



City of Seattle
Seattle Planning Commission

Michael Austin, Chair
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, November 12, 2020
Approved Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present:	Michael Austin, David Goldberg, Katherine Idziorek, Grace Kim, Patience Malaba, Julio Sanchez, Amy Shumann, Jamie Stroble, Kelabe Tewolde, Patti Wilma
Commissioners Absent:	Rick Mohler, Kelly Rider, Lauren Squires
Commission Staff:	Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; John Hoey, Senior Policy Analyst; Connie Combs, Policy Analyst; Robin Magonegil, Commission Coordinator
Guests:	Parker Dawson, City Councilmember Andrew Lewis' Office; Nathan Torgelson, Director, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections

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

Chair Michael Austin called the meeting to order at 3:03 pm 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. Chair Austin asked fellow Commissioners to review the Color Brave Space norms and asked for any additions or amendments to those norms before stating the expectation that everyone practice those norms.

ACTION: Commissioner Patience Malaba moved to approve the October 22, 2020 meeting minutes. Commissioner Grace Kim seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

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 8 hours before the start of the Commission meeting.

Briefing: Permanent Supportive Housing

Parker Dawson, City Councilmember Andrew Lewis' Office

Parker introduced themselves and stated that one of Councilmember Lewis' priorities is to provide affordable housing and housing for homeless populations. The proposed draft permanent supportive housing legislation is currently going through the environmental review process. The legislation would create a new section of the land use code for development of permanent supportive housing. Development of permanent supportive housing presents unique challenges due to high cost-of-entry barriers. The goal of the draft legislation is to facilitate permitting and construction of permanent supportive housing projects. One notable exception to the typical development process would be to waive design review requirements, as this is a very costly process for developers. Another issue that the legislation hopes to address is removing bicycle storage requirements for these projects. Service providers have indicated that bike storage rooms are typically used for things other than bikes.

Commission Discussion

- Executive Director Murdock requested more information about the timeline for the legislation. Parker stated that the draft legislation will be announced in the land use bulletin, followed by a three-week process for environmental review. It is hoped that the draft legislation will be ready for committee referral in December, when it will be sent to Councilmember Lewis' committee on homelessness. It is likely to be on the agenda for the first committee meeting in January and may be ready for a vote to be adopted in February.
- Commissioners asked for more information on which aspects of the proposed legislation would help to reduce the cost for developing permanent supportive housing projects. Parker stated that permitting is the primary area where cost savings could be realized. The design review process alone can take two to six months and can cost tens of thousands of dollars. They stated that affordable housing projects in Councilmember Lewis' district (District 7) are expensive, especially when considering the additional permits necessary for these projects (demolition, etc.).
- Commissioners suggested that the cost savings analysis for permanent supportive housing projects be used to inform other development projects, especially other types of housing. Parker stated that this legislation, which focuses on the unique characteristics of permanent supportive housing separate from other residential uses, may not be the correct place to capture that recommendation, but they will note it for future discussions.
- Commissioners asked if a steering committee or any other similar advisory body was involved in drafting this legislation, testing the language, or identifying any specific issues. Parker stated that there was not a focus group or steering committee, but legislative staff spent months communicating with stakeholders, especially providers and developers who have been involved with these types of projects in the past. Legislative staff utilized insights from stakeholders in working with City Council Central Staff and the City's Law Department to make sure that the proposed new section of land use code would perform as intended.
- Executive Director Murdock asked what type of feedback has been received on the draft legislation to date. Parker stated that the Commission for People with Disabilities provided feedback to make sure that Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements for ramps, parking spaces, and other related items are appropriately included. That Commission found that everything was covered.

Another review was conducted for cost information. The drafters worked with the Office of Housing to ensure that the income thresholds included in the draft legislation were appropriate.

- Commissioners asked if this is legislation is intended to be permanent or temporary/emergency. Parker stated that this is intended to be permanent legislation. This Spring, the City issued a wholly separate, temporary waiver for all affordable housing across the city. This is the first opportunity to look forward and make some significant steps on homelessness.
- Commissioners requested more specific information about the developers that were consulted to inform the draft legislation. Parker stated that Plymouth Housing Group, the Low Income Housing Institute, Compass Housing Alliance, and the Downtown Emergency Service Center provided information.
- Commissioners asked what the best way for the Planning Commission is to offer support. Parker stated that a letter and testimony would be helpful.

Update: Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI)

Nathan Torgelson, Director, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections

Director Torgelson stated that SDCI continues to be busy with permitting and other functions. Employees are mostly working remotely, but inspectors are working in the field. The rental inspection program is on hold, except for those vacant units that are between tenants in single family residences and duplexes. The SDCI budget is primarily fee-driven and current permitting levels are robust, so the department has not been significantly affected by City budget challenges. The City Council is proposing some additional resources for code compliance and renter's rights functions. SDCI recently released a tenant services grant request for proposals (RFP), which will be awarded through a competitive process. The RFP will include responding to tenant needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SDCI needs to update its technical codes (building, electrical, elevator, etc.) every 3 years. These updates are typically similar to the state's code updates, except for the energy code. Seattle's energy code is much more aggressive than the state's code. Two significant proposals recommended by the Construction Codes Advisory Board (CCAB) and proposed to go into effect in January 2022 (later than the rest of the technical code provisions) are to:

- eliminate all gas and most electric resistance usage for space heating in all new and significantly altered buildings (except houses, townhouses, and low rise (1-3 story) multifamily buildings). This will mostly impact multi-family buildings because other restrictions in the 2015 code effectively prohibit gas and electric resistance for most commercial buildings.
- eliminate water heating in hotel and multi-family (four story and more) buildings

The Mayor has not yet weighed in on these recommendations, so they are subject to further change.

Permitting levels are close to 2019 levels. Permit intake for building permits is strong, including \$4.3 billion dollars in construction intake. Developers are hoping to vest their projects before the energy code changes listed above take effect. Building permit levels are down, as many developers may be waiting to see what happens with the pandemic. Master Use Permit levels are also down. Although permit levels may be lower than in previous years, permit activity is stronger than during the last economic downturn.

Mr. Torgelson provided the following updates on other aspects of his department's work:

- During the pandemic, design review meetings have been held virtually.
- The recent SDCI omnibus legislation was passed by the City Council. Proposed bike parking requirements in the draft omnibus legislation were controversial but were resolved.
- SDCI and the Office of Housing are working closely with Councilmember Lewis on permanent supportive housing legislation. This legislation fits within a plan announced by the Mayor in August to create six hundred homes for homeless populations.
- SDCI is involved in the following major projects:
 - The last major permit for the Northgate hockey facility was recently issued.
 - A Master Use Permit was issued for the Civic Square project across the street from City Hall.
 - A substantial shoreline development permit was issued for expansion of the Seattle Aquarium.
 - SDCI has been very involved in the demolition of Pier 58 and made the difficult decision to temporarily close Pier 57 to prevent damage to that adjacent pier.
 - SDCI has been involved in permitting discussions about the Sound Transit 3 project. The City hopes to be an efficient permitting partner as that project moves forward.
- Mr. Torgelson thanked the Commissioners for their assistance in screening standard accessory dwelling unit (ADU) plans. Pre-approved plans will help decrease ADU permitting times from four to eight months to two to six weeks.
- SDCI is hoping to hold virtual home fairs in January or February.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners requested more information about the energy code updates. Mr. Torgelson stated that the Construction Codes Advisory Board are reviewing those. The two most controversial updates may be delayed to 2022. The Mayor has not made a decision on these updates.
- Commissioners asked if the onsite parking and sewer hookup requirements for ADUs have been updated. Mr. Torgelson stated that recent City legislation eliminated the off-street parking requirement for ADUs. There have been ongoing discussions between the City and King County about the sewer charge. King County sets the sewer charge rates and has adopted separate rates for ADUs and DADUs.
- Commissioners requested more information about the ability for developers to extend the timing of their building permits during the pandemic. Mr. Torgelson stated that SDCI encourages developers to pick up their building permits, but the department is not enforcing the usual deadlines.
- Commissioners asked about attendance at virtual design review meetings. Mr. Torgelson stated that the public has generally been very positive about virtual design review meetings, as it allows convenient public comment. It has been difficult to track attendance trends, but one meeting had approximately seventy people attend online. He noted that the question remains about whether meetings will return to an in-person format after the pandemic, or whether some meetings will remain virtual. Most Design Review Board meeting locations do not have access to technology and would need technology investments to continue virtual meetings. Providing online meetings has been staff intensive as meetings have needed rehearsals and technology staff.
- Commissioners asked whether there are hybrid opportunities (virtual/in-person) for design review. Virtual meetings have the benefits of making meetings more accessible to the public. Mr. Torgelson stated that one option being considered is to have all design review meetings in person in the Boards and Commissions Room of City Hall but to also make them available online.

- Commissioners requested updated information on unreinforced masonry buildings. Mr. Torgelson stated that the Mayor and City Council established a work program for this issue before the pandemic, but that has been put on hold. This will need to be addressed when the pandemic lifts.

Public Comment

Executive Director Murdock read the following public comment, which was provided via email:

Good afternoon, I'd like to comment on ongoing and stalled legislation being guided by SDCI that would benefit from Planning Commission input. In October at SDCI's recommendation the Council passed a bill to extend emergency Administrative Design Review (ADR) for projects through the end of the year. It included dozens of market rate projects that didn't qualify to remain in ADR under the original Covid emergency ordinance. At the time of passage SDCI staff reported the virtual design review system was fully operational. And I'd like to add, they've done an excellent job.

The provisions of the bill, CB119877 are on a timeline and will need to be revisited in the first quarter of 2021. As with the original Covid emergency ordinance and CB119877, representatives of the development community and their allies argue we should just eliminate public Design Review altogether. This likely wouldn't be done all at once but it does seem possible in this series of bills that extend the elimination of any review for affordable housing and marginalize the importance of input from the public and appointed Design Review Boards. If this continues the result will not be equitable, inclusive and it won't result in sustainable designs.

The second item is Director's Rule 12-2020 on Alleys, Loading Berths and Solid Waste that would mandate new tower developments include at least one working loading berth and off alley storage for solid waste and recycling. The Rule is in limbo with no timeline for approval. Meanwhile urban freight deliveries have spiked by 30% and curb space is shrinking. Researchers at the UW just published an empirical study with block-by-block delivery delay times from lack of loading spaces downtown. It concludes drivers spend an average of 25% of their time circling for parking, in some cases up to 18 minutes. At the same time a mixed-use office and residential tower with 571-units that participated in ADR features a single loading berth that won't hold a 15-ft U-Haul.

This isn't only about congestion; it impacts safety and emissions. We have abundant, City-commissioned detailed data and the situation is worsening because we don't act on it.

Thanks for your consideration.

*Sincerely,
Megan Kruse*

Commission Business

Executive Director Murdock stated that new Commissioners have not yet been appointed but asked the four outgoing Commissioners to share their perspectives on their respective years of service. Below is a summary of their comments.

Commissioner Grace Kim

- I have learned to appreciate the significance of the Comprehensive Plan. It has a huge impact in ways that I did not initially understand. The Plan includes many opportunities to inform the future and is an important part of the work of the Commission.
- The makeup of the Commission is very different now versus when I joined. When I joined, the Commission included developers and architects with deep knowledge of the land use code. The Commission now has a deeper diversity of opinions and experience. I am proud of the changes to the composition of the Commission and appreciate the dialogue and discourse each member brings.
- Commissioners all have networks that can be used as sounding boards and to draw in other voices on issues/activities. I encourage all Commissioners to engage with your networks.
- The Sound Transit 3 project is very important. The Chinatown/International District Station is a significant opportunity for placemaking and equity. I recommend staying focused on that station and do not forget about the Graham Street station. That neighborhood is working hard but is still not getting the attention they deserve.
- Industrial lands is the issue I knew the least about but now care the most about. We need to make sure to take care of Seattle's middle-income populations.
- Do not be afraid to speak up. It allows others to feel their voices are important also.
- Not all cities have planning commissions that are policy focused. Most serve both design review and planning functions. Seattle's Planning Commission is very important and special.

Commissioner Michael Austin

- I remember my first meeting as a Commissioner, soon after serving as a Get Engaged member of a Design Review Board. I was nervous, but the other Commissioners made me feel comfortable.
- Although Mayoral administrations and priorities change, the Planning Commission has to keep our commitment to racial equity.
- Acknowledge the voices and expertise on the Commission. When we speak beyond our expertise, our recommendations could have unintended consequences.
- Reviewing background material really does matter.
- Bring your full self and your unique perspective to Commission meetings. We are not all planners, nor do we have to be.
- Be a friend to other Commissioners. Make time to acknowledge what others say.
- Thanks to Planning Commission staff. Even if they do not agree with our direction, they will follow.
- Here are some issues and ideas to consider:
 - Activation of Union Station as a transit hub that reflects the best of Seattle
 - Recognize historic and ongoing harm to the Chinatown/International District community
 - Find ways to provide business opportunities for immigrant and refugee communities
- Translate how we work and communicate. Chances are that members of the community do not understand many of the issues that we discuss. If our communication is not tailored for the community, we need to adapt.

Commissioner Patti Wilma

- First, apologies to Robin Magonegil for my terrible timesheet habits. She has needed to email me incessantly with reminders.
- Think about providing a copy of the Comprehensive Plan to new Commissioners during their orientation. There are many elements of the Plan that we do not reference, but they are all important.

- Help Commissioners identify areas that they may be curious and/or passionate about.
- Do not be afraid to speak up. It can be intimidating because there are so many qualified people in the room.
- The current Commission is such a great group with friendly camaraderie. Keep that karma going.
- My time on the Commission has opened my eyes that my opinion may not always be informed. We should all be here to learn.
- It took us a while to move away from only asking questions to providing comments. Be prepared for both. Only asking questions is a form of consuming information. Providing comments is a form of participating. This will push the conversation forward.
- Issues to keep at the forefront include:
 - Racial equity is an important lens for everything we review
 - Sound Transit 3 is a good project for testing racial equity
 - Keep an eye on neighborhoods that are not at the top of mind. Urban villages are so often the focus. Get out and learn the city (especially new Commissioners). Virtual tours can help during the pandemic while we are not allowed to meet in person.
- Planning Commission staff will keep us informed and ready to go.
- It is a big deal and an honor to serve on the Seattle Planning Commission. It is very serious business but can also be fun.

Commissioner Amy Shumann

- I remember being so nervous during the interview to be a Commissioner. I was not prepared for how warm and welcoming everyone is. I appreciate everything that you all did to make me feel welcome. I hope you all will be able to gather in person soon.
- The Neighborhoods for All and Sound Transit planning projects stand out during my time on the Commission. Thank you to Planning Commission staff for all their hard work to prepare us.
- The Neighborhoods for All open house events and the tour of Delridge were highlights. Keep it going – see different places in Seattle, such as Northgate, South Park, and Hillman City.
- Remember to consider public health. Eliminating health inequities is so important.
- I am only leaving because I am no longer eligible. I will miss you all. This is not farewell.

Executive Director thanked all the outgoing Commissioners for their comments. She wished everyone a safe and happy Thanksgiving.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 pm.