



City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

McCaela Daffern and David Goldberg, Co-Chairs
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, July 25, 2024
Approved Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present:	Xio Alvarez, McCaela Daffern, Andrew Dannenberg, Matt Hutchins, Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson, Dhyana Quintanar, Monika Sharma, Jamie Stroble, Nick Whipple
Commissioners Absent:	Radhika Nair, Lauren Squires, Kelabe Tewolde
Commission Staff:	Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; 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.

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 7:45 am and announced several upcoming Commission meetings. Co-Chair Daffern offered the following land acknowledgement:

'As we begin our meeting, we respectfully acknowledge that our meeting today is taking place on occupied Coast Salish land. We pay respect to Coast Salish Elders past and present and extend that respect to their descendants and to all Indigenous people. To acknowledge this land is to recognize the history of physical and cultural genocide and settler colonialism, which continues to displace Indigenous people today. It is to also recognize these lands, waters, and their significance for the resilient and wise peoples who continue to thrive in this region despite the consequences of displacement and broken treaties. Those who hold settler privilege in this city must work towards supporting the Coast Salish people and all Indigenous people using the various forms of wealth and privilege they reap due to it.'

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. Co-Chair Daffern 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.

ACTION: Commissioner Rose Lew- Tsai-Le Whitson moved to approve the July 11, 2024 meeting minutes. Commissioner Matt Hutchins seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

Announcements

Vanessa Murdock, Seattle Planning Commission Executive Director, noted that a new slate of leadership for the Commission co-chair and committee co-chair positions had been nominated by the group. The leadership positions are determined by a vote of the Planning Commission. She shared the leadership slate proposed for a vote as follows:

- Commission Co-Chairs: McCaela Daffern and Jamie Stroble
- Housing and Neighborhoods Committee Co-Chairs: Matt Hutchins and Nick Whipple
- Land Use and Transportation Committee Co-Chairs: Monika Sharma and Kelabe Tewolde

ACTION: Commissioner Rose Lew- Tsai-Le Whitson moved to approve the leadership slate. Commissioner Xio Alvarez seconded the motion. The motion to approve the new leadership for the Commission passed.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Anti-Ageism Training

Dinah Stephens and Meg Woolf, Age Friendly Seattle; Alex O'Reilly and Barbara Will, Seattle-King County Advisory Council for Aging and Disability Services

Dinah Stephens from Age Friendly Seattle introduced herself to the Commission and noted she was joined by her colleague Meg Woolf as well as two members of the Seattle-King County Council for Aging and Disability Services, Alex O'Reilly and Barbara Will. Ms. Stephens shared that the Age Friendly Seattle program began around 2016 with the mission to make Seattle a great place to grow up and grow old.

Ms. Stephens outlined some of the work Age Friendly Seattle has conducted to help meet the needs of older adults in Seattle. She noted that in their work they examine what helps people thrive throughout life. They use life satisfaction as a proxy for measurement and have studied what helps people retain life satisfaction as they age. Their research showed that it is important to retain continuity in many aspects of life as we age and there are three key resources needed to do so:

- Maintaining physical health and wellbeing
- Maintaining economic stability
- Maintaining social connections and access to social resources

Ms. Stephens shared that Age Friendly Seattle created the Anti-Ageism Training modules last year to fight ageism and work to reduce the barriers that can prevent older adults from maintaining access to the three key resources noted above. They created three training modules for City of Seattle employees, which were shared with the Commissioners to review in advance of the meeting. Ms. Stephens noted there is also a version available to the public. She then passed the discussion over to Alex O'Reilly and Barb Will from the Seattle-King County Advisory Council for Aging and Disability Services, who are frequent collaborators with Age Friendly Seattle.

Ms. O'Reilly reminded Commissioners that she would be referencing the anti-ageism training modules shared with the Commission prior to the meeting and noted she would be walking the group through a series of discussion questions based on the training.

Commission Discussion

- Ms. O'Reilly asked Commissioners to consider a time in their lives when they felt old and what made them feel that way. As an example, she shared that she has participated in a competitive rowing team for over 30 years. She noted that teams are ranked in the competitions from A to H and in recent years her team has moved closer to the H level and that realization made her feel old. Ms. O'Reilly noted that she realized she could continue to be active at 75 years old, but she would be doing so at a different pace and level than she was used to performing. She opened the floor for Commissioner examples.
- A Commissioner recalled trying bouldering as a new activity recently. She noted that she has always been someone who liked to try all sorts of activities and exercises and thought of herself as fearless. When trying bouldering, however, she realized that heights are starting to feel different to her and her idea of risk has changed as she ages.
- Ms. O'Reilly posed another question: Were there any reflections or powerful moments that came up for Commissioners during the training?
- Commissioners noted that it was simple but important to acknowledge that we are all aging all the time, so ageism is a cross-cutting issue for everyone. They also noted that they were struck by some of the data in the training, such as how the population of older adults ages 85 and up in the Puget Sound Region is expected to grow by 300% by 2050. Growth in the older adult population must be considered in long-range planning.
- Commissioners noted experience working the field of accessibility retrofits in the Seattle area and learned it is very challenging to age in place in Seattle given the built environment and the cost of living. They reflected on how the training noted not everyone wants to relocate in their later years, but it can be very difficult to stay in place and that challenge is important to keep working on.
- Ms. O'Reilly agreed and raised the concept of Universal Design as a topic the Advisory Council often discusses. She pointed out that using design to make spaces accessible for older adults and those using mobility assistance devices can make spaces more accessible for everyone.
- Ms. O'Reilly then asked Commissioners to consider how they might use the information from the anti-ageism training in their work.
- Commissioners noted they think a lot about how Seattle can prevent displacement and they do not often consider how aging plays a role in displacement. Given how important it is to maintain social connections and access to resources, it would be impactful to consider how many of those displaced are older adults who would prefer to age in place.

- Commissioners pointed out that part of ensuring people can age in place is considering the role of transportation. Transportation access can relate to the ability to afford to stay in place and relates to how safe older adults feel using the transportation system. For example, an older adult using a mobility device may need more time to cross the street, but if street crossings are programed to prioritize the speed and convenience of cars, they may not give enough time for pedestrians who move slowly to cross.
- Ms. O'Reilly responded that the Advisory Council often discusses transportation access related to construction and how a change in travel patterns for someone who relies on walking or rolling to reach food, or medical services can have a big impact on their day.
- Commissioners reflected on how all the systems in place to shape the built environment work together on an issue. For example, how do decisions in the Comprehensive Plan, zoning incentives, and building code come together to shape the physical structure of communities? Sometimes those cumulative decisions lead to results like a recent boom in construction of townhomes and apartments without many options for single-story housing. They noted it is important to consider how those choices can work together to support better options for housing types that can support aging in place.
- Commissioners asked if Seattle has enough assisted living facilities and nursing care facilities within the city to meet future needs. Ms. Stephens responded that the overall housing shortage includes a shortage of such facilities. She noted that the demand for care centers is lower in Washington due to a program that provides vouchers for in-home care for aging adults who need it. A related issue, however, is that Seattle does not have enough in-home care providers. She noted that Age Friendly Seattle is also working on research of what other cities have done related to zoning and building codes to increase access to care centers and housing for older adults. Ms. Stephens offered to share that research with the Commission.
- Ms. Stephens noted that Age Friendly Seattle is tracking legislation at the state level that aims to support the paid long-term care workforce as well as providing relief for family caregivers. They are considering multiple approaches to support aging in place including the built environment, universal design, the workforce, and support for caregivers.
- Commissioners asked if Age Friendly Seattle runs programs in other areas such as advocacy around fall prevention. Ms. Stephens replied that they work with occupational therapists who can support care teams to make repairs and modifications in housing for older adults that make homes safer.
- Commissioners asked about funding challenges related to care for individuals who don't qualify for financial assistance. Ms. Stephens acknowledged that this is an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed. Many middle-income people do not qualify for some services but struggle to afford in-home care.
- Ms. Woolfe and Ms. Stephens thanked the Commissioners for their time and noted they would follow up with some research they have been conducting that the Commission might find helpful. They asked the Commission to think of them as a resource moving forward. Commissioners expressed appreciation for their presentation.

Update: Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections

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

Director Torgelson shared that SDCI went through a comprehensive auditing process over the last year through an internal review as well as receiving several suggestions from the Mayor's housing subcabinet that resulted in the following organizational changes to the department:

- Combined the Land Use Division and the Engineering Services Division into one new Land Use and Engineering Services Division. The new combined Division Director will be Darlene Edwards.
- Created a new Customer Success Division with Andy Higgins as the Division Director to help applicants through the application process. The Customer Success Division aims to:
 - Create clear ownership of initial customer service
 - Formalize the triage process and use of subject matter expertise
 - Support customers earlier in the permitting process and provide guidance on next steps
 - Reduce errors and re-work during project intake, and
 - Create cross divisional visibility to customers and identify key customer roadblocks
- Moved the Land Use Code Development Team from the Director's office to the new combined Land Use and Engineering Services Division. This change will provide better coordination between land use and technical code development.
- Created a new Finance Division with Shane Muchow as the Finance Director and reporting directly to Director Torgelson. This change helps put finance in closer contact with elected officials as they navigate the budget process.

Director Torgelson also noted changes to SDCI's customer service operations. He noted the Land Use Information Desk has been operating since December and was joined by staff from Seattle Department of Transportation in early 2024 to co-locate their public-facing help desks. While most applicants use the virtual application services, the information desk is available for anyone who does not have access to technology or prefers to talk to someone in person about their project. He noted SDCI is also updating their phone tree system to make it easier for the public to use.

Director Torgelson shared an update on permit activity. He noted permitting activity is down significantly citywide. SDCI had prepared for a situation like this during a pre-pandemic fee review process that raised fees to keep up with cost-of-living increases and inflation. Given the City's budget situation many are asking if there will be cuts to SDCI. Director Torgelson noted that they are reviewing the budget now and do not have any clear answers but as SDCI's budget is ninety-two percent fee driven and only eight percent of the budget is from the General Fund, cuts to the General Fund would have a small impact on the department overall.

Director Torgelson listed several other major projects SDCI is focused on, including:

- Memorial Stadium Phased Submittal – the first permit is expected by the end of the year and the project is a strong collaboration with SDCI, the school district, and Seattle Center.
- Master Use Permits related to the light rail expansion are expected in 2025.
- Northgate expansion – a housing project with around 1000 housing units recently broke ground which will be an important step for the area to move toward its growth goals.

Director Torgelson reviewed several code amendment projects the department is working on, including:

- Downtown Street Activation
 - The proposed amendments would allow more street activation for temporary uses. The City Council has tabled the amendments for now.
- Commercial to Residential Conversion
 - Legislation is led by the Office of Planning and Community Development with assistance from SDCI. The code amendments were passed by the City Council unanimously. SDCI's goal was to work toward adding flexibility in the building code because every building is different and will need to take a unique approach to conversion.
- Design Review Exemption
 - The proposed legislation would waive the Design Review process in permit review of development proposals that contain mostly residential or hotel uses, or research and development laboratories within the following urban center neighborhoods: Downtown, South Lake Union, Uptown, First Hill, and a portion of the Duwamish Manufacturing and Industrial Center.
- Omnibus Legislation
 - Going to City Council's Land Use Committee in early September
 - Removes old language about the State Environmental Policy Act
 - Relocates a proposed change to downtown height limits and maintains the Mayor's intended outcome for hotel development in Belltown
 - Removes parking from consideration under environmental review in line with the change to state law
- Building and Technical Codes
 - The legislation includes several amendments to incentivize voluntary public safety improvements to unreinforced masonry (URM) buildings as well as various Seattle Municipal Code cleanup and correction items that relate to construction codes.
 - Also working on codes to align with new State energy code requirements.
 - Commercial kitchens in new buildings must have capacity for future electrification.
 - For existing buildings, the changes soften rules for replacement of central HVAC gas and electric resistance heating equipment with heat pumps. The new rules would:
 - exempt affordable housing, hospitals, nonprofits, and buildings that would require major utility upgrades
 - allow buildings to retain fifty percent of their gas heating capacity for now
 - allow emergency replacements of gas equipment, using either a temporary certificate of occupancy or a performance bond that requires heat pump installation within four years
 - All of the above scenarios require building occupants to complete a future decarbonization plan that includes engineered schematic design and cost estimates for future conversion to heat pumps, central service water heating systems, and or central HVAC heating systems.
- Living Building Legislation
 - The Living Building Pilot Program is intended to promote the public interest by encouraging the development of innovative "living" buildings that can reduce environmental impacts. The planned amendments clarify that height bonuses are allowed to exceed 145 feet in height regardless of a lot size limit in the Downtown Mixed Residential zone in Belltown.

After Director Torgelson concluded his remarks, there was not enough time left for questions and comments from Commissioners. Director Torgelson suggested that Commissioners send him any questions raised by his update and he would answer them via email.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 am.