



City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

McCaela Daffern and Jamie Stroble, Co-Chairs
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, November 14, 2024

Approved Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Xio Alvarez, Cecelia Black, McCaela Daffern, Andrew Dannenberg, Dylan Glosecki, Matt Hutchins, Matt Malloy, Dhyana Quintanar, Monika Sharma, Lauren Squires, Dylan Stevenson, Kelabe Tewolde, Nick Whipple

Commissioners Absent: Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson, Radhika Nair, Jamie Stroble

Commission Staff: Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; John Hoey, Senior Policy Analyst; Olivia Baker, Planning Analyst

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:

<https://www.seattle.gov/planningcommission/meetings>

Chair's Report & Minutes Approval

Co-Chair Micaela Daffern called the meeting to order at 3:03 pm and announced several upcoming Commission meetings. Co-Chair Daffern 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 who have lived on and stewarded these lands since the beginning of time and continue to do so today. We offer land acknowledgement because Native land was taken by force and colonized to form the United States as we know it today. Through this process, which is ongoing through systematic oppression, Native identity, history, and land ownership has been ignored by colonizers and attempted to be erased. Land Acknowledgement is the first step in opposing the systematic oppression and historic erasure of Native people and Native Land ownership.'

Co-Chair Daffern noted that this meeting is a hybrid meeting with some Commissioners and staff participating remotely while other Commissioners and staff are participating in the Boards and Commissions Room at Seattle City Hall. She asked fellow Commissioners to review the Color Brave Space norms and asked for volunteers to select one or more of the norms to read aloud. She suggested to Commissioners that they collectively agree to abide by these norms.

ACTION: Commissioner Andy Dannenberg moved to approve the October 24, 2024 meeting minutes. Commissioner Xio Alvarez seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

Announcements

Vanessa Murdock, Seattle Planning Commission Executive Director, reviewed the format of the meeting. She noted that public comment could be submitted in writing via email at least eight hours before the start of the meeting or provided in person by members of the public attending the meeting at City Hall.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Working Session: One Seattle Comprehensive Plan Update

Vanessa Murdock, Seattle Planning Commission Executive Director, provided an overview of the Commission's work to date and upcoming meetings related to review of the One Seattle Comprehensive Plan. The Commission will take action to approve its comment letter on the Mayor's proposed Growth Strategy, Neighborhood Residential development standards, and zoning maps at a special meeting on Tuesday, December 17 from 8:30-9:00am.

Ms. Murdock provided the following summary of the November 5 Executive Committee meeting:

- Approach to review and comment development
 - Light touch on preferred growth strategy – save more for Council's review
 - Focus on zoning changes in Neighborhood Residential zones and proposed zoning maps
 - Look for themes and overarching suggestions on zoning maps
- Early thoughts on format for letter
 - Less text-heavy, use a table for comments, organized by categories
- Compared SPC recommendations on the growth strategy from draft Comp Plan to outcomes in the preferred growth strategy
- Comments on Preferred Growth Strategy
 - Some positive changes – FAR increase, bonus for stacked flats, improvements to affordable housing bonus
 - Continued concerns around concentration of density along arterials
 - Want to see affordable housing bonus work for social housing developer
 - Request OPCD explain the criteria used for selection of and zoning changes to neighborhood centers
 - Want to understand how changes to neighborhood residential zoning supports production of family sized housing and housing for people with disabilities

Olivia Baker, Seattle Planning Commission staff, provided the following summary of the November 7 Housing and Neighborhoods Committee meeting:

- Overview of SPC recommendations on draft Comp Plan compared to outcomes in draft zoning changes

- Comparison of draft zoning changes to state model code
- Discussion of specific zoning changes
 - Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and Unit Density
 - Would consider suggesting up to 1.6 FAR like the state model code. Interested in thoughts from others not present
 - Consider reviewing design standards around balconies, stoops, and entryways through the lens of encouraging interaction and community building
- Discussion of specific zoning changes
 - Affordable Housing Bonus
 - Appreciate the bonus has increased. Would like to know how many units this can be expected to produce and if affordable housing organizations are happy with this proposal
 - Corner Stores and Neighborhood Center Retail
 - Discussed concerns around balance of available retail space with increased housing capacity and potential displacement of existing small businesses
 - Discussed constraints around corner store provision – discussed pros and cons on removing constraints like required closed hours, limit to corner lots
 - Stacked Flats Bonus
 - Glad to see this bonus included, recommend removing the 6000 sq ft minimum lot size requirement
 - Building Heights in Neighborhood Centers
 - Discussed how each neighborhood center is so different, individual nuance is needed
 - Previously recommended up to 8 stories to support affordable housing, suggest an affordable housing bonus for neighborhood centers
 - Parking Requirements
 - Disappointed these do not go further to reduce minimums
 - Consider reiterating recommendation to removed parking minimums but also include some middle ground approaches
 - Open Space
 - Worry a flat 20% requirement will be overly restrictive, would like to discuss more ways to add flexibility
 - Inclusionary Zoning
 - Want to discuss further, but outside scope at this point in process

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners expressed support for focusing on how the Commission’s goals are reflected in the particulars of zoning, specifically Neighborhood Residential and Neighborhood Centers.
- Commissioners proposed a goal statement specifying that more people will have access to 15-minute neighborhoods.
- Commissioners suggested identifying criteria and themes on how to address neighborhood-specific needs and opportunities to reverse historic underinvestment and overinvestment (such as light rail going through Rainier Valley and leading to gentrification). It was suggested that the Commission’s comments point out specific examples of when a consistent approach to citywide issues and neighborhood-specific concerns would be beneficial.
- Commissioners asked how the preferred Growth Strategy differs from the zoning maps. Ms. Murdock stated that the Growth Strategy identifies boundaries of various future land use

categories. The updated zoning maps include details of new zoning types, including Neighborhood Residential development standards.

- Commissioners stated that the Neighborhood Residential development standards have been revised to allow for more family-sized units. Commissioners expressed concern that these standards will not work for social housing developers but will work for some developers. Commissioners stated that 6000 square foot lots can now be developed with up to nine units.
- Commissioners suggested the use of incentives and innovative tools. Housing for the lowest incomes and stacked flats will not get built. Landlords do not want to operate these types of units and condos have proven to be too litigious. Commissioners expressed concerns about accessibility related to townhomes.
- Commissioners stated that the porch bonus could be much more generous.
- Commissioners recommended that the City should keep the current formula for counting units that includes rounding up.
- Commissioners recommended revising the steep slope exclusion that limits the number of lots that can increase from four to six units.
- Commissioners acknowledged that the proposed FAR has been increased to 1.2 on most lots and to 1.4 for stacked flats on a 6000 square foot lot. Commissioners stated that stacked flats need an additional incentive. The difference between 1.2 and 1.4 FAR does not matter for townhouses but does for stacked flats.
- Commissioners commented on the transition between Neighborhood Centers and Neighborhood Residential zoning. There could be an opportunity around the Neighborhood Centers to slightly densify, informed by the typology in the neighborhood.
- Commissioners discussed the requirements and incentives that can be established for accessibility in stacked flats (for example, vertical solutions). Paris has FAR of 1.5 for all commercial uses. Commissioners noted that height is an incentive. Three stories will never get elevators, while projects with five or more stories require elevators. In stacked flats, one third of the units are inherently accessible because they are on the ground floor. Commissioners noted that this provides equity and should be recommended for more areas of the city than only on 6000 square foot lots.
- Commissioners expressed disappointment with the lack of a nexus between the growth strategy and economic development.
- Commissioners questioned whether corner stores need to be explicitly located on corners and discussed limitations on operating hours. Store hours can be evaluated by the neighborhood. Commissioners asked whether there is concern that many corner stores would serve alcohol. Many bars and breweries are in industrial area that are not easy to walk to. Commissioners stated that OPCD is tightly regulating corner stores, challenging the likelihood that some will be built.
- Commissioners stated that, in general, the density of people in an area will limit the feasibility of a business. Our low-density neighborhoods limit the feasibility of corner stores popping up everywhere. Commissioners noted that Google Maps or another method could be used to prove that most businesses in Seattle close by 10pm.
- Commissioners recommended that the Planning Commission make a strong statement on parking policy, including support for an integrated parking strategy. Seattle should turn parking minimums into parking maximums, combined with increased regulations on on-street parking. An overall strategy is needed to make the city less car dependent.

- Commissioners stated that they would like to hear from architects about alternatives to the 20% open space requirement. Commissioners noted that a tree point system has already been in use for five years on Residential Small Lot properties. This is a new layer for Neighborhood Residential.
- Commissioners stated that the City is balancing a lot of competing interests. We should not be prioritizing parking over trees, open space, and quality of life.
- Commissioners expressed concern that twenty to thirty new Neighborhood Centers do not have sufficient water and sewer infrastructure capacity.

John Hoey, Seattle Planning Commission staff, provided the following summary of previous comments on the proposed zoning maps:

Neighborhood Centers

- Suggestion that SPC does not review individual zoning maps. Residents will be submitting comments about which boundaries, blocks and parcels.
- Propose a citywide review of the Neighborhood Center maps. Look for patterns and themes across zoning maps and comment accordingly.
- Suggest agreeing on overarching criteria to ensure these centers are mapped consistently and equitably across Seattle.
- It would be helpful if OPCD could share their criteria for determining the maps and framework for how zoning choices were made.
- Request explanation for why specific Neighborhood Centers were added and why others were not – specifically in areas with a lack of NCs such as NE Seattle and SE West Seattle.
- Concern that Neighborhood Centers may not be big enough to make a difference. Want to ensure that we have sufficient land assemblage for large scale multi-family development.
- Are proposed Neighborhood Centers large enough to support economically feasible affordable housing?
- Challenge of balancing anti-displacement goals with developing and incentivizing walkable 15-minute neighborhoods.
- Concern about displacement of existing businesses. Is OPCD creating sufficient zoning capacity for commercial uses on adjacent lots?
- Appears that many Neighborhood Centers are going up to 65 feet, but incrementally. Needs more of a push for affordable units by going higher.
- Want to be careful about the balance between our existing neighborhood character and new density.

Arterials

- Continued density and increased capacity for housing along hazardous arterials is problematic due to public health concerns.
- Concern that development along arterials is limited only to first parcel fronting the street.
- All arterials are not the same. A light rail and low-emissions bus corridor is different from a high-pollution emitting arterial such as I-5, State Route 99, and freight corridors.
- This is a critical piece of how we bring an equitable lens to this review.

- People deserve a choice when it comes to where they live. Options available to low incomes households should not be limited to housing on arterials.
- Suggestion to ask the City to work with Seattle-King County Public Health to monitor pollution levels along arterials.
- Complete Communities Coalition came out with a proposal to expand this concept to a 5-minute walk from arterials.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners noted a citywide trend of density along arterials, for example in the Mt. Baker neighborhood. There is a significant amount of additional commercial zoning (orange on the maps) proposed where there is already commercial. It appears that OPCD is concentrating Low-Rise and Mid-Rise zoning around commercial areas. Commissioners expressed concern about displacing existing corner stores to develop mid-rise uses. Magnolia Village is another example. A significant number of parcels are converting to commercial zoning surrounded with taller mixed-use development. By creating development capacity in existing commercial nodes, will these areas be upzoned so much that they will be destroyed? Is adaptive reuse supported? What will that feel like?
- Commissioners expressed disappointment in the lack of commitment to accessibility in this Comprehensive Plan. Where will all the aging people live? Most of the middle housing will be townhouses. Even in stacked flats, only the bottom floor is accessible. Neighborhood Centers will only be five stories; there are not a lot of opportunities for elevators.
- Commissioners expressed frustration with the narrow definition of transit corridors. New Neighborhood Centers are close to Urban Centers, but the zoning does not connect. For example, the Tangletown Neighborhood Center does not connect to the Wallingford Urban Center.
- Commissioners stated that the Neighborhood Centers should allow more people to live in areas with existing services. These areas are upzoned from forty to fifty feet. What happens when existing businesses are redeveloped? Commissioners expressed support for a modest expansion of Neighborhood Commercial zoning to allow space for businesses to move around. OPCD has noted that their focus has been on creating primarily residential uses.
- Commissioners noted that the proposed zoning maps still include a tremendous amount of Neighborhood Residential (yellow) zoning. The proposed rezones are not going far enough. The Neighborhood Centers are rezoning places that define the character of our neighborhoods. We worry about the places that we love disappearing. If we care about neighborhood character or facades, the Pike/Pine corridor has been a success.
- Commissioners stated that the new Neighborhood Center zoning is limited to formal delineations. This is a missed opportunity to show how residents can get their daily needs met.
- Commissioners suggested that it is important to preserve Commercial and Low Rise 3 areas around arterials and Neighborhood Centers for accessibility. How to articulate the attributes of these areas that reinforces our values? Commissioners stated that Neighborhood Centers provide an opportunity for the next generation of entrepreneurial uses.
- Commissioners asked how home businesses are affected by the proposed zoning changes. Ms. Murdock stated that it will be necessary to determine the existing rules for home businesses before deciding whether to comment on this issue.

- Commissioners emphasized the importance of eliminating existing gaps between Urban Centers and Neighborhood Centers. The Commission should provide a comment on how to fill those gaps in a systematic way. There is no recognizable rationale for where these begin and end.
- Commissioners returned to the example of the Mt. Baker neighborhood. OPCD proposes to upzone all the small funky areas that were created in a nonconforming way. How do we foster these as a node, and how do we create the corner stores of the future? The City should think more systematically about where it wants the next generation of commercial nodes to pop up.

Public Comment

Joe Giampietro stated that he is an architect and appreciates the Commission's comments about the City's proposed zoning changes. Having any parking requirement is a concern or a loss. Any house has almost no green space because of parking. The City will be required to follow new rules from the state. A house with two accessory dwelling units requires one parking space. Curb cuts take away parking spaces on the street. If we want to advance housing, we need to discourage parking.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 pm.