



City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

Michael Austin, Chair

Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, May 28, 2020

Online Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Michael Austin, David Goldberg, Grace Kim, Rick Mohler, Julio Sanchez, Amy Shumann, Lauren Squires, Jamie Stroble, Rian Watt, Patti Wilma

Commissioners Absent: Sandra Fried, Kelly Rider

Commission Staff: Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; John Hoey, Senior Policy Analyst; Connie Combs, Planning Analyst; Robin Magonegil, Commission Coordinator

Guests: Katherine Idziorek, Patience Malaba

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:

<http://www.seattle.gov/planningcommission/when-we-meet/minutes-and-agendas>

Chair's Report & Minutes Approval

Vice-Chair Patti Wilma called the meeting to order at 7:49 am and recognized 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. Vice-Chair Wilma provided a preview of the agenda. She announced that the next meeting will be held on June 11. This meeting will also be held online.

ACTION: Commissioner Amy Shumann moved to approve the May 14, 2020 meeting minutes. Commissioner Rian Watt seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

Announcements

Seattle Planning Commission Executive Director Vanessa Murdock reviewed the format of the meeting and noted that in-person public comment cannot be accommodated at this time, rather public comment may be submitted in advance of the meeting and will be read aloud during the public

comment portion of the agenda . This meeting format is in accordance with rules laid out by the Attorney General in terms of Open Public Meetings Act compliance in this time of the COVID-19 crisis. Ms. Murdock introduced Patience Malaba, who is anticipated to soon be approved for appointment to the Commission by the City Council. Ms. Malaba introduced herself. She works as a Policy Manager at the Housing Development Consortium of King County. She previously worked for the Seattle for Everyone coalition. She expressed enthusiasm for joining the Commission at this time, especially with the upcoming Major Update to Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan.

Briefing: City Life at Street Level

Magda Hogness, Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD)

Ms. Hogness provided an overview of the City Life at Street Level study, which was part of the Imagine Greater Downtown project. The intent of this project was to understand different types of streets, streetscape qualities, and uses. She described the long-term goals of the study as well as some short-term objectives as the City plans to re-open after the COVID-19 pandemic response. Within the scope of this project OPCD reviewed both traditional planning principles and newer approaches to street use, including focusing streets as destinations.

The project researched street level frontages in Downtown neighborhoods to better understand which design qualities encourage public interaction and vibrant small businesses. This study focuses on street level frontage—a key element of successful street rooms. Ms. Hogness stated that approximately 40% of Downtown is public right-of-way. The project aimed to understand streets holistically and focus on what street level qualities along streets create an engaging environment. The analysis included review of design guidelines, development regulations, and what can be improved.

The project used both a qualitative and quantitative approach. Five separate measures were evaluated using ten case studies. The five measures are as follows:

1. Welcome public life
2. Invite a mix of active uses
3. Connect visually and physically
4. Reinforce building entrances
5. Enhance human scale

Ms. Hogness stated that different uses create different levels of activity. Some uses encourage pedestrian activity more than others. Active (people-centered) uses include restaurants, lounges, and transit entrances. The uses within the Mixed (viewing-focused) category are more open to observation, including retail sales and services, galleries, and visible craftwork and food preparation. Limited (controlled access) uses include offices, hotels, banks, institutions, and residential entrances. Ms. Hogness reviewed case studies within each of these measures, which were selected for excellence in urban design. Key lessons from the case studies are as follows:

1. Storefronts should be designed for variety

2. Not all glass is transparent
3. Inside activities invite people
4. Corners are meeting places
5. Entries and floors should step with slopes
6. Vertical rhythms create pedestrian scale
7. Details ensure visual interest
8. Light, clear canopies work in the Northwest
9. Lighting adds safety and invites nightlife
10. Spillover draws people in
11. Infill over time
12. Micro retail is an incubator
13. No barriers are needed!
14. Active arcades are fine; not all setbacks are good

The following recommendations were generated by the study to identify gaps in development regulations and design guidelines:

- Reinforce street level use requirements
- Strengthen street level transparency requirements
- Increase minimum street level floor height

Possible new topics for consideration include:

- Require entrance spacing
- Require floor lines to step on steep slopes
- Prohibit recessed moats along sidewalks
- Ensure storefront variety with vertical rhythms and materials that establish legible increments of 20-30 feet
- Create pedestrian scale and interest with code standards for 6-12" façade depth, composition, variation

Ms. Hogness stated that this presentation includes new elements to reflect lessons and ideas from the current COVID-19 situation. OPCD is re-examining the project's ideas to consider how they could be adapted to recovery and resiliency. She stated that there are a lot of opportunities to adjust public space and street typologies to support social distancing in the short-term and resiliency in the long-term. Many cities in the U.S. and around the world have started testing these ideas with expanding restaurants and retail into streets and parking lots. More and more cities are looking into similar ideas and approaches. For Seattle, the State of Washington's phased approach to re-opening will determine specific approaches. Initial recommendations to support community needs and recovery include the following:

1. Along Healthy Streets, other streets, or flex zones create temporary modification permits that would allow to expand seating to increase their capacity while maintaining social distancing standards. Ask and listen to businesses for the locations. Make sure that there are operators out there that will use these ideas.

2. Lift parking requirements to “allow us to free up additional space” in parking lots for outdoor dining services.
3. Waive any additional fees associated with the temporary permits.

Ms. Hogness noted the recent expansion of the Healthy Streets initiative that provides recreation use and a new way to experience city life. The City is looking at ways to expand that program to view streets holistically.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners requested more information about the linkages between different interventions and outcomes. Ms. Hogness stated in OPCD the Outside Citywide project has been working to identify opportunities for equitable access to outdoor spaces. Downtown has limited public space. OPCD is also currently working on an analysis of the Jackson Hub area as part of the Sound Transit 3 program. This includes asking businesses and community members that are experiencing harm right now to identify investment opportunities. The Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and other departments are also looking into different interventions and possibilities.
- Commissioners stated that there needs to be a balance between urban design goals and economic reality in the real estate market affected by this pandemic, as demonstrated by small-scale storefronts and vacant storefronts. It is an economic imperative that businesses can continue to operate to ensure revenue and livability. Restaurants, in particular, will need more outdoor space while social distancing is in force to survive, and that is an urgent matter. Commissioners asked who would take the lead in making sure that OPCD, SDOT, the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, Parks, and other pertinent departments are coordinating and giving this issue the attention it deserves. Ms. Hogness stated that conversations are starting at OPCD about new approaches and tools, including zoning.
- Commissioners asked for more information about longer-term strategies to magnify public space management, such as streateries. Ms. Hogness stated that OPCD is looking at different ideas and opportunities, including low cost, less-restrictive approaches that may assist business owners.
- Commissioners asked if anyone outside of the City has seen this presentation. Ms. Hogness stated that the original report was shared with SDOT and the Downtown Seattle Association. The report is available online at <https://dailyplanit.seattle.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/City-Life-At-Street-Level-email-version.pdf>. She stated that the new ideas in response to COVID-19 have not been shared yet in this form, though they are based on conversations inside and outside the City and the ideas are evolving as city efforts adapt to address recovery.
- Commissioners expressed appreciation to SDOT for opening streets for community use, particularly throughout the Central Area. That neighborhood does not have a lot of parks, so the streets help redistribute open spaces to neighborhoods that have been historically underserved. Commissioners encouraged the City to be proactive about helping residents create woonerf-compatible activities and furnishings like sandboxes and picnic tables.
- Commissioners stated appreciation for the murals over boarded up storefronts in Capitol Hill and Pioneer Square and encouraged Downtown merchants and building owners to do the same. The Downtown streets feel more inhospitable and hostile to homeless individuals as well as the average pedestrian.

- Commissioners stated that other parts of the city would benefit from the approaches presented in the City Life at Street Level project, especially areas such as South Seattle and Rainier Avenue. These neighborhoods have less access to open space. Ms. Hogness stated that there are potential investment opportunities by working in coordination with the Outside Citywide and other efforts.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 am.