



## City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

Rick Mohler and Jamie Stroble, Co-Chairs  
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

### SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, October 27, 2022

Approved Meeting Minutes

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<b>Commissioners Present:</b>	McCaela Daffern, Roque Deherrera, David Goldberg, Matt Hutchins, Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson, Rick Mohler, Dhyana Quintanar, Dalton Owens
<b>Commissioners Absent:</b>	Mark Braseth, Patience Malaba, Radhika Nair, Alanna Peterson, Julio Sanchez, Lauren Squires, Jamie Stroble, Kelabe Tewolde
<b>Commission Staff:</b>	Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; John Hoey, Senior Policy Analyst; Olivia Baker, Planning Analyst

*Seattle Planning Commission meeting minutes are not an exact transcript and represent key points and the basis of discussion.*

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Referenced Documents discussed at the meeting can be viewed here:

<https://www.seattle.gov/planningcommission/meetings>

#### Chair's Report & Minutes Approval

Co-Chair Rick Mohler called the meeting to order at 7:35 am and announced several upcoming Commission meetings. Co-Chair Mohler offered the following land acknowledgement:

*'On behalf of the Seattle Planning Commission, I'd like to humbly recognize that we are gathered on Indigenous land, the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples including the Duwamish, Suquamish, and Muckleshoot. We thank these caretakers of this land who have lived and continue to live here since time immemorial. We acknowledge the role that traditional western-centric planning practices have played in harming, displacing, and attempting to erase Native communities and we respect Indigenous rights to sovereignty and self-determination. We commit to being better listeners, learners and to lifting indigenous voices. We also commit to identifying racist practices, to practice allyship and strive to center restorative land stewardship rather than unsustainable and extractive use of the land.'*

Co-Chair Mohler 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. He reminded Commissioners that they have collectively agreed to abide by these norms.

**ACTION: Commissioner David Goldberg moved to approve the September 22, 2022 meeting minutes. Commissioner Roque Deherrera seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.**

### **Announcements**

Vanessa Murdock, Seattle Planning Commission Executive Director, noted that this meeting is a hybrid meeting where some Commissioners are participating remotely while other Commissioners and staff are participating in person in the Boards and Commissions Room at Seattle City Hall. She noted that public comment could be submitted in writing via email at least eight hours before the start of the Commission meeting or provided in person by any members of the public attending the meeting at City Hall.

### **Repurposing the Right-of-Way Issue Brief**

Commissioner David Goldberg provided an overview of the Commission's Repurposing the Right-of-Way issue brief. He stated that work on this issue brief began last December and thanked the Commissioners who contributed to its development. He stated that the goal for this agenda item is to gain agreement on the final product so the Commission can release the brief and move into the outreach phase. This issue brief is one in a series of policy papers prepared by the Seattle Planning Commission in anticipation of the Comprehensive Plan update. This issue brief focuses on how the City's public rights-of-way can be repurposed and re-envisioned in the One Seattle Plan. Re-envisioning the public right-of-way and reprioritizing its use will open a wide range of possibilities for improving city life while meeting important policy goals.

#### *A Vision*

Publicly owned right-of-way provides not just mobility, but also critical social and cultural space, an environmental and recreational resource, and an opportunity for economic development. The Seattle Planning Commission envisions a future where Seattleites of all ages, races, income levels, and abilities safely use and enjoy our public rights-of-way. Transformed by direct community involvement, this public space provides safe and equitable access by bicycle, wheelchair, foot, transit, or by car. It also forms an interconnected network of urban nature corridors with street trees connecting to habitat patches in parks and clean stormwater flowing to our waterways.

#### *Equitable streets for people in a growing city*

- Land use policies such as minimum parking requirements and "free" on-street parking have prioritized the movement and storage of cars on our increasingly valuable public rights-of-way.
- A true devotion to Vision Zero requires redesigning roads and reallocating space to reduce traffic speeds and create safe spaces for people walking, biking, and using wheelchairs and other mobility devices.
- Taking climate action requires allocating more space to providing safe and convenient alternatives to driving, as well as increasing tree canopy, vegetation, and "green stormwater infrastructure".

#### *Opportunities to evolve the Comprehensive Plan*

- The updated Comprehensive Plan and the forthcoming Seattle Transportation Plan must focus on equity to prioritize transportation and safety investments in communities of color.

- The City must prioritize investment to prevent traffic violence while providing more opportunities for outdoor activity; improve transit speed and reliability; reduce noise and emissions in residential areas; and increase options for non-motorized travel.

*A journey toward balance and equity*

- The Seattle Planning Commission acknowledges that change will not be instantaneous – nor should it be – and that there are many difficult policy and budgetary choices to be made to ensure a just transition.
- However, we are confident that Seattle has the civic wherewithal to make the shift over the 20-year life of the next Comprehensive Plan.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners suggested alternative subtitles for the issue brief.
- Commissioners recommended formatting changes for accessibility by people with reading disabilities.

**Briefing: Equitable Development Zoning**

Katy Haima and Nick Welch, Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD)

Mr. Welch provided an overview of the purpose, potential strategies, and themes related to Equitable Development Zoning. He provided the following definition for Equitable Development from the City’s Equitable Development Initiative (EDI) program: “Public and private investments, programs, and policies that meet the needs of marginalized populations, reduce disparities, and expand access to quality-of-life outcomes.” The intent of Equitable Development Zoning is to develop tools that could be available for development projects whether they receive funding from the EDI program.

Mr. Welch provided several examples of recent development projects that encountered barriers that the Equitable Development Zoning program hopes to address:

- Wa Na Wari, a cultural space in the Central District, was not an allowed use in its Neighborhood Residential zone and had to navigate a costly and uncertain conditional use process.
- The Nehemiah Initiative, a group of historic Black churches in the Central District, identified zoning changes that would boost its project feasibility.
- Hip Hop is Green wanted a zoning change but faced a prohibitive \$28,000 fee barrier to explore a contract rezone.
- Real Time Human Services did not want to have to “become a zoning expert” to carry out their mission.

He shared the following challenge that Equitable Development Zoning hopes to solve. “We prioritize equitable development, fund it through EDI, but regulate development in ways that can hinder, delay, complicate, and add cost to these projects by:

- Limiting allowed uses and development
- Adding costs due fees and requirements

- Creating delay and uncertainty
- Requiring specialized expertise that distracts from organization mission”

The purpose and promise of Equitable Development Zoning is to align land use policy with equitable development goals.

- Help equitable development projects succeed by removing the barriers they face in City regulations and processes
- Provide resources and supports that increase access to the development process for BIPOC communities and organizations
- Shift development policy and process to prioritize community supportive equitable development

Ms. Haima highlighted the following key themes that were identified during early engagement efforts, including conversations with EDI stakeholders in late 2020/early 2021 and interviews with applicants to the 2021 and 2022 EDI Request for Proposals (RFPs):

- Multiple City regulations are creating challenges for EDI projects
- Sites available and affordable to EDI organizations may not accommodate their proposed uses
- Existing zoning generally doesn’t facilitate or encourage equitable development outcomes
- The permitting process is complex, costly, and uncertain, especially if a conditional use permit or a contract rezone is involved
- The real estate market and complex permitting together favor larger, experienced developers over small BIPOC led organizations

A stakeholder group was convened in 2022 with broad expertise to guide development of Equitable Development Zoning strategies. Ms. Haima stated that this group has been meeting monthly and has had four meetings to date. This group is very knowledgeable on the types of issues they are running into, with the following areas of expertise:

- Firsthand experience with EDI
- Arts & cultural space
- Community centers & institutions
- Affordable housing
- Childcare
- Land trusts & ownership models
- Indigenous methodologies & stewardship
- Practitioners with experience on Equitable Development projects

The City is compensating these stakeholders for their time. The scope of work for this group is to:

- Review near term legislation to remove code barriers to equitable development
- Advise on how to define equitable development (criteria)
- Identify and recommend how to avoid potential unintended consequences

- Inform early implementation and continued engagement in 2023

The following strategies have been identified at this point in the process:

#### *Permitting support*

Problem: Navigating the permitting process is complex, confusing, and costly, especially for smaller, BIPOC led organizations developing their first project.

Opportunity:

- Identify dedicated staff to help EDI projects before and during permitting
- Expedite permits for equitable development projects
- Explore ways to ease cost burden of review for Equitable Development projects

Timeline:

- The Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) has a staff member assisting EDI applicants
- OPCD and SDCI are currently sharing an intern who will explore where EDI projects are getting stuck to identify and share lessons

#### *Legislation to remove code barriers*

Problem: Many equitable development projects are permitted as institutions and thus face a lengthy, discretionary permit processes and restrictions on site selection and design.

Opportunity: Develop legislation removing Land Use Code barriers identified by EDI stakeholders, including possible solutions like:

- Allowing some institutional uses outright in residential zones (rather than conditional uses)
- Relaxing burdensome requirements for institutions (like dispersion and parking)
- Update and clarify definitions
- Consider allowing certain uses that are prohibited or limited in residential zones, such as urban agriculture and accessory commercial uses

Timeline: aiming to transmit legislation early 2023

#### *Flexibility for equitable development*

Problem: Structural barriers in the real estate system make it hard for equitable development to succeed

Opportunity: Use land use tools (development standards, overlays, incentives) to provide additional development capacity and flexibility for equitable development projects

As OPCD explores this idea, they are considering questions like:

- How do we define the projects or uses that are eligible?
- Who determines that a proposal meets the criteria for equitable development?

- What types of flexibility or alternative development standards would be most helpful for equitable development projects?
- Should flexibility be available citywide or focused in certain geographic areas?

The Equitable Development Zoning program is anticipating the following next steps:

- Near term implementation through a pilot
- Scaling through One Seattle Comprehensive Plan, Station Area Planning
- Adding Comprehensive Plan policy to support equitable development

#### Commission Discussion

- Commissioners asked for more information about the volume of projects facing the challenges OPCD staff described; specifically, how many applicants this program would apply to and whether land banking would assist some of the applicants. Ms. Haima stated that the number of applicants for EDI funding varies every year. OPCD is trying to create a zoning structure that can assist a broader range of applicants regardless of whether they receive EDI funding. Hopefully there will be no limitation on how many organizations benefit from the Equitable Development Zoning program after completion of a pilot project. She stated that land banking is outside the scope of this program, but that the program could potentially help support land banking efforts.
- Commissioners inquired about the potential for involving private sector professionals in this process. Mr. Welch stated that the EDI program includes a convening process to connect professionals within the EDI network. Ms. Haima stated that the Equitable Development Zoning stakeholder group has expressed interest in building the necessary expertise and knowledge within their own network.
- Commissioners stated developers have indicated that they appreciate the complexity of the development code because it limits the involvement of others who are not as familiar with the complexities. Private professionals can aid project applicants working with the City on complicated permitting issues.
- Commissioners asked if all the challenges project applicants have encountered have been within Neighborhood Residential zones. Ms. Haima stated that the range of projects extends beyond Neighborhood Residential zones, but it is more straightforward to address the barriers projects face in Neighborhood Residential zones. Land for other types of projects in other zones is more expensive. Many project applicants do not have the resources to develop in those zones.
- Ms. Haima stated that this process aims to unlock the value of property for those who have been excluded from the development community.
- Commissioners stated that this program is very aligned with the Commission's values, especially around centering BIPOC communities. The Commission would like to stay informed and hear more as the process continues. Ms. Haima stated that she would inform the stakeholder group of the Commission's interest in this program.
- Commissioners inquired whether stakeholder meetings are open to the public. Ms. Haima answered that the stakeholder meetings are by invitation only. OPCD wants to make sure the meetings are a safe space for conversations. She stated that the stakeholder group meetings are only a first step in the process and there will be more opportunities to provide input in the future.
- Commissioners asked if the SDCI intern is currently looking at opportunities to streamline the permitting process. Ms. Haima stated that she does not know the details of the intern's work program but will talk to SDCI staff about that idea.

- Commissioners noted that this program might need to restrict where projects are located, for example in industrial lands. Ms. Haima stated that the Equitable Development Zoning program wants to make sure BIPOC communities benefit but not to exclude others. There are various legal issues to sort out, including how other private developers fit in with this program. She stated that the pilot program will hopefully reveal some of those issues and potential answers.

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**The meeting was adjourned at 9:02 am.**