



## City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

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

### SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, October 10, 2024

Approved Meeting Minutes

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**Commissioners Present:** Xio Alvarez, McCaela Daffern, Andrew Dannenberg, Dylan Glosecki, Matt Hutchins, Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson, Matt Malloy, Dhyana Quintanar, Monika Sharma, Lauren Squires, Kelabe Tewolde

**Commissioners Absent:** Cecelia Black, Dylan Stevenson, Radhika Nair, Jamie Stroble, Nick Whipple

**Commission Staff:** 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:

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

#### Chair's Report & Minutes Approval

Co-Chair McCaela Daffern called the meeting to order at 3:04 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 acknowledge the role that traditional western-centric planning practices have played in harming, displacing, and attempting to erase Native communities. We commit to identifying racist practices and strive to center restorative land stewardship rather than unsustainable and extractive use of the land.'*

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 Xio Alvarez moved to approve the September 26, 2024 meeting minutes. Commissioner Andy Dannenberg 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.

### **Follow Up Discussion: Subarea Planning**

Jesse London and Amy Nguyen, Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD)

Mr. London provided an update on Capitol Hill/First Hill engagement and visioning in collaboration with Capitol Hill Eco District and the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle. Engagement efforts included small group discussions, pop-up events, a public workshop on September 12, and an online survey. Small group discussions included focus groups organized around four categories –environment, culture/health, economy/housing, and transportation. The following takeaways were noted consistent across all topics:

- First Hill and Capitol Hill are very different experientially and there is a physical disconnection between these two neighborhoods and Downtown.
- Capitol Hill is a good place for ground floor retail, but spaces are closing. There is a fear that it is losing its eclectic-ness and there is displacement of arts and nonprofits.
- This area is very diverse and LGBTQ+ friendly.
- Mental health and substance abuse are in plain sight.
- Need for more green space and tree canopy.
- Lack of public restrooms.

The following visions for the future were noted across all topics:

- Accessible for kids and elderly. More for youth to do (especially for free).
- Safety is a priority.
- Prioritize people.
- Housing affordability.
- Green and walkable.
- Sense of welcoming and belonging and celebration of a multi-cultural identity.
- More connection between First Hill and Capitol Hill.

The community workshop highlighted an emphasis on public space, activating streets, pedestrian amenities, and support for new housing, diversity of housing, and affordability.

Mr. London provided an update on the Downtown subarea planning process. A recent public workshop provided residents with an opportunity to review a vision statement, themes, and policy ideas for feedback.

- Participants shared constructive ideas to ground the vision statement, often sharing how they imagined each theme could be successful.
- The most commented themes on the vision board were welcome, safe and at home Downtown.
- Ideas ranged from policies to encourage balanced, affordable development, to projects that amplify indigenous voices and programs to support the unhoused.

Below is a summary of some takeaways for each of the key themes:

#### Make everyone feel safe and welcome

- In order for people to feel safe Downtown, it needs to be activated
- Unhoused people need supportive services and help, rather than regulation
- Street ambassadors are an important community safety resource
- A public realm that is cared for (well-lit and maintained) would make people feel safer Downtown
- Representation of cultures, especially Indigenous culture, would make more people feel welcome

#### At home Downtown

- Remove barriers to development (including height and lot size restrictions)
- Support development of buildings with a mix of affordable and market rate units, as well as mixed uses on the ground floor
- Support for more daily services and amenities (grocery, school, parks)
- Desire for more unit types (that support families) and ownership opportunities

#### Find our way

- Activation and events need to be more visible/easy to find in the public realm
- Way-finding systems are needed to help people move through Downtown (maps at bus stops, markers for important places)
- Separation of mobility types would make people feel safer to walk and bike
- Feeling that cars are prioritized, and Downtown would benefit from a pedestrian -first mindset
- Using transportation should feel safe and be enjoyable

Mr. London provided an update on the Northgate Regional Center, with a focus on housing and transportation topics. He provided the following key takeaways related to housing:

- 82% of households are renters (compared to 56% citywide)
- 10-15% lower rents than rest of the city
- 49% of Northgate renters experience housing cost burden (compared to 40% citywide)
- Development pipeline is exclusively rental housing
- Rents for apartments in pipeline are expected to be unattainable for many current residents

Mr. London and Ms. Nguyen presented the following questions for the Commission:

- Northgate’s existing residential population is at relatively high risk of displacement. However, given its lower density relative to other Centers and temporary slowdown in redevelopment, we have an opportunity to pursue preventative programs.
- Options discussed internally include:
  - Using the proximity of North Seattle College to encourage training for higher paying jobs
  - Encouraging relocation of directly displaced tenants to housing within the subarea
  - Enable current renters to purchase their apartments

#### Commission Discussion

- Commissioners requested more information on the existing affordable housing situation in the subarea. Mr. London stated that there are several affordable housing development projects in progress, including the Northgate Apartments which are being redeveloped as mostly affordable.
- Commissioners asked about the options for expansion of affordable housing on publicly owned land. Mr. London stated that residents that were displaced may be eligible for the BRIDGE housing project on the former Northgate park and ride lot.
- Commissioners asked if the City has considered purchasing existing lots and/or buildings to accommodate residents. Ms. Nguyen stated that the City has expressed interest in land banking and strategic real estate acquisitions, especially along the Sound Transit 3 route. She stated that BIPOC communities have been asking the City to lean into this anti-displacement strategy for years.
- Commissioners pointed out the significance of having North Seattle College in the Northgate Regional Center. Ms. Nguyen also highlighted the expansion of the University of Washington Medical Center in Northgate for well-paying jobs and work/living balance.
- Commissioners highlighted the prevalence of rental housing in the Northgate area and encouraged the City to promote both affordable rentals and affordable ownership opportunities.
- Commissioners noted the dramatic shift between the Regional Center boundary and the adjacent single-family neighborhoods. Higher education and medical facilities are surrounded by unaffordable neighborhoods. Commissioners pointed out previous comments on the Comprehensive Plan related to arterials adjacent to low-density neighborhoods. The City should promote smoother transitions and gentler densification. Ms. Nguyen suggested that the Planning Commission continue to provide these types of comments in the next round of the Comprehensive Plan update.

Mr. London provided the following summary of transportation issues in the Northgate area:

- Community has stressed interest in improved walkability and a more pedestrian-oriented built environment
- Northgate is comprised of long blocks, few streets and pedestrian connections, pedestrian and bike safety challenges, and so much parking.
- Previous planning efforts have produced recommendations for pedestrian connections (1993, 2004, 2006, twice in 2013, and 2015)
- Mall redevelopment will have improved internal conditions, but largely continue to have vehicle-oriented access to the site

Mr. London and Ms. Nguyen presented the following questions for the Commission:

- We are exploring approaches to “reconnecting” or otherwise proliferating the adjacent “grid”-like street network by leveraging long-term developer interest in increased building heights for public spaces or easements that would build out this network, via land use regulations.
- Questions include:
  - What are realistic expectations for this approach?
  - What should be the geographic extent of this approach? For example, should it include west of I-5?
  - A pedestrian-only network would be an easier nexus case. Should we omit vehicular streets?

#### Commission Discussion

- Commissioners asked if the City is considering vacating streets in the Northgate Regional Center. Ms. Nguyen stated that the intent is to break up superblocks in the area. Commissioners expressed strong support for this approach. Once any land is dedicated to cars, it is very difficult to reclaim. If the City intends to build pedestrian-oriented zones, cars must be excluded. Commissioners asked if there are specific parcels that the City would want to prioritize. Mr. London stated that the ideal blocks to focus on would be the large parcels to the south of the light rail station. Adjacent streets in that area already have a network.
- Commissioners expressed strong support for more pedestrian connections and suggested building sidewalks where there are currently none. Commissioners recommended exploring additional ideas for crossing the I-5 corridor and alternatives to the current grid network. Commissioners stated that the Kraken Community Iceplex has developed a series of intuitive pedestrian connections to the light rail station. Commissioners recommended additional connections to the Seattle Neighborhood Greenway network.

Mr. London provided an overview of Downtown Regional Center housing and transportation topics. He provided the following key takeaways related to housing:

- Cost burden is the biggest housing problem.
- Downtown housing growth has exceeded targets by 15% since 2015
- 75% of Downtown units were built after 2000
- The median year units were built is 2011
- Downtown is on pace to be the largest housing center in Seattle.

Mr. London and Ms. Nguyen presented the following questions for the Commission:

- We recognize the need to support families Downtown through development of larger scale units, however there is a need for additional resources in the area before it will be desirable for families. How do we impress the importance of these investments?
- In your view what are mechanisms to incentivize or require larger scale units?
- Have you seen examples of mixed income development in high rise construction?

### Commission Discussion

- Commissioners stated that the future of downtown in a post-pandemic context is hopefully moving to a more 24-hour regional center.
- Commissioners noted that Downtown will never have grocery stores and other amenities if there is not enough housing for families. Downtown has too many studios and one-bedroom units. The City will need a mandatory program or incentives to build more larger units.
- Commissioners stated that Downtown schools and parks are essential for attracting families. Downtown may not have the land available for those amenities unless the Lid I-5 effort is successful.
- Commissioners noted that Seattle has missed opportunities in the past, including the Seattle Commons and planning around the waterfront and stadiums.
- Commissioners highlighted Yesler Terrace as a long-term integrated family neighborhood. There is an opportunity for the King County Civic Campus initiative to pivot from civic space to other uses.
- Commissioners recommended including Seattle Public Schools as a thought partner in bringing families to Downtown.
- Commissioners stated that if it seems implausible to bring essential services and amenities to Downtown, the City should at least focus on the areas around downtown and improving essential transportation connections.

### **Commission Business**

Ms. Murdock stated that the Planning Commission's recent paper *Invest in Seattle's Future* has been distributed to the Mayor's office, City Council, and a variety of City departments. The strategy for further distribution is through leveraging Commissioner contacts. She suggested that Commissioners contact staff if they would like to receive tailored speaking points.

The first public hearing on the Mayor's proposed budget will be held on October 16. Ms. Murdock stated that several Commissioners have agreed to testify. Staff will draft speaking points.

Ms. Murdock stated that OPCD will release the Mayor's preferred growth strategy, Neighborhood Residential development standards legislation, and proposed zoning maps on October 16. The Commission will be briefed on these topics by OPCD staff on October 24. OPCD will be holding a series of Comprehensive Plan public meetings in each of the City Council Districts with opportunities for public comment. Ms. Murdock stated that the Commission will be dedicating all meetings between October 24 and December 20 to review and comment on these proposals. She stated that the Neighborhood Residential zoning legislation will be considered by City Council by next May to comply with recent state legislation, HB 1110. The Mayor's proposed Comprehensive Plan will be released by the end of this year. The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) should be released around the same time. The Mayor's proposed budget includes funding for a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) studying the impacts of increased density in already dense areas of the city.

### Commission Discussion

- Commissioners asked how these new Comprehensive Plan proposals relate to subarea planning. Ms. Murdock clarified that the Regional Centers in the Comprehensive Plan are not changing, other than the addition of Ballard.

- Commissioners stated that proposed boundaries and zoning maps for the Neighborhood Centers will likely be an iterative process.

**Public Comment**

There was no additional public comment.

**The meeting was adjourned at 4:56 pm.**