



City of Seattle Seattle Planning Commission

Josh Brower, Chair
Barbara Wilson, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION JULY 9, 2009 APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

COMMISSIONERS IN ATTENDANCE

Chair - Josh Brower, Vice-Chair - Leslie Miller, Linda Amato, David Cutler, Chris Fiori, Mark Johnson, Marty Kaplan, Kay Knapton, Kevin McDonald, Christopher Persons, Matt Roewe, Michelle Zeidman

COMMISSION STAFF

Barbara Wilson-Director, Katie Sheehy-Planning Analyst, Diana Canzoneri-Demographer

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

Catherine Benotto, Jerry Finrow, Colie Hough-Beck, Amalia Leighton

GUESTS

Dennis Meier, Tom Hauger, DPD; Brian Surratt, OED

IN ATTENDANCE

Aaron Houseknecht, Seattle City Light

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

Chair Josh Brower called the meeting to order at 3:06 p.m. He thanked out-going Chair Linda Amato for her excellent service and stated that he is honored to serve as Chair for the upcoming year. Chair Brower noted that the minutes for June 25 meeting will be approved at the next Full Commission meeting.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

▪ **Chair's Report** - Commission Chair Josh Brower

Chair Josh Brower indicated that the Commission's letter regarding the Multifamily Code Update was sent out on Monday and that the HNUC Committee is working on a response to Council Central Staff's June 8 memo on the same topic. He also noted that the Commission's recommendations about this year's proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments went out on June 30. Chair Brower reviewed the upcoming meetings. He reminded the Commissioners that the July 23 meeting has been cancelled.

Chair Josh Brower stated that the second of the five Neighborhood Status Report open house meetings took place last night and asked the Commissioners who staffed the meeting to share their thoughts. Commissioners briefly summarized the neighborhood discussions at the June 22 and July 8 open house meetings. Ms. Wilson noted that approximately 50 people have responded to the on-line version of the questionnaire.

BRIEFINGS & DISCUSSION

- **Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District**
 - Dennis Meier, DPD

Recusals & Disclosures:

- Commissioner Christopher Persons disclosed that his firm, Capitol Hill Housing, is working on a project within the proposed overlay district.
- Commissioner Chris Fiori disclosed that his firm, Heartland, represents the Polyclinic.
- Chair Josh Brower disclosed that his firm, Tupper Mack Brower, represents clients who develop properties within the proposed overlay district.
- Commissioner Brian Cutler disclosed that his firm, GGLO, works on projects within the proposed overlay district.

Chair Brower welcomed Mr. Meier. Mr. Meier began by noting that he spoke with the Commission a few months ago about the Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District, which is intended to help preserve the character of the neighborhood. He noted that a Cultural Overlay District Advisory Committee was formed and a consultant was hired to assist with community outreach. Mr. Meier stated that the area currently has a number of overlapping zoning regulations that have been adopted over the decades and that part of the proposal would replace these overlaps with one consistent set of regulations. Mr. Meier explained that the new regulations would focus on retaining the historic character of the area through preservation of existing 'character structures' that are more than 75 years old. He indicated that while the base zoning would not change, there would be an incentive program that would allow additional height for projects that preserve significant portions of these character structures. He noted that there are also provisions to encourage smaller retail spaces that would be more affordable to small, local businesses. Mr. Meier briefly outlined concerns related to the potential expansion of the Polyclinic that has garnered a lot of attention. He indicated that Council is working toward a compromise on the issue.

Commissioner Roewe asked for clarification about how the proposal would differ from current regulations. Mr. Meier reiterated that there would be an incentive to preserve character structures and that the current zoning regulations would remain as a base. He noted that there is not a one size fits all solution and that the possibility of using a transfer of development rights (TDR) program is also being explored.

Commissioner McDonald asked about how preservation of a character structure would be defined. Mr. Meier replied that the new addition to the building would have to be setback from the existing façade by at least 15 feet and that the existing façade would have to be retained at street level; he also indicated that the Director will retain some discretionary authority about what would qualify as preservation.

Commissioner Fiori asked about the potential utility of a TDR program and expressed concern that there was a lack of demand for receiving sites. Mr. Meier replied that a TDR program linked with downtown was explored, but not deemed feasible. He indicated staff will continue to explore whether or not this could be a useful tool for the neighborhood but agreed that it only has limited applicability.

Commissioner Kaplan asked about the setbacks for new additions extending above existing buildings. Mr. Meier replied that it would be a clear and consistent standard that would allow for an additional floor in height. He reiterated the required setback would be 15 feet from the existing façade but also noted that there could be an opportunity for flexibility through design review.

▪ **Industrial Lands**

- Tom Hauger, DPD; Brian Surratt, OED

Recusals & Disclosures:

- Commissioner Mark Johnson disclosed that his firm, ESA Adolfson, works on projects within industrial zones.

- Chair Josh Brower disclosed that his firm, Tupper Mack Brower, represents owners and developers of industrial land.

Mr. Hauger summarized the history and process of the Industrial Lands project. He explained that DPD conducted an inventory of the industrial properties throughout the city, evaluated industrial zone boundaries, and compared the City's regulations (including FAR) to other areas throughout the country. He spoke briefly about how DPD and OED are working to identify mechanisms, such as a planned action ordinance, that would streamline the regulatory process. Mr. Hauger noted that the potential of creating TDR program was also explored.

Mr. Surratt indicated that the economic study OED is working on, which should be completed this summer, will include 2008 data. He noted that it seems that the city's industrial jobs base has remained stable.

Ms. Wilson asked about the criteria used to rezone industrial land. Mr. Hauger replied that when Council adopted changes to the size of use limits in 2007, they also adopted changes to the Comprehensive Plan that indicate IG zones are not appropriate for urban villages. He noted that there needs to be balance between preservation of industrial uses and growth within urban centers.

Commissioner Johnson asked about the proportion of industrial jobs compared to the overall job base. Mr. Surratt replied that they represent approximately 18-19 percent of the employment base. He noted that while this proportion has been declining somewhat over the years, it relates more to the increase in the number of jobs in other sectors rather than an actual reduction in the number of industrial jobs.

Commissioner Kaplan asked for more details about how industrial jobs compare to the rest of the employment sectors. Mr. Surratt indicated that the number of industrial firms has remained remarkably stable, while the number of other firms has increased, which accounts for a somewhat downward trend in the proportion of industrial firms. He also noted that the fundamentals of our industrial sector are strong, particularly with the robust port along the downtown core.

Commissioner Fiori lauded DPD's work on the inventory and mapping of industrial land. He asked for more information about the planned action ordinance (PAO) in the North Bay area. Mr. Hauger replied that the PAO would provide predictability about uses and ensure that appropriate mitigation measures would be in place.

Commissioner Roewe asked about the size limitations for non-industrial uses. Mr. Hauger replied that the intent is to discourage uses that could disrupt the character in the manufacturing and industrial centers (MIC). Commissioner Johnson reiterated that the intent is to prevent the conversion of industrial land to non-industrial uses. Commissioner Roewe asked what is being done to attract green industry firms. Mr. Surratt replied that energy efficiency is one of their biggest concerns and noted that McKinstry, one of the national leaders of sustainable industry, is based in Seattle and recently received permits to expand its offices in the Duwamish MIC. He noted that no one is really sure yet what the needs of these new firms will be, but that cities with large contiguous areas with flexible zoning for industrial uses will be in the best position to attract these new businesses. Mr. Surratt stated that the City intends to preserve industrial land not only for the existing industrial businesses, but also for the long-term health of the city's employment sector.

Commissioner Persons asked for clarification about the stability of the number of industrial firms in Seattle. Mr. Surratt replied that there are fluctuations in the subsectors of industrial businesses, but the overall revenues have remained stable. Chair Fiori noted that the number of publically traded firms has declined during the past decade because there had been a lot of consolidation. Mr. Surratt noted that the biotech industry in particular has seen a lot of consolidation.

Ms. Canzoneri asked about movement of industrial jobs within the Puget Sound region. Mr. Surratt replied that there is a lot of movement within the region, but that the vacancy rates in Seattle have been relatively steady at about 3.5-4 percent. He noted that it could be compared to an incubator where a lot of small businesses start up here and then move elsewhere as they get larger.

Chair Brower noted that while the industrial sector accounts for 18-19 percent of jobs in Seattle, it accounts for more than a third of tax revenue. Mr. Surratt agreed that industrial jobs are an important aspect of the city's economy. He noted that the country overall has shifted to a consumer based economy; Seattle's industrial businesses still make products that can be consumed locally, regionally and internationally. Chair Brower asked what is being done to help keep these businesses. Mr. Hauger replied that changing the size of use limits for non-industrial businesses has helped reduce the pressure on industrial businesses. He noted that transportation is one of the challenges in terms of balancing the needs of freight with other drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians. Mr. Surratt added that workforce education is also important. Industrial jobs are often 'living wage' jobs that are accessible for people who do not have four year degrees. He noted that cities like San Francisco gave up on their industrial base and now has greatly reduced job opportunities for less educated people. Mr. Surratt indicated that a lack of a ready labor force is a problem for some industrial businesses especially as many current workers are reaching retirement age. He did bring attention to a vocational community college in Georgetown that specializes in preparing students for industrial jobs and has been very successful in placing them at local companies.

Commissioner Knapton asked about how much the City invests in industrial areas relative to how much revenue is received from them. She suggested that the City receives much more revenue relative to its investment. Mr. Surratt replied that it would be interesting to conduct a cost-benefit analysis and suspected that many industrial business owners would agree with her suggestion.

Commissioner Fiori agreed with Commissioner Knapton's assertion. He asked what the City could do to further support industrial businesses. Mr. Hauger replied that staff is talking about how to develop a plan whereby the City could partner with industrial businesses to invest in incremental infrastructure improvements.

Commissioners briefly discussed future development possibilities in the areas around the two light rail stations in the Duwamish MIC. Mr. Hauger noted that City Council is working on a proposal to study these station areas.

Chair Brower asked about the potential timeline of the Planned Action Ordinance in North Bay. Mr. Hauger replied that staff hopes to have it completed sometime this fall but are not certain that it will be completed before the end of the year.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Josh Brower adjourned the meeting at 5:29 p.m.