Transit, Multi-Modal Connections
- VII. Housing and Displacement
- VIII. Visual Impacts

Mr. Hoey stated that the Commission's final comment letter will be sent to Sound Transit before the 90-day comment period deadline of April 28.

**ACTION: Commissioner Roque Deherrera moved to approve the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions DEIS comment letter. Co-Chair Rick Mohler seconded the motion. Of the fourteen Planning Commissioners, nine were present at this meeting. Three Commissioners recused themselves from the discussion and abstained from the vote. The remaining six Commissioners voted to approve this letter. This does not represent a quorum of the Commission required to approve a letter.**

#### **Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**The meeting was adjourned at 4:24 pm.**