



City of Seattle
Seattle Planning Commission

Michael Austin, Chair
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, January 09, 2020
Approved Meeting Minutes

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

Commissioners Absent: Kelly Rider, Julio Sanchez

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

Guests: Nathan Torgelson, Director, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections; Tracy Krawczyk and Adiam Emery, Seattle Department of Transportation; Megan Kruse

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 3:35 pm and announced several upcoming Commission meetings.

ACTION: Commissioner Sandra Fried moved to approve the December 9, 2019 meeting minutes. Commissioner Grace Kim seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

Announcements

Vanessa Murdock announced the new City Council committee structure. Councilmember Dan Strauss will serve as Chair of the Land Use and Neighborhoods Committee. The Planning Commission's Evolving Seattle's Growth Strategy white paper was released this week. It was sent to the Mayor and City Council members and has already been covered in the media. We are hoping to meet with City Council members and the Mayor's Office to discuss this white paper.

Update: Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections

Nathan Torgelson, Director, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI)

Director Torgelson stated the Mayor has convened an Affordable Middle-Income Housing Advisory Council and a Small Business Advisory Council. Policy recommendations from those groups are anticipated to be released for review by the Mayor soon, and several of these will be relevant to the work of SDCI. The policy recommendations may be presented at the Mayor's upcoming State of the City address.

Director Torgelson presented an overview of permitting statistics. 2019 was another extremely busy year for SDCI. The Department hired thirteen additional term-limited positions in the Land Use Division, primarily in zoning review. In 2019, SDCI processed 54,861 permit applications for intake, which was slightly lower than last year. The Department issued 55,065 permits, which was slightly higher than last year. 2019 was a strong year of building development project valuation for both intake and issuance, with \$3.76 billion of project intake for construction permits, and \$4.6 billion in permit issuance (10,567 net housing units). SDCI received 7,200 building permit applications (less than last year) and issued 6,766 permits (higher than last year). The Department received 853 Master Use Permit applications (compared with 954 last year) and issued 812 (compared with 679 last year). The Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) regulations produced approximately \$15.65 million for affordable housing in 2019 (compared with \$13.2 million in 2018). Some of the MHA projects included on-site performance with affordable units included in the development projects, but most projects provided cash payments for citywide affordable housing.

SDCI has experienced a 25% increase in the number of complaints to code compliance staff. Many complaints are related to construction, zoning, vacant buildings, weeds, and other similar issues. This is challenging for SDCI because funding for code compliance staff comes from the general fund and the Department has not been able to hire additional staff to address the increase in complaints. Director Torgelson stated that the permit tracking software Accela has continued to be a big challenge, but SDCI continues to make improvements, especially in phased permitting and permits for the demolition of vacant buildings. The Department continues its work on MHA and Incentive Zoning permit processing. The permit tracking website Shaping Seattle will come back in March after being taken down due to the challenges with Accela.

Director Torgelson provided an update on several major projects. Construction work is well under way at the Seattle Center Arena. Northgate Mall is radically changing. Demolition will soon be underway and SDCI hopes to issue permits for the NHL Seattle practice facility in February or March. The NHL is hoping to occupy the new building in 2021. Simon, the owner of the mall, is planning on developing more than 1,000 residential units as part of the redevelopment. SDCI staff is very engaged with ongoing Sound Transit planning and permitting. There was a tragic fire recently in Ballard. SDCI has worked closely with other agencies to address issues from the fire, including asbestos and other concerns.

SDCI is working with the Mayor's Office on developing a policy for unreinforced masonry (URM) buildings. A stakeholder group has formed around this issue called the Association for Safety, Affordability, and Preservation (ASAP). The National Development Council recently issued a report on funding mechanisms for URM projects. Director Torgelson stated the City now has a robust vacant building monitoring program. SDCI is following up with related violations and emergency orders. The

Department has issued a request for proposals from design firms for accessory dwelling unit/detached accessory dwelling unit (ADU/DADU) standardized plans. An open house will be held on January 14th and a frequently asked questions document will be on the SDCI website.

In response to an Executive Order on tree preservation by former Mayor Burgess, SDCI published an updated Director's Rule and is currently working on how to track trees in the City's IT system. State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) thresholds have been raised to 200 units in urban villages, which will allow for faster permit processing. SDCI is holding two annual Home Fairs in January and February. The fairs will include information sessions on landslide hazards and ADUs. SDCI has been conducting outreach to landlord and tenant communities, including more than 800 landlords and 55 service providers. The Department recently hired a new Inspections Services Division manager and City Council liaison.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners requested details on the breakdown between MHA onsite performance and payment. Director Torgelson stated 57 units were committed for performance and 12 completed in 2019. \$25.4 million was pledged and \$15.6 million was collected for in-lieu payment. Commissioners stated that \$15 million could build approximately 80-100 units of affordable housing.
- Commissioners asked for more information on the nature of additional complaints received by SDCI. Director Torgelson stated that more people are working and living in Seattle, which leads to more construction. Some complaints result in code violations, but others do not. He stated that there is an increased awareness of tenants' rights. Commissioners commented that many low-income residents can't afford to take care of problems that others may complain about. Director Torgelson stated that SDCI works to coach staff in code enforcement to reply appropriately to resident concerns.
- Commissioners requested additional information on SDCI's response to the challenges associated with URM buildings. Director Torgelson stated the ASAP stakeholder group is pressuring the City to impose a mandatory policy. There are significant financial and timing considerations for the City and building owners.
- Commissioners asked Director Torgelson about his priorities and achievements for SDCI in 2019. He stated URM, permitting and tenants' rights were his priorities for the Department.
- Commissioners asked if SDCI is coordinating with the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) on the City's URM policy. Director Torgelson stated that the University District upzone has a lot of potential to address URM issues in that neighborhood. SDCI is also working with Brennon Staley of OPCD on Transfer of Development Rights incentives that would be beneficial for the preservation of URM buildings.
- Commissioners asked whether the URM situation is contributing to the increased number of vacant buildings. Director Torgelson stated he does not believe there is a connection between the two issues. Most URM buildings are in Ballard, Pioneer Square, and other older neighborhoods. Most vacant buildings are duplexes or single-family houses waiting to be demolished.
- Commissioners asked whether the recent changes to the design review program are contributing to longer permitting times. Director Torgelson stated the primary delay in permitting times is the

large number of projects in the permitting pipeline. Design review projects that do not propose code modifications move through the process quicker than in the past because of the fairly new limit on the number of Board meetings, but the process still takes longer than some developers would like. Affordable housing projects are subject to administrative design review, but some affordable housing developers are choosing to take their projects to the board.

- Commissioners asked whether there are opportunities for input from the design and development community. Director Torgelson replied yes, opportunities exist including in the Affordable Middle-Income Housing Advisory Council process. The Downtown Seattle Association, Master Builders Association, and American Institute of Architects have all provided feedback.

Briefing: SDOT Policy and Operations Advisory Group

Tracy Krawczyk and Adiam Emery, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT)

Ms. Krawczyk explained the purpose and goals of the new Policy and Operations Advisory Group (POAG). SDOT has a need for better multimodal policies. The Comprehensive Plan includes prioritization of the right-of-way but does not specify how to prioritize modes. SDOT needs a policy framework to guide this. Current guidance comes from the Comprehensive Plan, Complete Streets policy, Streets Illustrated, and the modal plans. There is need for greater guidance for designing projects incrementally.

Ms. Emery stated SDOT has operational constraints within a limited right-of-way. The capacity of Seattle's roadways does not accommodate the city's significant growth. Movement of people and goods is very important. She cited challenges such as signal operations and pedestrian push buttons to achieve right-of-way balance. This advisory group will help to shape an operational prioritization and will assist in developing draft policies. There will be a number of ways that those draft policies will be advanced and ultimately become operationalized.

The POAG will serve as a pilot project for a year. SDOT will decide what to do after its completion. SDOT is asking for three applicants from each of several existing boards and commissions to provide a variety of perspectives. The group will have six meetings over the course of this year. Participants will be encouraged to bring lessons learned back to their groups.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners asked if the intent of the POAG is to address specific questions or establish a framework for answering those questions in the future. Ms. Krawczyk replied that the intent is a bit of both. SDOT wants to explore potential policy directions and connect them to the Department's core values.
- Commissioners acknowledged SDOT's New Mobility Playbook as an exciting innovation and asked how the POAG process could similarly advance innovation in Seattle. Commissioners also asked whether this group will set explicit racial equity outcomes. Ms. Krawczyk stated that SDOT's Urban Design team has been working on a public life protocol and is completing its first public life action plan for the Yesler Crescent. That work includes consideration of racial equity in design issues. It has been very interesting to look at how different people use public spaces. There is a need to

include new mobility, emerging mobility needs in SDOT's design work. For example, where might scooters be allowed to occupy the right-of-way, and how to keep users safe.

- Commissioners asked who the recipients of the recommendations will be. Ms. Krawczyk replied that any guidance coming from the POAG would be directed to SDOT as a whole. She and Ms. Emery will be sharing the responsibilities for strategic direction. Lizzie Moll will be staffing the group.
- Commissioners complimented SDOT for their efforts to bring the diverse constituencies together. This advisory group will need a racial equity framework and a very good facilitator.
- Commissioners asked for more information about the potential health and equity impacts of any decisions coming out of the POAG. Ms. Krawczyk stated that SDOT updated its vision and mission statements this year and formed a Transportation Equity workgroup that is helping to provide recommendations on developing a transportation equity agenda. Recommendations from that workgroup are expected this spring. The POAG is hoping to draw from that work.
- Commissioners inquired about more specific examples of policy direction needed from this group. Ms. Emery stated SDOT cannot continue to support single-occupant vehicles in the same way. SDOT needs to pivot to transit and delivery of freight and goods. For example, there is a need for a bus lane on all main arterials. SDOT hopes to create transportation policies that are user-focused and allow the Department to enable this type of modal shift.

Public Comment

Megan Kruse stated she has lived downtown on 3rd and Pike for 36 years. She works as an advocate for downtown micro-neighborhoods. Her recent focus has been on transportation. She stated that every single-occupant vehicle on Seattle's streets is outnumbered by more than twice as many TNCs (Uber and Lyft). The only freight loading spaces are on 3rd Avenue, so freight deliveries often use alleys. She stated more buildings need loading berths. She has attended many design review meetings. She expressed her opinion that the recent design review changes have not been effective. She stated that Seattle needs more affordable housing. She complimented the Planning Commission for being a responsible citizen advisory board and for listening to constituents.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:55 pm.