



City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

Xio Alvarez and Matt Hutchins, Co-Chairs
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, October 23, 2025

Approved Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Xio Alvarez, Cecelia Black, Rebecca Brunn, McCaela Daffern, Dylan Glosecki, Matt Hutchins, Julia Jannon-Shields, Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson, Dhyana Quintanar, Margaret Szeles, Nick Whipple

Commissioners Absent: Andrew Dannenberg, Radhika Nair, Monika Sharma, Dylan Stevenson, Kelabe Tewolde

Commission Staff: Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; John Hoey, Senior Policy Analyst; Olivia Baker, Policy 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 Matt Hutchins called the meeting to order at 7:34 am. Co-Chair Hutchins 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 Hutchins 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

Ms. Murdock announced several upcoming Commission meetings and reviewed the format of this meeting. She provided an update on the City of Seattle's budget process currently underway at the City Council. The Planning Commission will provide public comment at an upcoming public hearing.

ACTION: Commissioner Nick Whipple moved to approve the September 25, 2025 meeting minutes. Commissioner McCaela Daffern seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

Public Comment

Ms. Murdock noted that public comment may be provided in person at City Hall, submitted in writing via email at least eight hours before the meeting, or offered on the hybrid meeting platform MS Teams. Public comment must be able to be given in two minutes or less.

There was no public comment.

Update: Small Business Development and Food Deserts Statements of Legislative Intent

Jessica Ramirez, Office of Planning and Community Development

Ms. Ramirez provided an overview of *Statement of Legislative Intent OPCD-003S-A: Report on strategies to attract food retailers to food deserts*. This Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) requested the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD), Office of Economic Development (OED), and Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) to submit a report outlining strategies to attract food retailers to food deserts. The report includes policy and zoning options to improve access to grocery stores in food deserts, particularly in the Duwamish Valley and Delridge. The City Council requested OPCD, OED, and OSE to evaluate and report on best practices for attracting food retailers to underserved areas. This includes:

- Clarifying siting and size requirements for different types of grocery stores
- Assessing how the City's zoning supports or restricts grocery store development
- Identifying potential zoning or policy changes to better attract grocery stores to food deserts

Ms. Ramirez provided some examples of food access mapping. The first map showed that Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)-authorized grocers are concentrated along major arterials. The second map showed that South Seattle has fewer full-service stores, and areas with the highest equity priority show the least proximity to grocery stores. She stated that neighborhoods such as South Park and Rainier Valley have the fewest options. These are areas where geography, race, and income all intersect to create a food desert.

Ms. Ramirez provided some market context, highlighting that the grocery industry is dominated by large chains, both nationally and locally. Starting and surviving as a small grocer is challenging due to thin margins, high operating costs, unequal pricing and supplier access, competition from chains and

online retailers, and access to capital. Even when community demand is there, barriers can prevent small grocery stores from succeeding. Local examples include the Delridge Grocery Co-op and Cascadia Fresh Market. In contrast, the Delridge Farmers Market is succeeding. This demonstrates that community ownership and cultural relevance are important in shaping local food systems.

Ms. Ramirez listed the following Equitable Development Initiative (EDI) projects focused on food access:

- African Community Housing and Development
- Black Star Farmers
- Byrd Barr Place
- Friends of Little Saigon
- Hip Hop Is Green
- Nurturing Roots
- Queer the Land
- Rainier Beach Action Coalition
- Yehaw Indigenous Creatives Collective

She shared some zoning and siting findings, including most grocery stores within several store types have sizes in the 20,000–50,000 square foot range. Size-of-use limits in Neighborhood Commercial 1 (NC1) and Neighborhood Commercial 2 (NC2) zones can constrain new stores. Neighborhood Commercial 3 (NC3), Commercial 1/ Commercial 2 (C1/C2), and Seattle Mixed zones are more conducive to these uses. The availability of large sites (50,000 square feet or more) is a limiting factor.

Ms. Ramirez highlighted the following recommendations:

- Increase residential density to expand catchment areas.
- Add and expand commercial zoning in underserved neighborhoods.
- Modify maximum size-of-use limits in NC zones (e.g., raise limits in NC2; special exception in NC1).
- Incentivize inclusion of grocery space using incentive zoning tools in high-density zones and transit-oriented development (TOD).
- Address restrictive land use covenants and recruit grocers to suitable vacant sites.

Equity is at the center of this work. It is not just about having a grocery store nearby; it is about ensuring people have access to food that is culturally relevant, affordable, and rooted in community. The City's role is to partner with community-based organizations, CDFIs, and mission-driven grocers; focus public investment on small-format and cooperative models that keep wealth and decision-making local; and avoid subsidizing large chains that don't advance long-term neighborhood goals.

Ms. Ramirez summarized the next steps for this SLI as follows:

- Refine a pilot to explore models for small-format grocers in underserved areas.
- Pursue public-private partnerships with philanthropic organizations and CDFIs; coordinate across agencies.
- Integrate findings into the One Seattle Plan and EDI strategy.
- Incentivize inclusion of grocery space using incentive zoning tools in high-density zones and TOD.
- Address Mayor Harrell's Executive Order.

Ms. Ramirez provided an overview of *Statement of Legislative Intent OPCD-005S-A Expansion of EDI to Advance Small Business Development and Prevent Commercial Displacement*. She stated that this SLI requested OPCD in partnership with OED develop a strategy to:

- Expand the eligibility of EDI funding specifically for small business development, support, and ownership through programs such as the Tenant Improvement Fund, the Business Community Ownership Fund, and others; and
- Support the creation of spaces designed to meet the needs of future small business tenants in EDI projects.

She summarized the reasons why EDI invests in commercial space:

- Addresses racialized displacement through community-led, anti-displacement strategies.
- Prioritizes community-driven control of commercial spaces that deliver lasting public benefits and return value on public investment.
- Supports projects serving a valid public purpose under Washington state's Constitution.
- Commercial and cultural spaces are key to identity, mobility, and cohesion for BIPOC communities.
- Stabilizes community organizations and small businesses through real-estate ownership.
- Ensures delivery of public-benefit services like childcare, arts, health, and workforce training.
- Focuses on high-displacement areas, protecting culturally rooted communities across Seattle.

Ms. Ramirez highlighted the following EDI investments with small business outcomes:

- Shared investments with OED
 - Cultural Space Agency – El Barrio
 - Hillman City Partners
 - Midtown Square
 - Multi-Cultural Community (MCC) – Cultural Innovation Center
- Direct investment in small businesses or small business-related public benefits
 - African Community Housing and Development, Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Public Market Project
 - Black & Tan Hall
 - Interim CDA-Uncle Bob's Place

She summarized current OED and OPCD coordination with EDI:

- Business Community Ownership Fund (BCOF)
- OED Capital Access Program (CAP)
- Tenant Improvement Program (TIP)
- Funded and Future Project Coordination
 - Coordination on funded/future EDI projects
 - Community and Commercial Space - If an EDI project includes community or commercial spaces, OED's CWB team should be involved in construction planning to ensure the spaces are well-designed, cost-effective, and support diverse, community-based uses and funding models.

- Commercial and/or Community Uses – If an EDI project falls within one of the recent business district studies, CWB team expertise should guide EDI projects to create well-designed, community-serving spaces that meet neighborhood needs, support local businesses, and promote inclusive economic growth.

Ms. Ramirez described the future strategy for this SLI:

- EDI Strategic Planning
 - Consultant will facilitate an 18-month community visioning and strategic planning process in partnership with community members and key stakeholders.
 - Builds on the EDI Implementation Plan, Financial Investment Strategy, Comprehensive Plan, and relevant area neighborhood plans.
 - Aligns existing City initiatives with EDI's strategic direction to close gaps and expand capacity.
 - Results in a comprehensive five-year strategic plan grounded in community priorities.
 - Supported by clear goals, metrics, and an accountability framework to guide implementation and promote continuous learning and improvement.
- 2026 EDI RFP will consider strategies to:
 - Align with existing OED funding tools
 - Integrate ground floor/commercial space questions in applications
 - Coordinate pipelines and investments early
 - Support small BIPOC businesses through scoring and strategic plan
 - Clarify fund uses: commercial build-out, feasibility, stabilization

She ended her presentation with the following key takeaways:

- OPCD and OED are uniquely positioned to strengthen small businesses and prevent commercial displacement.
- The City supports ownership, commercial space access, and economic mobility via investments and community-led design.
- Coordination with OED and aligned funding tools advance equity, resilience, and commercial stability.
- Responding to displacement and underinvestment in BIPOC-owned businesses.
- Programs like Small Business Capital Access, Tenant Improvement, and Business Community Ownership Fund show the City's commitment.
- EDI is committed to supporting small businesses for shared benefit and inclusive growth.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners asked if OPCD is considering land banking. Ms. Ramirez stated that the SLI did not address that issue. Land banking is difficult in Seattle but not impossible. She said that organizations would need to purchase land. The South Park project would be a good case study.
- Commissioners stated that many of the small and culturally relevant stores are outside the city limits. Ms. Ramirez stated that there is an ongoing dialogue around this issue. For example, OPCD is currently working with Uwajimaya on how their trucks go in and out of higher density neighborhoods and addressing issues of theft. It is important to think about placement of future stores. She highlighted what PCC is doing in downtown Seattle with grab and go foods.

- Commissioners stated that small grocery stores may have struggles operating in new Neighborhood Centers. Ms. Ramirez stated that the Mayor's new Executive Order is looking at grocery stores and other grocery mapping efforts. This work will be linked to a community Indicators report and trying to identify where a potential food desert exists.
- Commissioners stated that Neighborhood Centers and Corridors will create new opportunities for patrons in these areas. However, smaller Neighborhood Centers may experience displacement of existing small businesses. Ms. Ramirez stated that the EDI team is looking at how they lead with equity frameworks and apply anti-displacement frameworks. They are in early conversations about community-led development, including what properties owners are considering selling.
- Commissioners inquired whether the EDI team has talked with other departments, including the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) and the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) about lot adjustments and freight movement. Ms. Ramirez stated that SDCI received the SLI for informational purposes. They are working with SDOT and Sound Transit on equitable transit-oriented development and remnant parcels.

Update: Equitable Development Initiative

Giulia Pasciuto, Office of Planning and Community Development

Ms. Pasciuto provided the following introduction to EDI: *"The Seattle Equitable Development Initiative is a community originated anti-displacement and access to opportunity program. Our main strategy is funding community-owned land and development which we support through capacity building, pre-development, acquisition, and capital funding. We address historic policy and market inequities through investing in projects and programs that mitigate displacement and increase access to opportunity."*

She described the EDI origin story:

Community Planning

- Long-term relationship building through community plans
- Joint fundraising for capacity building and community-led long-range neighborhood planning
- Community real estate projects emerge and come together for Race and Social Equity Taskforce coalition

Comprehensive Plan Advocacy

- SOUTH CORE Coalition demands displacement analysis of growth strategies
- Clear displacement risk associated with the plan
- Advocacy for mitigation strategy
- Created heat and political will

Ms. Pasciuto summarized the EDI funding categories as follows: capacity-building, site acquisition, pre-development and construction of Community Owned Equitable Development Real Estate Projects. EDI awards range from \$75,000 capacity grants to more than \$5 million aggregate for capital projects. She stated that EDI funding exists to:

- Serve as critical first funder in the capital stack

- Position community accountable institutions as leaders in the development of their own neighborhood
- Boost ownership and mitigate the high risk of social, economic, and cultural displacement in diverse and under-resourced communities

Ms. Pasciuto described how the EDI receives its funding as follows:

- One-time initial funding: \$16 million from the sale of Civic Square and \$42 million for Mercer Megablock site acquisitions
- Ongoing funding from the Payroll Expense Tax and Short-Term Rental Tax
- 2025-26 Adopted Budget: \$19.7 million from the JumpStart Payroll Expense Tax (PET) and \$5.1 million from the Short-Term Rental Tax Fund

The EDI team operates in a co-governance model with an appointed Advisory Board of 13 members. The City has \$116.5 million invested via EDI in 78 unique community-led, equitable development projects. The scale has increased significantly. EDI currently operates an ongoing \$25 million fund. Ms. Pasciuto highlighted the following EDI projects: the Rainier Beach Action Coalition Food Innovation Center, the Friends of Little Sài Gòn Landmark Project, and comprehensive multi-project investments in the Central District. She concluded her presentation with the following summary of 2025 work:

- 2025 RFP: \$24.3 Million, awards announced in December
- EDI Network of Support Roster and Technical Assistance program
- Launch Strategic Planning
- Brought on five new EDI Advisory Board Members, confirmation expected 10/31
- New contracting templates
- Anticipated close out of SIF award acquisitions
- Readiness and Project Roadmap
- Emergency Funding Policy
- Promoted three staff internally, three positions (one filled, one pending).

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners asked for more information about how the EDI connects with small businesses. Ms. Pasciuto stated that the Washington state Constitution prevents public funds being gifted to businesses. Since the City recognizes that small businesses provide public benefits, the EDI can assist with small business incubation.
- Commissioners expressed enthusiasm for potential opportunities to collaborate with the EDI team. Ms. Pasciuto stated that they will look for ways to collaborate. The recently adopted Roots to Roofs program specifies involvement by the EDI Advisory Board. There may be a role for the Planning Commission also. She stated that the EDI team will extend an invitation to their upcoming celebration to the Planning Commission.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 am.