



**City of Seattle
Seattle Planning Commission**

David Cutler and Amalia Leighton, Co-Chairs
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

**SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION
FEBRUARY 13, 2014
APPROVED MEETING MINUTES**

COMMISSIONERS IN ATTENDANCE

Co-Chair David Cutler, Co-Chair Amalia Leighton, Luis Borrero, Josh Brower, Keely Brown, Colie Hough-Beck, Bradley Khouri, Grace Kim, Kevin McDonald, Tim Parham, Marj Press, Matt Roewe, Morgan Shook

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

Catherine Benotto, Jeanne Krikawa, Maggie Wykowski

COMMISSION STAFF

Jessica Brand - Policy Analyst, Diana Canzoneri-Senior Analyst, Robin Magonegil – Administrative Assistant, Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

GUESTS

Geoff Wentlandt, Mike Podowski, DPD; Councilmember Mike O'Brien

IN ATTENDANCE

Charles Anderson, Cindi Barker, Rebecca Herzfeld, Eric McConaghy, LeRoy Simmons, Joshua Torres-Pagan

Please Note: Seattle Planning Commission meeting minutes are not an exact transcript but instead represent key points and the basis of the discussion.

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Marj Press called the meeting to order at 3:05 pm.

- **Chair's Report & Approval of Minutes**
 - Co-Chair David Cutler

ACTION: Commissioner Kevin McDonald moved to approve the January 9, 2014 meeting minutes. Commissioner Grace Kim seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

ACTION: Commissioner Kevin McDonald moved to approve the January 23, 2014 meeting minutes. Commissioner Tim Parham seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

▪ **Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendments**

Executive Director Vanessa Murdock reviewed the Commission recommendation to include the proposed 2013-2014 annual Comprehensive Plan amendment regarding industrial lands in the 2015 Major Comprehensive Plan update rather than to adopt in the current amendment cycle. She noted this position was discussed in Executive Committee subsequent to the last full Commission meeting where the recommendation was to adopt the amendment in the current amendment cycle. Ms. Murdock continued that a letter regarding all proposed amendments then drafted, circulated among Commissioners and was approved via e-mail. She wanted the full Commission to be aware of these changes and to discuss if needed.

Commissioner Khouri suggested instituting a policy that when a substantive change in the Commission’s recommendation or position takes place in committee, it should be brought back to the full Commission. Commissioner Brower reaffirmed the use of email as a means of approving letters and noted the practice should continue. He added that he was supportive of continuing to push the Industrial policies forward and that there is a need to have a consistent rule of order regarding Industrial Lands. Co-Chair Cutler confirmed that this was an amended opinion, not a reversal, and that it was prudent to proceed with the approved letter. Commissioner Borrero suggested that Commission staff follow up with the Industrial Lands group make them aware of the amended opinion.

Ms. Murdock stated that the letter stands approved.

▪ **Action: Bicycle Master Plan Letter**

Disclosures & Recusals:

- Commissioner Josh Brower recused himself and left the room.
- Commissioner Amalia Leighton disclosed that her firm, SvR consulted on the Bicycle Master Plan (BMP) and she worked on the cost estimates for the BMP.
- Commissioner Matt Roewe disclosed that SDOT is a client of his firm, VIA Architecture.
- Commissioner Colie Hough Beck disclosed that SDOT is a client of her firm, HBB Landscape Architecture.
- Commissioner Grace Kim disclosed that SDOT is a client of her firm, Schemata Workshop.

Commissioner McDonald reviewed the two letters noting the language differences. He stated that one of the letters suggests specific technical edits for SDOT and the other is in support of the BMP for City Council. He added that the letter to City Council concerns policy issues including: support of adequate funding and an ask for additional revenue to pay for a Bicycle Master Plan coordinator; a reminder of transit communities as a reasonable place to connect; and suggests more specificity in regards to intermodal integration. Commissioner Brower noted that, although there is quite a bit of information on integration with the Freight Master Plan in the BMP, there is still work to do to integrate the Transit Master Plan and the Pedestrian Master Plan.

Co-Chair Cutler wondered if there was a way to link to other supportive policies around the Commission’s family-sized housing work within the prioritizing of projects – connecting destinations like school, libraries, etc.

ACTION: Co-Chair Cutler moved to approve the letters. Commissioner McDonald seconded the motion and offered some edits. The letters were approved with the edits. Commissioner Brower recused himself from the vote.

- **Briefing: Low Rise Height**
 - **Geoff Wentlandt and Mike Podowski, DPD**

Disclosures & Recusals: Commissioner Brad Khouri disclosed that he works in the development of Low Rise and as a private citizen has advocated on this issue.

Geoff Wentlandt and Mike Podowski gave an overview of low rise and gave a presentation that can be viewed via the below link:

<http://www.seattle.gov/documents/departments/seattleplanningcommission/incentivezoning/lrpresentationplancomm.pdf>

Commissioner Khouri shared what was discussed at the architect stakeholder meeting he attended as part of the last update to the Lowrise code. He added that it would be good to understand if the current issues around Lowrise development are unique to microhousing (micros) or whether other buildings are a part of the problem too. Commissioner Khouri continued that he thought the additional allowed height should not be removed from the code. He noted that additional rental housing is needed and that the combination of eliminating the required parking and the two, four feet height allowances make projects more economically feasible to build. Commissioner Khouri added that the Commission has been on record about extending design review for micros. He wondered if this could be remedied by the new legislation.

Mr. Wentlandt stated that micros are a part of the reason but not the whole reason. He added that height issues are not exclusive to micros and that between September 2013 and January 2014, about half of the permitted apartments were micro housing.

Commissioner Kim stated that the code is challenging because the developer wants to get as much as possible in allowed FAR but the allowances are discordant with the incentives. She added that some design elements that result in a better building reduce the buildable FAR. Commissioner Kim continued that this makes economic sense to maximize the FAR, resulting in a building resembling a block rather than working with the site and building articulation and designing a better building.

Co-Chair Cutler asked the average square footage of the buildings of issue being built in Lowrise zones and wondered if any of these projects would be addressed under the proposed ordinance. Mr. Wentlandt answered that each of the examples given would have been subject to the new proposed ordinance updates.

Commissioner Kim stated that while micros are an important part of the issue, they are not the entirety.

Commissioner Roewe asked if the four-foot allowance for the partially below grade floor was supposed to be related to ground related activation. He stated that the additional allowed height should be about activating the street and that the examples shown did not seem to be addressing that issue. He suggested this be evaluated at some point. Commissioner Roewe continued that there is incompatibility with NC zones adjacent to Lowrise zones, because in NC zones the four additional feet of height must be used for retail. Mr. Wentlandt replied that the extra four feet can effectively add a fifth floor and thus changes the amount of FAR.

Co-Chair Leighton noted that 12% of the land in Seattle is zoned Lowrise. She added that the Commission noted in the Family Sized Housing paper the need to evaluate where new family sized units will be built. She

suggested being mindful that Lowrise is where the family amenities are and that more family-sized units are needed in this area.

Commissioner Borrero suggested changing the connotation of apartments to flats thus avoiding confusion regarding ownership. He added that loft spaces do not count towards total square footage if you build them later and that they should be counted. He wondered if there were a way to make sure that happens.

Commissioner Shook wondered if the draft recommendations are doing away with the four-foot allowance and is this solution born out of the grade issue. He added that it is good to have more capacity and more affordable housing but wondered if it is worth it the negative reactions from neighbors. Mr. Podowski responded that the same method of height measurement is used in L1 and L2 zones and this problem is not apparent in these zones.

Commissioner Brower stated that higher intensity Lowrise zones (L-3) are where we want more people and more density. He added that in these examples, you get 25% more living area and this is a good thing. Commissioner Brower noted that the problem is getting enough units in the city to make them affordable. He added that we are looking at how to get more affordable housing and there is concern that if we take away these advantages, less housing will be built. He continued that this type of housing is not everywhere, only where zoning allows this type of development.

Commissioner Hough Beck wondered how the aesthetics issues could be addressed. She remarked that the most recent changes to the Lowrise code were in response to squat, six- unit developments and the current changes being contemplated are in response to tall six -unit developments. The predominant layout of these taller developments favor single building entries, making them less engaging at the street level. She expressed support for identifying ways to make this type of housing more engaging at the street level, and more inclusive and available for a variety of people.

Commissioner Hough Beck wondered how the aesthetics issues could be addressed and respond in a positive way to reflect the example that was shown in the presentation. She remarked that the most recent changes to the Lowrise code were in response to squat, boxy six- unit developments and the current changes being contemplated are in response to tall six -unit developments. She added that the predominant layout of these taller developments favor single building entries, making them less aesthetically pleasing and less engaging at the street level. Commissioner Hough Beck stated that she supports the height and density but expressed support for identifying ways to make this type of housing more engaging at the street level, more compatible with the neighborhood architecture where they are located, and more inclusive and available for a variety of people.

Commissioner Khouri stated that the aggregate of the incentives and allowances in the make these developments feasible. He added that he hoped that the City did not go backward with the allowable extra height and other incentives. Mr. Podowski suggested not taking away the height but eliminating the FAR exemption.

Commissioner Kim agreed that the height allowances should not be taken away.

Commissioner Roewe stated that what they were seeing was a reaction to the change in the code. He noted that people tend to react negatively when they see change. He suggested a longer-term lens when considering potential changes to the code. Commissioner Roewe stated that the clerestory on some building examples seem more pronounced and wondered if you could control the bulk by making that clerestory set

back instead of hanging over the rooftop. He suggested tying that to the FAR exemption on the ground floor to two or three bedrooms so that different types of housing are developed.

Co-Chair Cutler stated that bulk is not really the problem. He noted that there is too little encouragement to address the ground plane. He added that how buildings meet the sidewalk and the public realm is what matters in how they become neighbors and there is very little encouragement in the code to break up the building mass as it meets the ground plane. Co-Chair Cutler stated that there needs to be a framework to deal with micros as there is for all other types of buildings. He added that design review is avoided by some, thus implicitly incentivizing certain types of building types.

Commissioner Kim suggested that in order to gain the additional four feet of height, access to the street, and stoops should be required. She added that the City should ask more of developers so citizens get more from development.

Commissioner Brower stated that if the code was working then there would be no new single family uses in the LR zones. He noted that there is such limited land available for multifamily development and making it more difficult to produce apartments is not the right way forward.

Commissioner Khouri stated that we want to see density and see the housing built here. He suggested a more proactive approach, providing incentives for the types of development we want to see. He added that a number of housing types do not have to go through design review and are thus implicitly incentivized.

Ms. Brand stated the Housing & Neighborhood Committee would continue to work on this issue.

- **Briefing: Low Rise Large Lot**
 - **Commissioners Cutler, Khouri and Roewe**

Co-Chair Cutler reviewed a letter from Councilmember Burgess requesting the Commission to weigh in on the following questions regarding large lot (over 2 acre in size) development in Lowrise 1 and 2 zones.

1. What are the substantive differences, if any, between the type and scale of development that can occur and that typically occur on large (two acres or more) parcels as opposed to on parcels of a more typical size?
2. If there are differences, have these differences added to or detracted from the quality and value of the development or the adjacent neighborhood?
3. Are there new regulations that the Commission would recommend the City adopt to ensure these projects more smoothly integrate into their neighborhoods? For example, the code currently does not require Design Review for projects in Lowrise 1 and 2 zones.
4. Should the City require full Design Review for projects on sites of a certain size?
5. Should the City consider other factors before permitting or allowing development of such sites? Such factors could include infrastructure capacity (road capacity, parking availability and requirements, transit service, parks and recreation spaces) of the neighborhood to accommodate the number of residents anticipated.

Commissioner Brower stated that requiring design review may not be the best method to address neighborhood concern as the scope of design review is limited to design issues.

- **Guest: Councilmember Mike O'Brien**

Chair Cutler welcomed and introduced Councilmember O'Brien.

CM O'Brien spoke about the workforce-housing forum being hosted in City Hall with close to a couple hundred people talking about the important issue of affordable housing. CM O'Brien as a follow up to the South Lake Union rezone organized this forum. CM O'Brien offered a piece of data from the forum – the vast majority of projects participating in the City's Incentive Zoning program paid-in-lieu resulting in 636 affordable units at approximately \$55,000 per unit. That said, 636 units is a drop in the bucket over a ten-year timeframe. Seattle's Office of Housing is able to fund similar units for around \$44,000 per unit reaching a lower level of affordability. Unfortunately, federal and state monies are disappearing and so those units funded by the Office of Housing are going to double in price in the future. Commissioner Shook commended CM O'Brien for looking at affordable housing needs and production in such a comprehensive manner.

Commissioner Rowe noted that the Multifamily tax incentive is working well as well as some other programs but market rate options need to be explored as well.

CM O'Brien continued that work in his committee would include looking at the Detached Accessory Dwelling Units (DADUs) and trying to better understand why there are not more. DADUs have been shown to alleviate the cost burden on single-family housing and allowing for multi-generational living. British Columbia is a successful model that has ten times the number of these units than Seattle has produced. CM O'Brien remarked that Seattle currently has density and affordable housing in competition with each other, unlike other parts of the country.

Additional projects in the pipeline in CM O'Brien's committee include the Mt. Baker rezone, small lots and micro housing. Incentive Zoning will likely be taken up in late spring and early summer.

CM O'Brien closed with describing a vision of Seattle as a mixed income community where people can thrive on all different levels.

Co-Chair Cutler noted that affordable housing is an important issue to the Commissioner and appreciated the breadth of conversation around the topic. He wondered about how other cities achieve density and affordability.

Commissioner Kim was encouraged to hear about continued work on Accessory Dwelling Units and the interest in affordability in all neighborhoods. She noted that desirable neighborhoods are getting a lot of growth and wondered how all neighborhoods could be made more desirable.

Commissioner Borrero asked who is leading the effort to analyze the access to education and good education and aligning that with transit. He encouraged bringing the Seattle public schools into this conversation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Cindy Barker, citizen, spoke to the Lowrise code corrections. She noted a number of people are impacted by development in these zones. She added it was an unexpected consequence of the last round of code correction to go from three stories to a permitted four and sometimes five stories with the exceptions currently in place. Ms. Barker noted the challenge for the Planning Commission is that Lowrise zoning is next to single family zoning. She continued that in some places, it just doesn't work and that is part of the issue and should be considered in code review.

Charles Anderson, citizen, also spoke to the Lowrise code corrections. As a resident in a Lowrise 3 zone, he had certain expectation when he moved to his Capitol Hill. Following the most recent changes to the code, his expectations changed dramatically. Mr. Anderson asked the Commission not to forget the long term effects on the community.

ADJOURNMENT

Co-Chair Cutler adjourned the meeting at 5:37 pm.