



City of Seattle Seattle Planning Commission

Tony To, Chair
Barbara Wilson, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION SEPTEMBER 13, 2007 APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

Commissioners in Attendance

Chair Tony To, Linda Amato, Mahlon Clements, Jerry Finrow, Chris Fiori, Colie Hough-Beck, Mark Johnson, Martin Kaplan, Kay Knapton, Amalia Leighton, M. Michelle Mattox, Steve Sheehy

Commissioners Absent

Tom Eanes, Kevin McDonald, Kirsten Pennington

Commission Staff

Barbara Wilson-Director, Casey Mills-Planning Analyst, Robin Magonegil-Administrative Specialist, Andrea Clinkscales-Intern

Guests

Adrienne Quinn, Office of Housing; Tom Hauger, Mark Troxel DPD; Chelsea Levy, Get Engaged Commissioner (term begins September 30, 2007);

In Attendance

Bob Morgan, Rebecca Herzfeld, Ketil Freeman, Council Central Staff; Irene Wall, Phinney Ridge Community Council; Sara Nikolic, Futurewise

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 3:07 pm by Chair Tony To.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

ACTION:

Commissioner Kay Knapton moved to approve the July 12 minutes. Commissioner Colie Hough Beck seconded the motion. The July 12, 2007 minutes were approved unanimously.

Commissioner Kay Knapton moved to approve the July 26, 2007 minutes. Commissioner Colie Hough Beck seconded the motion. The July 26, 2007 minutes were approved with one abstention from Commissioner Martin Kaplan.

▪ Chairs Report

Chair To welcomed the Commissioners back after the August break. He recapped news of all that happened in August.

Chair To stated that Chelsea Levy has been appointed as our Get Engaged member and that she will be replacing Commissioner Amalia Leighton whose term ends at the end of September. He noted that her appointment officially begins on September 30th but that she is sitting in on today's meeting to familiarize herself with the Commission and some of the issues we are working on. Chair To welcomed Ms. Levy to the Commission and asked her to tell the Commission a little about her background.

Ms. Levy stated that she was a third year graduate student at the University of Washington and was obtaining a Master's degree in Urban Planning and Public Affairs. She noted that her interests include ensuring that Seattle has more multimodal transit options and providing more affordable housing.

Chair To noted that, after the release of the Commission recommendations on the Interbay Overlay Proposal, City Council announced that they would not support the proposal as it is currently written. He added that the City Council liberally cited the Commission's recommendations in their letter which was signed by seven of the council members.

Chair To stated that the Mayor released his Industrial Lands Proposal which does institute many of the Commission's findings and recommendations but there is still more work to be done. Chair To noted that the Commission will be co-hosting a forum on Industrial Lands with Councilmember Steinbrueck on September 20th at 5:30 in the Bertha Knight Landes room in City Hall. Chair To stated that he would be making some opening remarks and will also participate in a panel discussion on behalf of the Commission. He added that the Council would like the Commission to provide recommendations on the Mayor's report and would like us to review the proposed ordinance which addresses the limits on size of use.

Chair To stated that the Commission convened two group meetings to work on affordable housing metrics in August. He added that the metrics will be a part of the Commission's comprehensive affordable housing action agenda to be released at the end of the year.

Chair To reported that Seattle Planning Commission staff has been working on finalizing a resource guide for residents of South East Seattle who are considering building a Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit. He added that staff has also been working on some interesting research regarding single family zoning.

Chair To noted several upcoming Committee meetings. He called attention to the City Boards & Commissions Reception that will be held on October 24th, 2007; 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in the Bertha Knight Landes Room. He stated that this event is meant to celebrate and thank all of the hundreds of citizens who serve the City on a board or commission and that, the Mayor, Councilmembers, Board & Commission staff also attend.

Executive Director Barbara Wilson broke the news that the Planning Director, John Rahaim, will be leaving his position with DPD and taking a job in San Francisco as the City's Planning Director. She talked a bit about his new position and what the plans are for finding a new Planning Director.

Ms. Wilson noted that the Commission will be reviewing the Executive's size of use limits for industrial lands next week and that, if Commissioners have any comments, they should send them to staff.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

- **Presentation: Seattle Housing Inventory**
 - Adrienne Quinn, Director, Office of Housing

Chair To noted that Adrienne Quinn will give a presentation of the Seattle Housing Inventory and discuss the City's efforts on an Incentive Zoning resolution.

Ms. Quinn presented the Seattle Housing Inventory. She noted that there is currently an even split between renters and homeowners which is a good thing. Ms. Quinn stated that the current vacancy rate for rentals is currently extremely low and that it is much too low to be healthy. She added that the thousands of units in the pipeline might eventually alleviate this.

Ms. Quinn noted that low-income housing is not as concentrated in Southeast Seattle as people often think, though when Section 8 vouchers are factored in that picture changes. She stated that the Office of Housing (OH) has worked to disperse low-income units throughout the City, although many are still focused in the Center City for a variety of reasons. Ms. Quinn added that the Section 8 tenants are often found in the Southeast due to the landlords being willing to rent to them, offer lower rents and a desire to live in a certain ethnic community.

Ms. Quinn noted the growing problem of condo conversions, which appear to be just as prevalent this year as they were last year, despite predictions they would slow down. Many of the buildings being converted now are older buildings that house lower-income tenants.

Data about who lives in Seattle shows that many of those who work in Seattle don't live here. The highest percentages of people who work here but don't live here are those in the middle-income range, for whom there is no subsidized housing and who cannot afford the median house price.

Ms. Quinn noted that OH would be working to expand the current housing inventory and working on the next iteration of the Housing Levy as well. She stated that one effect of Seattle's current lack of affordable housing was revealed in a Boston study that showed the most productive and desirable workers were leaving the city for other parts of the country.

Commissioner Mahlon Clements asked if there was a wage problem or a housing problem. Ms. Quinn replied that it would be nearly impossible to raise wages in certain professions to the necessary level it would take for these workers to afford housing here.

Commissioner Steve Sheehy asked how the city could help increase affordability by increasing supply. Ms. Quinn responded that the city could help the market do what it would do anyway and that is to overbuild. She added that examples of how to do this include over the counter permitting as they do in New York City.

Commissioner Hough-Beck asked if Seattle had sufficient zoning capacity to do this. Ms. Quinn answered that the city still has a great deal of available land for building. Chair To noted that one problem is under building, so minimum densities could be a good thing to advocate for.

Commissioner Chris Fiori asked if data over time showed this to be a problem nationally. Ms. Quinn replied that data nationwide shows that there has been little wage growth nationally but very rapid housing cost growth. Commissioner Fiori asked if the OH was working on townhouse design, as this housing type could help with housing affordability. Ms. Quinn answered that DPD primarily works on this but that 7 over 2-type construction presents a much better way to achieve affordability than town homes. She added that while she appreciates good design, too much design review can significantly increase the cost of housing.

Ms. Quinn discussed Incentive Zoning. She stated that the OH and the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) have been working on a resolution that will provide a framework for both the Executive and City Council regarding how to move forward with future upzones and their corresponding incentive zoning packages.

Ms. Quinn noted that the resolution would work to ensure building the housing onsite is incentivized, while taking into account the realities of the market. She added that luxury condo towers, for example, would probably not include on-site affordable housing. Ms. Quinn stated that City Council is eager to review the resolution, as they would like to look at it along with the Multifamily Tax Exemption. She noted that they are also eager to review the proposal for the Dravus area, and that the incentive zoning resolution should be reviewed before the Dravus proposal. Ms. Quinn noted that the current resolution attempts to be flexible, offering affordable rental housing for those making up to 100 percent of median income and affordable ownership housing for those making up to 120 percent of median income.

Chair To noted that he believed ‘stacking’ the incentives – combining programs like incentive zoning with programs like the multi-family tax exemption – presents the best opportunity to getting affordable housing built. Ms. Quinn agreed. Chair To added that the Commission would like to see affordable housing metrics measured better and that they would be advocating for the city to hire a demographer.

Commissioner Knapton stated that she was skeptical that there was as much development capacity in Seattle as city officials claim there is. She pointed out many business owners would not be willing to sell their property so it could be torn down and rebuilt, because the businesses would not want to relocate.

- **Briefing & Discussion: 2007 Comprehensive Plan Amendments**
 - Tom Hauger & Mark Troxel, Department of Planning and Development

Ms. Wilson stated that both the Land Use & Transportation and Executive Committees had already reviewed the amendments. She noted that they had split up the amendments into ones they viewed as more important amendments that would require further discussion and for which the Commission would provide extensive comments, and minor amendments which would not be commented on extensively. Ms. Wilson stated unless Commissioners disagreed with any of the Committees designations of amendments as minor, the Commission would agree with DPD’s recommendations for each of them. She added that the Commission would discuss the amendments more next week at the Executive and LUT Committees.

Chair To called for any recusals or disclosures.

Recusal & Disclosures:

- **Commissioner Jerry Finrow recused himself and left the room.**
- **Commissioner Amalia Leighton disclosed that her firm, SvR Design, did some work on**

the Fort Lawton redevelopment and worked on Complete Streets.

- Commissioner Chris Fiori disclosed that his firm, Heartland, does work in multifamily zones and on the Fort Lawton redevelopment.**
- Commissioner Martin Kaplan disclosed that his firm, Martin Henry Kaplan Architects, does work in multifamily and industrial zone.**
- Chair Tony To disclosed that his firm, Homesight, does work in multifamily zones.**

Mr. Hauger stated that the Comprehensive Plan process allows anyone to submit an amendment and then the Department of Planning & Development (DPD) makes recommendations to City Council about which amendments should move forward for further study. He noted that City Council reviews these recommendations and can make its own suggested amendments. Mr. Hauger added that, this year, City Council added quite a bit during their deliberations.

Mr. Troxel reviewed the amendments that the Commission had deemed ‘major’. He discussed the multifamily policy changes, the Fort Lawton rezoning, sustainability goals, the Nordic Heritage museum, the commercial space exemption in the Duwamish, the Complete Streets changes, the Colman Dock redevelopment changes, the affordability goals for workforce housing, the Goodwill Site rezoning, and the industrial lands strategy changes.

Mr. Ketil Freeman, noted that, even though an amendment may be identified as a City Council amendment, the language presented may not be the language recommended by City Council, as the Executive may have changed it.

Commissioner Steve Sheehy asked what the process was for this year’s amendments. Mr. Freeman responded that the amendments were submitted very late by the Executive this year, so the process has been abbreviated. He noted that, in mid to late October, the City Council will hold a hearing on the issue. Mr. Freeman stated that, on November 28th and December 12th, the City Council will hold more extensive discussions about those amendments that are contentious and that the City Council must complete their review before the end of the year.

Commissioner Hough-Beck asked if LEED should be mentioned in the sustainability indicators. Mr. Hauger replied that he believed City Council was aiming for numeric goals, not the methods to achieve those goals, so a mention of LEED might be more appropriate elsewhere. Commissioner Hough-Beck wondered if these indicators were more of a framework for what the goals were, or a tangible method for achieving them. Mr. Hauger replied that it was more the latter.

Commissioner Leighton questioned how the indicator of ‘healthy years lived’ was arrived at. Mr. Freeman answered that it was meant to be a sustainability indicator that sought to measure the healthy of the city’s residents. Commissioner Leighton suggested all of the sustainability indicators be more clearly tied to land use tools and policies.

Ms. Wilson requested clarification on the amendments related to the industrial lands strategy. Mr. Hauger stated the amendments seek to provide more clarification about the importance, location and nature of IG zones; provide some flexibility for large users to expand their office use; and make sure public agencies recognize the importance of using industrial land for industrial-related activities.

Commissioner Linda Amato expressed concern that the exception of size of use limitations for 'large' users could give room for many different businesses to utilize the exception.

Commissioner Fiori asked if the changes allowed room to keep the aggressive transportation management standards for businesses in Seattle. Mr. Hauger replied that they intended to leave room for these standards.

Commissioner Kaplan stated that he noticed the multifamily changes do not include mention of minimum densities and wondered if this would be the time to suggest such a thing. Mr. Troxel stated that seemed more like a change for the Land Use Code. Ms. Wilson noted that this topic could be discussed further in an Executive Committee meeting.

Commissioner Kaplan asked if there were any last minute amendments being considered by Council. Mr. Freeman answered that he was unsure of this.

Commissioner Sheehy suggested that the wording of the Director's report be a bit clearer regarding what language was new, what was old, and what had been amended.

Commissioner Leighton asked why the Goodwill site was being reconsidered for being zoned industrial. Mr. Freeman responded that some Councilmembers felt that because a land use study was already underway in South Downtown, it would be better to wait for this study to be complete before rezoning the site to anything other than industrial. He added that returning it to industrially zoned land would allow time for that study to be completed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Irene Wall, Phinney Ridge Community Council, stated that she felt the Comp Plan Amendment regarding parking facilities in public parks should be closely examined by the Commission. She noted that the amendment is about making policies so that when future decisions are made, these policies are adhered to. Ms. Wall stated that the Executive was trying to connect the amendment to a specific garage near the zoo, but that this was misleading. She added that parking should not be encouraged in parks, due in part to all the planning for parks that had been done and the work the City was doing to reduce its carbon footprint. Ms. Wall also stated that the current version of the amendment in DPD's Director's Report is significantly different than the amendment she submitted, and no longer represents the policy direction she intended.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair To adjourned the meeting at 5:27 pm.