



City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

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

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, May 09, 2024
Approved Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Xio Alvarez, McCaela Daffern, Andrew Dannenberg, David Goldberg, Matt Hutchins, Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson, Rick Mohler, Dhyana Quintanar, Julio Sanchez, Monika Sharma, Lauren Squires, Jamie Stroble, Kelabe Tewolde, Nick Whipple

Commissioners Absent: Radhika Nair

Commission Staff: Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; John Hoey, Senior Policy Analyst; 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 David Goldberg called the meeting to order at 3:07 pm and announced several upcoming Commission meetings. Co-Chair Goldberg 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. 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 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 Goldberg 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. He 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 suggested to Commissioners that they collectively agree to abide by these norms.

Announcements

Vanessa Murdock, Seattle Planning Commission Executive Director, 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. Ms. Murdock stated that full Commission meetings will be recorded and posted to the Planning Commission's website. She noted that these recordings are not in lieu of the Commission's minutes, which are approved at the next full Commission meeting.

ACTION: Commissioner Rick Mohler moved to approve the April 25, 2024 meeting minutes. Co-Chair McCaela Daffern seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

Public Comment

Ms. Murdock read the following public comments, which were submitted by email:

Hello Seattle Planning Commissioners,

My name is Sarajane Siegfriedt. I live in a Neighborhood Residential zone in Lake City. I am 75 and a bus rider.

The Transportation Plan is tragically flawed in that Seattle even after "frontloading" 250 blocks of sidewalks, the City will still be missing 11,000 blocks of sidewalks. A plan that values pedestrian safety, especially for seniors and people with disabilities, must demonstrate that it will complete the grid within the 20-year plan.

Did you know that only developers in multifamily zones are required to build sidewalks in front? Or that those developers of the many main/ADU/DADU complexes aren't responsible for adding sidewalks because our formerly single-family zones don't require it, even though ALL residential zoning is multifamily zoning now?

- 1) Please recommend that ALL developers in residential zones be required to build sidewalks.*
- 2) Please propose a 20-year plan to complete the sidewalk or walkway grid so that Seattle can be ADA-compliant and pedestrian friendly.*
- 3) Please call for the SDOT to complete a study to show where discontinuous sidewalks can be filled in and completed by the 250 sidewalks in the Plan. Only complete blocks of sidewalks are helpful to people who use mobility aids. Incomplete blocks are arguably more dangerous than none at all.*
- 4) Please urge the City Council to do this before fall of 2024, so the both plans can be amended appropriately and we don't continue building unworkable neighborhoods with patchwork sidewalks in the meantime. Please "frontload" the legislation.*

*Thank you,
Sarajane Siegfriedt*

Briefing: Seattle Transportation Levy Proposal

Greg Spotts, Director, and Meghan Shepard, Interim Funding Plan Director, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT)

Director Spotts provided an overview of the Seattle Transportation Levy Proposal, an eight-year, \$1.45 billion levy proposal to fund transportation safety and maintenance in Seattle. He stated that the levy proposal has been shaped by community input and would cost an owner of a median-value home sixteen dollars more per month than the current levy. He stated that the levy proposal reflects a One Seattle vision for a safe, reliable, and connected transportation system. The Seattle City Council will review the proposal and consider referral to voters for the November 2024 ballot.

Director Spotts provided the following information on why this is the levy that Seattle needs now:

- Adoption of a twenty-year aspirational Seattle Transportation Plan (STP).
- Robust and well-researched asset management strategy.
- Broad and growing understanding of how to invest equitably.
- Eighteen years of experience from past levies.
- Vision Zero response to injuries and fatalities on our streets.

Ms. Shepard stated that the levy proposal development process started approximately eighteen months ago and has involved a significant amount of stakeholder involvement. This process was expanded to include broader multicultural outreach and public engagement over the past month. City Council engagement and consideration will take place between May and July.

Ms. Shepard stated that transportation justice is central to the transportation levy proposal. In support of the STP's equity goal, the levy proposal aims to address inequities in the transportation system by prioritizing investments for impacted communities. SDOT implemented fifteen Transportation Equity Framework tactics in development of the levy proposal and embedded equity throughout the proposal. She stated that SDOT aims to distribute levy investments equitably, informed by Seattle's Racial and Social Equity Index, the STP, and SDOT's Transportation Equity Framework.

Ms. Shepard stated that the proposed levy would cost the owner of a median home with a tax-assessed value of \$804,000 approximately thirty-nine dollars per month, sixteen dollars more than the current Levy to Move Seattle. She described SDOT's engagement efforts throughout the development of the levy proposal, as well as a summary of what they heard and how they responded.

Ms. Shepard provided an overview of the levy proposal's investment categories and commitments:

- Vision Zero, School & Neighborhood Safety: \$162 million
 - Safety projects at 40 high collision locations.
 - Leading pedestrian intervals at 280 intersections.
 - 12 safety redesign projects on the high injury network.

- Traffic calming on 50 corridors.
- Contributions to safety education programs and up to 70 projects at public schools.
- 16 neighborhood-initiated, co-created safety projects.
- Street Maintenance and Modernization: \$423 million
 - Fill 80% of reported potholes within 72 hours.
 - Repave approximately 15 streets.
 - 50 lane-miles of spot paving repair and paving on arterial streets at approximately 400 locations.
 - Refresh curb and pavement markings.
- Bridges and Structures: \$221 million
 - Upgraded electrical and mechanical systems on Ship Canal bridges.
 - Structural repairs on Ballard Bridge and Magnolia Bridge.
 - Preventative bridge maintenance program for the City's 134 bridges.
 - Advance 6 structures for future replacement.
 - Improve areaway (the underground spaces between sidewalks and building basements) data collection, pursue partnerships and grants.
- Transit Corridors and Connections: \$145 million
 - 4 bus route projects on high ridership routes serving equity priority areas.
 - 3 Link light rail access projects, with improved sidewalks, crossings, bike lanes, and/or lighting.
 - 5 key partnership projects connecting to Link light rail stations.
 - 160 transit spot improvements for reliability, safety, and access.
- Pedestrian Safety: \$135 million
 - 280 blocks of new sidewalks – 30 along frequent transit network.
 - Sidewalk surge: deliver 250 blocks in first 4 years.
 - Support for 10,000 accessible curb ramps.
 - 34,000 sidewalk spot repairs on buckled and damaged sidewalks.
 - 9 stairway repairs.
 - New and upgraded crosswalks.
 - Sidewalk and infrastructure repair and funding strategies.
- New approach to sidewalks
 - The goal is to increase the pace of construction, reevaluate current practices, and find longer-term solutions to create accessible streets for all.
 - Disability Rights Washington engaged the Mayor's Office and SDOT, requesting greater urgency to Seattle's sidewalk challenges – echoed by many stakeholders.
 - Proposal doubles the rate of new sidewalk construction starting in year 1; continues building 250 blocks of new sidewalks through year 4; and creates a task force to investigate and implement sidewalk and infrastructure repair and funding strategies.
- Bicycle Safety: \$114 million
 - 5 new neighborhood greenways - focus on K-8 public schools and south Seattle.
 - Regular sweeping and barrier repair.
 - Close gaps in the all ages and abilities bicycle network.
 - Upgrade 30% of existing protected bike lanes with improved barriers or buffers.
 - Make safety improvements to existing bike lanes, trails, and neighborhood greenways.

- Signals and Operations: \$100 million
 - 40 corridor signal timing projects.
 - 4 Intelligent Transportation System projects.
 - New traffic signals at 10 locations.
 - Major maintenance on 40 traffic signals.
 - Accessible pedestrian signals at 50 crossings.
 - Preventative traffic signal maintenance.
 - 5,500 sign replacements.
 - Research and respond to ~24,000 constituent inquiries.
 - 24/7 service in the Transportation Operations Center.
- Freight and Goods Movement: \$25 million
 - 32 investments to improve truck movement, intersection upgrades, and additional truck parking.
 - Additional paving on the Heavy Haul Network in partnership with the Port of Seattle.
- Climate and Resiliency: \$59 million
 - Expand public electric vehicle charging at public facilities in partnership with Seattle City Light and operating departments.
 - Pursue grants for transportation electrification.
 - 3 low pollution neighborhood pilot projects.
 - Meet the 3 to 1 tree replacement requirement.
 - Expand tree species diversity.
 - Expand tree canopy in neighborhoods that have had less investment in tree planting and care.
- People Streets and Public Spaces: \$66 million
 - 8 People Street Projects.
 - 8 Public Space investments.
 - Spot improvements.
 - Pilot projects in equity priority areas.
 - Downtown Activation and 3rd Avenue.
 - Maintenance for activation projects.
 - Citywide wayfinding maintenance and expansion.
 - Pedestrian lighting leading to transit stops.

Ms. Shepard stated that the Seattle City Council Select Committee will deliberate and make a final decision on whether to send a Levy proposal to the ballot for consideration by Seattle voters. The Select Committee meetings are underway and will continue until July.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners noted that complete streets projects often require funding from various sources and asked how much of the levy's arterial maintenance funding could be used for a complete street. Director Spotts stated that SDOT is exploring this. An example is a recent paving project on 15th Avenue NW. This project added a landscaped median and other amenities. Ms. Shepard noted that SDOT used the STP to create a list of projects for the levy. These projects will be developed using a robust project management system.

- Commissioners expressed enthusiasm for projects that provide east-west connections to light rail stations. There are significant opportunities in partnership with Sound Transit.
- Commissioners requested clarification about the levy proposal's transit projects in SODO, an area with a significant need for safety projects. Ms. Shepard stated that SDOT is hoping to advance a project on 4th Avenue South. Director Spotts stated that the upcoming Vision Zero action plan will include a variety of projects in SODO.
- Commissioners asked whether the levy proposal is enough to respond to Seattle's most pressing bridge and safety needs. Director Spotts stated that separate billion-dollar levies could be established for several categories of transportation projects. SDOT conducted a public opinion poll to determine the ultimate size of the final levy proposal.
- Commissioners expressed support for bicycle improvements in school areas and asked if there are any programs to discourage parents from dropping their kids off. These areas get heavily congested with vehicles during school drop-off times, making bicycle traffic hazardous. Director Spotts stated that SDOT has worked closely with the School Traffic Safety Committee. There are some interesting strategies for car-free drop off in other communities.
- Commissioners asked how SDOT plans to assess the effectiveness of its mobility improvements. Director Spotts stated that metrics will be used as projects are implemented. Commissioners recommended SDOT track outcomes on a yearly basis. Director Spotts stated that a new levy oversight committee will be convened next year. There is interest across SDOT in outcomes-based measurement. Ms. Shepard stated that a good example is bridge preventative maintenance.

Briefing: Low-Pollution Neighborhoods

Radcliffe Dacanay, Seattle Department of Transportation

Mr. Dacanay stated that SDOT is initiating its work on low-pollution neighborhoods. This work started when the City signed on to the C40 Green and Healthy Steets Declaration. Low-pollution neighborhoods are mentioned in Mayor Harrell's One Seattle Transportation and Climate Justice Executive Order, with the language "Plan for the creation of carbon-free, low-pollution neighborhoods, with concepts like low-emission zones, eco-districts, resilience districts, and super blocks..." Mr. Dacanay stated that examples include London's congestion pricing program, an effort in Dundee, Scotland to manage access based on vehicle emissions, and Barcelona's superblocks model that manages access to the interior of a neighborhood. The Capitol Hill Eco District and the Duwamish Valley Action Plan are local examples that SDOT will be learning from.

SDOT's 2023 Climate Change Response Framework informed the STP and the Transportation Levy Proposal. Mr. Dacanay highlighted a graphic of Seattle's core emissions sources. Single occupancy vehicles generate the largest number of emissions. The opportunity to reduce these emissions can be achieved by shifting to transit, cycling, walking, and electric vehicles. Seattle is not meeting its goal to reduce transportation emissions by eighty-two percent by 2030 but hopefully can by 2050. SDOT recently received a Federal Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant. The RAISE planning grant deliverables are as follows:

1. Establish vision and toolkit – Develop a Low-Pollution Implementation Toolkit that includes an inventory of citywide pilots, programs, and design interventions, identifies gaps, and recommends new tools to address those gaps.

1. Identify candidate areas – Develop methodology to select candidate areas informed by data, climate impact, community readiness, and partnership opportunities.
2. Define projects, programs and develop a funding and implementation plan – Meet communities where they are. Match low-pollution tools to community needs and readiness to define specific projects and programmatic opportunities. Develop planning-level cost estimates and a funding and implementation plan (late 2025).

SDOT's definition of a Low-Pollution Neighborhood is "Designated areas or streets where we can deploy or pilot a variety of policy, program, built interventions or incentives to reduce pollution and increase climate resilience." Mr. Dacanay provided the following overview of the next steps and commitments in delivering the Mayor's Executive Order low-pollution neighborhood commitments.

2023-2024

Commitment: Convene Community Conversations

- Q4 2023 – Q4 2024
- Produce "what we've heard" summary.
- Inform future investments and focus areas; set the stage for RAISE grant funded planning effort.

2024-2025

Commitment: Develop Implementation & Funding Plan

- Develop implementation and funding plan to pilot several low-pollution neighborhoods.
- This task will be funded through the awarded Federal RAISE planning grant.
- Submit plan to MO by late 2025.

2025-Onwards

Commitment: Implement three low-pollution neighborhoods by 2028.

- Pursue implementation funding opportunities - e.g., grants and forthcoming transportation funding plan.
- Implement three low-pollution neighborhoods by 2028.

Mr. Dacanay stated that this effort will build upon existing opportunities, including the Home Zone, School Streets, and Stay Healthy Streets programs. SDOT will be identifying Opportunities 2.0 by asking "How do we create a better version of reclaiming street space?" Examples include streateries, street festivals, speed tables, and other innovations. SDOT will be constantly identifying and evaluating opportunities to take projects to the next level with the goal of slowing down and managing access within neighborhoods.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners asked Mr. Dacanay to clarify what type of pollution this effort is addressing. He stated that SDOT is initially focusing on air pollution but there is an opportunity to look at all types of pollution, including noise and polluted stormwater.
- Commissioners asked if parking management is being considered. Mr. Dacanay stated that the project team are meeting with SDOT parking staff to discuss how to adjust residential parking zones as they are thinking about using street space differently.

- Commissioners inquired about a framework for prioritizing goals for the low-pollution neighborhoods. Mr. Dacanay stated that there are many pathways to get to a certain outcome, but the ultimate strategy will be based on how the community wants to move forward.
- Commissioners requested more information on the scale of the low-pollution neighborhoods. Mr. Dacanay stated that SDOT is conducting a cursory analysis of how big the focus neighborhoods will be. He stated that the communities SDOT works in can help them to define the scale.
- Commissioners stated that low-pollution neighborhoods could work well with the new neighborhood center concept in the One Seattle Plan. These would work well in places where people walk, bike, roll, and catch the bus. These could be the densest urban environments with zero emissions overall.
- Commissioners asked how SDOT is balancing the needs of communities with high levels of pollution and other communities with high emissions such as Downtown and Ballard. Mr. Dacanay stated that a lot of work has already been done in the Duwamish Valley. SDOT could work with that community to expand on the work that has already been done. They may consider one candidate neighborhood in the southern part of Seattle and one in the north of Seattle around a light rail station or Aurora Avenue North. SDOT will develop an initial template and build from there.
- Commissioners noted that specific neighborhoods including Lake City and Georgetown have challenges such as lack of green spaces. Mr. Dacanay stated that there are different ways to address these problems. SDOT will continue to seek out new funding sources and partnerships in creating the first three low-pollution neighborhoods.
- Commissioners expressed concern that SDOT is only selecting three neighborhoods and stated that Seattle should be a low-pollution city. This effort must be community driven, and SDOT should work to secure durable and continuous funding to ensure a long-term commitment to this work. Mr. Dacanay stated that funding will always be a challenge. There are many ways to accomplish the goals of this effort. SDOT will be exploring various ways to scale up the initial low-pollution neighborhoods. He offered to engage with the Commission in an ongoing conversation as this work moves forward.

Office to Residential Building Conversion Legislation

Rawan Hasan, Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD)

Ms. Hasan provided an overview of recent legislation on office to residential conversion. She summarized the following reasons for the focus on conversions to residential uses.

- Challenges for the downtown commercial/office market following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Remote work is common now and office vacancy rates are ~25% in downtown Seattle submarkets.
- New residential development remains in high demand.
- Seattle is planning for over 110,000 more housing units, as job growth outpaced housing growth in the last decade.
- Over a third of Seattle residents are housing cost burdened.
- A more balanced use mix with housing in downtown has long been a policy goal for Seattle.
- Avoid long periods of vacancy that can result in negative perceptions.
- Increasing housing supply helps address the lack of affordable housing.
- Potential revitalization of business districts and downtowns by the presence of residents.

- Strong support by the general public.

She summarized how Washington State and the City of Seattle are supporting conversions.

Washington State

- House Bill 1042.
- State sales tax exemption ESSB 6175 passed during the 2024 session.
 - Exempts construction sales tax on conversion developments.
 - Requires 10% of housing units to be affordable for 10 years at the 80% AMI level.
 - Cities must enable the exemption with a local action. (Seattle is currently working on this.)

City of Seattle

- 2023 OPCD “Call for Ideas” competition.
- CB 120761 Conversion to Residential regulatory and fee relief legislation.
 - Exempts conversion proposals from all development standards and design review in downtown, commercial, and mixed-use zones.
 - Waives the Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) requirements for conversions of existing structures.
 - Applies to new projects, projects in construction, and projects with MUPs that have not started construction yet. MHA waiver does not apply to new projects. They still need to contribute to affordable housing according to the MHA requirements that were in place at the time the permitted projects became vested.
 - Goes before City Council in June 2024.
- Direct consultation/support to owners.
- Possible interpretations of construction codes.
- Support for federal funding applications.

In summer 2023, Mayor Harrell released his Downtown Activation Plan. In mid-2023, OPCD conducted the “Call for Ideas” competition inviting building owners and designers to submit their concepts for conversions. There were thirteen quality proposals with information on:

- Floor plans / design
- Financial feasibility information
- Housing mix and affordability levels
- Suggestions for policy or code changes

Ms. Hasan highlighted two examples from the competition, the Polson and Western Buildings and Smith Tower 2.0.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners asked if the City has a system for evaluating the viability of converting vacant buildings to residential uses. Ms. Hasan stated that conversions are complex and costly. Conversion projects require a significant amount of investment. The City is not anticipating a lot of conversions. Not more than a dozen conversions within the next seven years. The Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) is having conversations with building owners about how to make building codes more flexible. Building officials at SDCI will be evaluating conversions projects on a case-by-case basis.

- Commissioners asked about the key takeaways from the conversion to residential competition. Ms. Hasan stated the City learned that conversion is more costly and complex than previously thought. The City may need to streamline permitting processes and offer code flexibility. Multiple workshops were held after the competition to talk about some of these issues. She stated that older commercial structures are better candidates for conversion because they have relatively smaller floor plates. Most are historic buildings.
- Commissioners expressed concern over the likelihood of conversion projects happening and stated a preference for more focus on other projects that have more potential to be developed. Commissioners stated that some projects could be done well with the right developer and funding but will only make a small contribution to the housing affordability crisis.
- Commissioners stated that the discussion of office to residential conversion projects is more about the revitalization of Downtown than affordability.

Public Comment

There was no additional public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:26 pm.