



City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

Jerry Finrow, Chair
Barbara Wilson, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION FEBRUARY 8, 2007 APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

Commissioners in Attendance

Jerry Finrow – Chair, Linda Amato, Hilda Blanco, George Blomberg, Chris Fiori, Martin Kaplan, Amalia Leighton, M. Michelle Mattox, Kevin McDonald, Tony To

Commissioners Absent

Mahlon Clements, Tom Eanes, Kay Knapton, Kirsten Pennington, Steve Sheehy

Commission Staff

Barbara Wilson – Director, Casey Mills – Planning Analyst, Robin Magonegil-Administrative Specialist

Guests

Grace Crunican, SDOT; John Rahaim, Gordon Clowers, Cheryl Sizov, DPD

In Attendance

Rebecca Herzfeld, Bob Morgan, Norm Schwab, Council Central Staff; Nathan Torgelson, Mayor Nickel's Senior Staff; Andrea Wenet, Interbay Neighborhood Association; Irene Wall, City Neighborhood Council

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

The meeting was called to order at 3:09 pm by Chair Jerry Finrow.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

- Approve January 25, 2007 Minutes

ACTION: Commissioner Tony To moved to approve the January 25, 2007 minutes. Commissioner Chris Fiori seconded the motion. Director Barbara Wilson made an amendment regarding noting Commissioners noting their employers when disclosing. The minutes passed unanimously as amended.

▪ Chairs Report

Chair Finrow called attention to the meetings and events that are listed on the back of the meeting agenda. He noted the upcoming Commission meetings for the month and called special attention to the 'Housing our Future' Speaker Series with Henry Cisneros on Thursday, February 15 at City Hall from 5:30 – 7:00 pm. He added that there will be a reception afterwards.

Executive Director Barbara Wilson gave an update on the Incentive Zoning white paper. She noted that some of the Commissioners have stated that the recommendations looked good, others had some minor changes, and others had substantive changes. Ms. Wilson noted that she will be sending out the document soon for final review and approval on Friday. She also

Chair Finrow read into the record the Commission's course of action concerning their 1/17/06 letter to the City Council regarding the Alaskan Way Viaduct rebuild.

For the Record:

"On January 17, 2006 the Planning Commission approved the Final Draft of their letter to the Seattle City Council. The letter states the Commissions continued support for the tunnel option and encourages the Seattle City Council to find a workable compromise solution that meets the needs of the overall project. 12 members voted to approve. 2 members -- Commissioners Blanco and Clements -- were unavailable for vote. Commissioner Sheehy recused himself because of a conflict of interest. Of the 14 members eligible to vote 12 voted to approve and the Action was approved"

Chair Finrow noted the upcoming Industrial Lands Strategy public meetings. Commission Analyst Casey Mills requested that Commissioners volunteer to serve as facilitators for each of the meetings. He noted that the meetings are March 29th, 4:30 – 6:30 pm; April 10th, 4:30 -6:00 pm; April 24th, 4:30 – 6:00 pm; and May 31st, 4:30 – 6:30 pm. Mr. Mills added that all of the meetings will take place in the Bertha Landes Room, Seattle City Hall, 600 Fourth Avenue.

▪ Commission Business

Yesler Terrace Citizen Review: Chair Finrow asked Commissioner M. Michelle Mattox to give a brief update on the Yesler Terrace Review Committee. Commissioner Mattox stated that the Committee is still in its very initial stages, and, at this point, is still working to define important terms, such as sustainability and economic vitality. She added that she will provide another update when they make start discussing more substantive issues.

Affordable Housing Action Agenda: Mr. Mills gave an update on the affordable housing action agenda. He noted that he was currently listing all the strategies Commissioners had heard about or that offered to meet Seattle's affordable housing needs. He added that this document will be reviewed and edited and the next HNUC Committee meeting.

Downtown Tower Spacing: Chair Finrow gave an update on DPD's tower spacing advisory committee Chair Finrow is chairing as a representative of the Planning Commission. He stated that most of the committee feels the Council's proposed spacing requirements make sense, though some feel the towers

should be spaced farther apart than they are currently required to. Chair Finrow added that the committee's work will hopefully be completed in a month or so.

Development Capacity Model discussion at HNUC: Chair Finrow gave an update on the previous HNUC meeting and DPD's Tom Hauger's presentation on the City of Seattle's development capacity model. He noted that this model is used to determine how much development capacity Seattle has. Chair Finrow stated that DPD found that there is currently an underutilized capacity of maybe 30 percent. He added that it should be the Commission's responsibility to advocate for up zoning and increasing density so that the 30 percent figure will not change in the coming years as it has a direct impact on affordability. Chair Finrow continued that, if the percentage gets any lower than that land prices could raise significantly, thereby reducing housing affordability considerably. Commissioner To stated that his biggest problem with growth management techniques is that they determine development capacity, but there is no affordability element included in the models.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

▪ City of Seattle's Transportation Future

Chair Finrow invited Grace Crunican, Seattle Department of Transportation, to join the Commission at the table for a briefing on the City's transportation goals and vision and to discuss some of the important projects and policies.

Ms. Crunican stated that transportation should function in the context of broader goal and consider what the vision is for Seattle? She noted that some want it to be San Francisco, but in reality Seattle is a combination of both Oakland and San Francisco, because it has large industrial areas and an active port. She added that Seattle does not have any plans for setting aside its role as the states major economic engine, so therefore biking, walking and transit must fit in with getting large trucks around. Ms. Crunican noted that the goals must work with regional goals as well.

Ms. Crunican noted that The Bridging the Gap funds – about \$80 million will go to a variety of things. She noted that the funds will be used to improve regional connections, such as Lander, Spokane and Mercer. Ms. Crunican mentioned that the funds will be used to enhance the Urban Village strategy by making sure those living in urban center villages can expect bus service every 15 minutes at least 18 hours a day.

Ms. Crunican stated that SDOT has identified three important transportation hubs – King Street Station, Colman Dock and Westlake Center and ten major projects. She noted that the ten projects are the Spokane Viaduct, which includes a widening to improve bus connectivity; Lander Street changes, to improve route time predictability for transit; Light Rail, which will open in '09, and the UW extension and Northgate extensions, which will open later; The King Street Station, which has \$29 million committed for retrofitting and other improvements; Alaskan Way Viaduct; Colman Dock; West Seattle-Ballard Bus Rapid Transit, where they are doing street improvements to make these lines faster; South Lake Union streetcar; SR520; I-90, where they are working on getting a fixed rail for the center of the highway.

Ms. Crunican stated that SDOT is focused on four major program areas – Expand transit options, meaning getting people out of their cars; Pedestrian and Bike improvements, including the Bike Master Plan, which was just released for comments, and the Pedestrian Master Plan, which they are just beginning; Parking, which they are working on right now, including moving parking from the street and

making private garages operate more for short-term parkers rather than commuters; and Leveraging fixed rail for transit-oriented development, which Office of Policy Management is the lead on but that SDOT plays an important role in.

Ms. Crunican then gave a quick briefing on the proposed 'hybrid' option for the Alaskan Way Viaduct Rebuild. She stated that the option has slightly less capacity than the previous stacked option, but plenty of capacity for the estimates out to 2030.

Commissioner Finrow mentioned that the southern portion of the project could be done immediately.

Commissioner Kaplan asked how realistic it was that the tunnel would move forward. Ms. Crunican said in terms of funding, it was very realistic. She added that there are a variety of funding sources for the tunnel option. Ms. Crunican noted however that, politically, she is unsure.

Commissioner Blomberg questioned why SDOT would want to take parking off the street. Ms. Crunican replied that it would make truck mobility better and would improve speed of transit.

▪ **Upcoming Development Initiatives**

Chair Finrow invited John Rahaim, Gordon Clowers and Cheryl Sizov from DPD to brief the Commission on several upcoming development related initiatives.

Mr. Rahaim stated that DPD was working on a series of somewhat related efforts that were going to be packaged together, but they no longer are.

Mr. Rahaim noted that the first effort is to change the SEPA thresholds. He noted that these thresholds have not been changed in 20 years and during that time, Design review, Comprehensive Plan, Neighborhood Planning and other City initiatives have all been implemented. Mr. Rahaim added that the second effort is tying the city's sidewalk policy to the Urban Village strategy and changing the thresholds for providing sidewalks. He continued that the third effort is the Open Space Impact Fee. He noted that the impact fee proposal is still in the formative stage.

Mr. Clowers stated that since SEPA thresholds were last set, many new codes came into place that provides environmental controls. He added that the state also recently changed possible thresholds for infill development.

Mr. Clowers went over a chart depicting the proposed changes to the thresholds. He mentioned that Design Review thresholds would not be changed. Mr. Clowers added that he had researched 10 years of development data, and estimated only about 50 projects per year would be affected by the new thresholds and that it could save \$5,000-\$10,000 per unit of residential development. He noted that it could also increase density because developers would no longer build smaller to avoid SEPA review. The new thresholds would incentivize growth in Urban Centers as well. Lowering the thresholds would not make a massive difference, as SEPA usually only recommends mitigations regarding construction and little else.

Commissioner Kaplan stated he was concerned about the projects that would no longer be caught by SEPA and that could have traffic impacts that would need to be mitigated. Mr. Rahaim stated that most developments under 20 units don't have much impact on traffic.

Chair Finrow stated that DPD might want to look into providing some sort of pressure valve for neighborhoods who have problems with projects that would not undergo SEPA review under the new thresholds. He added that this could possibly happen in Design Review.

Ms. Sizov discussed changes to the sidewalk development standards. She stated that requirements regarding sidewalks had also not been changed in 20 years. Ms. Sizov noted that the Mayor's Office and Council have increasingly prioritized pedestrian safety, so this issue became a priority for DPD.

Ms. Sizov mentioned that the objective of the initiative is to tie sidewalk improvements to location rather than type or size of project. She added that, since Urban Villages and Urban Centers are where growth is targeted, these areas should get a higher level of service.

Ms. Sizov stated that right now sidewalks are just one of the street improvements allowed for new developments, and there are a lot of exceptions from having to provide sidewalks. She added that the new standards would require sidewalks in urban centers and on arterials and any development over three units elsewhere. Ms. Sizov noted that this would be Phase I of the project with Phase II seeking to develop alternatives to standard curb and gutter sidewalks and allow some options for developers in the future.

Commissioner Leighton noted that someone may have to pick up the cost of installing an entire drainage system in areas where none exist if sidewalks with gutters were added to such areas. Ms. Sizov said that is a very difficult question that will have to be answered in Phase II. She noted that they were working with Seattle Public Utilities on this question.

Commissioner To stated that the city often requires developers to build sidewalks to certain standards but the city itself is required to build to a lesser standard. He added that the new standards should apply to the city as well as developers. Ms. Sizov agreed that the standards should be consistent.

Commissioner Kaplan suggested that there be no exceptions – that developers everywhere, no matter what size the unit, should include a sidewalk.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Finrow adjourned the meeting at 5:25 pm.