



City of Seattle Seattle Planning Commission

Linda Amato, Chair
Barbara Wilson, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION SEPTEMBER 25, 2008 APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

Commissioners in Attendance

Chair Linda Amato, Josh Brower, Tom Eanes, Jerry Finrow, Colie Hough-Beck, Mark Johnson, Martin Kaplan, Kay Knapton, Kevin McDonald, Leslie Miller

Commission Staff

Barbara Wilson-Director, Robin Magonegil-Administrative Assistant, Katie Sheehy-Planning Analyst, Diana Canzoneri-Demographer, Lee Roberts-Intern

Commissioners Absent

Chris Fiori, Amalia Leighton, M. Michelle Mattox, Tony To

Guests

Michelle Zeidman, Mike Podowski - DPD; Michael Jenkins - City Council Central Staff

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 Linda Amato called the meeting to order at 7:30 am.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

▪ **Chairs Report**

Chair Amato noted the upcoming commission meetings. She indicated that the Executive Committee will meet next Tuesday, September 30; the HNUC Committee will meet the following Tuesday, October 7; and the next full commission meeting will take place on Thursday, October 9.

Chair Amato stated that City Council approved the neighborhood plan update process this past Monday. She thanked Commissioner Martin Kaplan for attending the PLUNC Committee meeting to speak on behalf of the Commission about the 2008 Comprehensive Plan amendment recommendations.

Executive Director Barbara Wilson noted that the LUT Committee is planning a Seattle's Transit Communities roundtable meeting, similar to the Commission's Industrial Lands work from a few years

ago. She indicated that representatives from City departments and a few key agencies will be invited to attend. Ms. Wilson added that Commission staff is conducting lots of background research, preparing a questionnaire that will be distributed to City employees prior to the roundtable, and looking at best practices, which will comprise a report from Commission staff at the roundtable, followed by a Commissioner-led discussion. She continued that next steps will include further meetings and discussions that will conclude some time next year with the release of a report.

Chair Amato asked Commissioner Colie Hough-Beck to share her thoughts about Sustainable September.

Commissioner Hough-Beck spoke about the program, which is an east King County-oriented green symposium focused on how industry can create new green jobs. She added that she was invited to participate and had planned to speak about how her work as a landscape architect has always addressed sustainability and that the issue is more about looking at existing jobs in new ways. Commissioner Hough Beck noted that Governor Gregoire's speech focused on how new jobs have to be created; that private industry has to lead the charge. Commissioner Hough-Beck indicated that this caused her to switch her topic to speak about how there has to be a top down approach too. She spoke of the Commission's industrial lands initiative, and its attention to clean collar jobs, which was a good example of how policy makers can help set goals for the city. Commissioner Hough Beck stated that at a regional and state level we need policy makers to help do this. She added that overall it was a very informative event and she looks forward to attending next year.

Chair Amato asked who attended.

Commissioner Hough-Beck stated that there were lots of educators, economic development directors, staff from cities, engineers, architects but that she didn't see any politicians or planners. She added that there were also a variety of people who represent vocational and technical schools and a lot of non-profits. Commissioner Hough Beck stated that many people asked whether or not sustainability is really being incorporated in businesses today, but she indicated that most prospective young employees choose where to work based on how green and sustainable businesses are.

Chair Amato noted that there was one last announcement.

Ms. Wilson stated that the Commission is able to keep Lee Roberts as the Commission's intern through the fall quarter. She added that he will continue to work almost full time until he joins his wife in Burma. Ms. Wilson noted that Mr. Roberts is doing great research for the Transit Supported Communities project.

Ms. Wilson introduced Michelle Zeidman, the new get-engaged Commissioner, who will hopefully be confirmed soon.

Commissioner Zeidman indicated that she is a concurrent MPA & MUP student at the University of Washington who has two quarters left. She noted that she previously worked in environmental studies and has lived in Seattle for seven years.

▪ **Minutes Approval**

Commissioner Kevin McDonald suggested two minor edits to the minutes.

ACTION: Commissioner Kevin McDonald moved to approve the September 11, 2008 minutes as amended. Commissioner Jerry Finrow seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed unanimously.

DISCUSSION

▪ **Multifamily Zoning Update**

- Discussion about Mayor's Draft Ordinance; Mike Podowski, DPD;
- Potential info about City Council's Decision Agenda; Michael Jenkins, Council Central Staff

Chair Amato introduced Mike Podowski and Michael Jenkins. She noted that the Commission would not take any action today and called for disclosures and recusals.

Recusal & Disclosure:

- **Commissioner Tom Eanes disclosed that his firm, Hewitt Architects, works on multifamily projects.**
- **Commissioner Martin Kaplan disclosed that his firm, Martin Henry Kaplan Architects, works on multifamily projects.**
- **Commissioner Colie Hough-Beck disclosed that her firm, *Hough Beck & Baird Inc.* works on multifamily projects.**
- **Commissioner Josh Brower disclosed that his firm, *Tupper Mack Brower PLLC*, represents clients who develop multifamily housing.**

Ms. Wilson noted that the Commission's previous involvement related to the Multifamily Zoning Update. She added that the Commission has been reviewing this project for quite some time and that the Commission appointed an ad hoc committee to address these issues. Ms. Wilson continued that Councilmember Sally Clark would like to hear the Commission's perspective. Ms. Wilson stated that the Commission has decided to break their recommendations down into a series of issue papers on the key topics.

Chair Amato invited Mr. Podowski to speak about his department's work to date.

Mr. Podowski summarized the key changes in the Mayor's recommendations since the last time he briefed the Commission. These include:

- maintaining the existing 25-foot height limit rather than raising the limit to 30 feet;
- lowering the Green Factor ratio from .75 to .6; and
- establishing an Administrative Design Review process that would apply to new multifamily buildings with between two and eight units.

He reiterated that the main goal of the project is to make the code easier to use and understand and also to address climate change and affordable housing. Mr. Podowski summarized the Key Recommendations on page 6 of the attached [document](#).

Commissioner McDonald asked whether or not the lower height limit impacts the potential density of the low rise zones. Mr. Podowski replied that it does not have much of an impact on the potential density but does change the heights at the upper floor level; it is more about form than density.

Commissioner Hough-Beck stated that she thinks .6 is still too aggressive for the Green Factor, particularly when internal lots have the same requirements as corner lots. She added that the rating system should be adjusted, for example that trees are not given enough weight in the current criteria. Mr. Podowski indicated that he would be happy to work with the Commission on adjusting the rating criteria.

Commissioner Finrow asked about the timing of the proposed legislation. Mr. Podowski responded that it is currently being reviewed by the Law Department and that they hope to send it to City Council soon, but because of the budget review it is not likely to be taken up by committee until early next year. Michael Jenkins reiterated that he also expects Council to begin addressing this legislation sometime in January.

Commissioner Finrow asked what opportunities for change exist between now and then. Mr. Podowski answered that the Mayor's proposal will go forward as written, but that there could be discussion about changes that DPD would also support.

Commissioner Finrow asked about the two foot height allowance for green roofs. Mr. Podowski replied that it can be difficult to accommodate the structure and planting material of a green roof within the 25-foot height limit, and that an additional 24 inches would make green roofs more feasible. Commissioner Johnson noted that the only part allowed to exceed the height limit would be those elements necessary to support the green roof.

Commissioner Finrow asked about LEED and Built Green and mentioned that the Commission has expressed concern about these programs. Commissioner Eanes detailed some of their concerns about these programs and Commissioner Johnson summarized the concern that including Built Green as part of the incentive program seems to legitimize the label as a measure of sustainability.

Commissioner Finrow added that it's also not clear how the City will monitor changes to the standards if these programs are codified. Mr. Podowski responded that they are currently monitored by DPD's Green Team and that if in the future the City feels they are no longer adequate, City code could be changed. Commissioner Finrow indicated that it would be helpful to clarify how these programs are being monitored. He added that it is a particular concern with regard to Built Green because it is an industry lobby group. Commissioner Finrow reiterated that it helps to know that the programs are already being monitored and that it would be helpful to communicate that more broadly.

Commissioner Kaplan stated that he does think the difference between a 25 and 30 foot height limit can impact density and asked why the proposed changes backed off from the height increase. Mr. Podowski responded that most developers and designers that DPD have talked to have stated that these height limits are okay; the Mayor decided not to pursue the change. Commissioner Kaplan noted that the lower limit basically eliminates the ability to build stacked-flats. Mr. Podowski replied that the 25' height would just be in LDT through L2 zones, whereas L3 is the zone that has the largest density gap. He added that stacked flats could be built in L2 if the parking was below grade, but agreed that it is a good point.

Commissioner Eanes asked if the ordinance posted on DPD's website includes the Mayor's changes mentioned previously. Mr. Podowski indicated that the posted ordinance does include most of the changes, but that the administrative design review process will be addressed separately.

Commissioner Eanes noted that at a PLUNC committee meeting, he heard that the intention of reducing height limits in 1989 was to produce a partial 3rd floor, but that that is not what actually gets built. He suggested that a different, well thought out, approach to regulating height could probably have a better result.

Commissioner Finrow asked about the townhouse design review process. Mr. Podowski stated that the current administrative design review will be used as start and the new program will be developed over the next 3-4 months. He noted that he would be glad to come back to a future meeting to discuss the process in more detail once the program has been developed more. Commissioner Finrow indicated that the Commission would indeed appreciate discussing this in more detail at a later date.

Mr. Podowski noted that DPD is currently reviewing questions of timing and process for the administrative design review program and that the Mayor does not want it to extend the permit review period by more than a month or two. There was further discussion where a number of the Commissioners noted that it will be very important to hire qualified staff to conduct the reviews.

Commissioner Kaplan asked what opportunity there would be for neighborhood review. Mr. Podowski stated that is one of the aspects under consideration.

Commissioner Hough-Beck asked about the existing design review boards and Mr. Podowski clarified that the current Design Review thresholds would remain the same so that projects with 9 or more units would go through full Design Review, whereas projects with 2-8 units would be subject to administrative design review; projects would not be subject to both. Mr. Jenkins noted that the SEPA and Design Review thresholds have been uncoupled.

Commissioner McDonald noted that the proposed legislation eliminates parking minimums and asked whether or not parking maximums had been considered. Mr. Podowski indicated that while they were not as part of the Multifamily Zoning Update process, it was discussed and could be addressed in future projects such as the neighborhood plan updates.

Commissioner Brower noted that he was happy to hear about proscribed time limits, as additional review time adds to the cost. He asked whether or not pre-approved plans could still be used. Mr. Podowski indicated that they could still be used.

Commissioner Miller reiterated what other Commissioners said about the importance of neighborhood involvement. She noted that, overall, there is apprehension in some single family areas that do not want to see multifamily development anywhere nearby and that the City should address those fears. Mr. Podowski indicated that they certainly welcome the Commission's help in this regard.

Ms. Zeidman asked whether or not there is a conflict between the City's goals of reducing carbon emissions and allowing for wider driveways in the proposed legislation. Mr. Podowski responded that DPD has found that the current standards do not accommodate many vehicles that people own and that the intent of the code is to make sure that people can actually use the spaces that are provided. He added that her point is well taken.

Chair Amato thanked Mr. Podowski for his time and asked Mr. Jenkins if there was anything he would like to add. Mr. Jenkins noted that he has a whole list and would be happy to come back. He added that it would be nice if the code was more aspirational rather than just correcting problems. Mr. Jenkins

continued that there are lessons to be learned from Portland in this regard and that Councilmember Clark has invited a few planners from Portland to come and speak about their experience.

▪ **Viaduct & Seawall Replacement**

- Discussion of Commission Recommendations

Chair Amato then moved on to the next item on the agenda – the Viaduct and Seawall Replacement.

Recusal & Disclosure:

- **Commissioner Josh Brower disclosed that his firm, *Tupper Mack Brower PLLC*, represents clients who own industrial land.**
- **Chair Linda Amato disclosed that her office has an on-call contract with WSDOT related to this project.**
- **Commissioner Colie Hough-Beck recused herself from the discussion and left the room.**

Ms. Wilson provided a brief background report about the Commission’s involvement on this topic including that there have been a couple of briefings about the project over the summer and that an ad hoc committee has been formed to help the Commission make strong recommendations to the three executives some time later this autumn. Ms. Wilson added that the Commission sent a letter to SDOT earlier this week requesting more information. She confirmed that SDOT is working to furnish the information but had a couple of clarifying questions. Ms. Wilson noted that the current project takes a more broad approach than previously when the Commission supported the tunnel option.

Chair Amato suggested that as the Commission moves forward with their discussion, it might be helpful to first identify those building blocks that they do not want to support and move them off the table so the Commission can move forward with those they do want to consider.

Commissioner Johnson stated that he supports the surface alternatives and mentioned that it would be interesting to know more about how other cities such as Portland and San Francisco have managed after eliminating elevated freeways along their waterfronts.

Commissioner Finrow indicated that he would like the Commission to advocate for quality of life in downtown Seattle. He asked about the status of the downtown waterfront study. Commissioner Finrow noted that he does not favor aerial structures or increasing traffic on downtown streets.

Commissioner Kaplan noted that he and Commissioner Eanes have been advocating that exact position. He added that this has been a much better planning process and that it is moving quickly toward a conclusion. Commissioner Kaplan stated that he understands the waterfront study to still be valid. He noted that in Portland, it was easy to get rid of one freeway when they built a new one close by. Commissioner Kaplan added that it doesn’t make sense that the city could transfer that capacity onto our city streets and still retain quality of life.

Commissioner Knapton noted that people in eastern Washington view this as a project to make Seattle beautiful, and that the movement of traffic in this corridor does not have any impact on them. She noted that at a state level there needs to be better education about the fact that this is a statewide issue and that it has implications for the movement of goods to and from the eastern half of the state.

Commissioner Knapton agreed that there are immediate implications for the quality of life in the city and that it is not clear how we can accommodate all traffic on our city streets.

Ms. Zeidman noted that she lived in the San Francisco area when the Embarcadero Freeway was removed and that it would be amazing to see Seattle connected to the waterfront. She stated that she would not support an elevated option and that she would like to see options that encourage increased transit and discourage need for throughput.

Commissioner Eanes stated that he has another question for SDOT in terms of origin and destination for each of the scenarios. He reiterated that quality of life is extremely important. Commissioner Eanes indicated that he wishes the surface transit option could be made to work, but that he's not sure it can and that freight mobility ultimately needs a grade-separated way to move through downtown. He added that, as a region, we have to stop focusing exclusively on capacity and that the gubernatorial election will have a big impact on this issue.

Commissioner McDonald reiterated the importance of quality of life downtown. He added that there are lots of alternatives for commuters to downtown, but for other trips (which make up most of the traffic on the viaduct) there are fewer options.

Commissioner Brower restated what other Commissioners spoke of – that this is a once in a lifetime opportunity where we can choose to stay in the 21st century or move forward. He noted that SR99 is vital for freight and that surface streets downtown simply cannot accommodate that traffic.

Commissioner Brower stated that he would like the Commission to articulate a grand vision for Seattle and that we need to push for a solution that maintains the throughput and provides more amenities for our community. He added that a tremendous amount of new development potential would exist if the viaduct was removed. Commissioner Brower continued that he does not think a surface option could provide enough capacity and that an underground would provide more opportunity.

Commissioner Miller indicated that she is glad to hear that people do not want to support an elevated option. She added that while San Francisco and Vancouver do not have freeways downtown, she is not sure how applicable those examples are to Seattle.

Chair Amato noted that she spends a lot of time in San Francisco and it is a different model. Ms. Wilson also noted that Portland and San Francisco have basically killed their industrial sectors.

Commissioner Finrow noted that Commissioner Brower's point about the economic development potential would make for an interesting study that is an important part of this decision.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Amato adjourned the meeting at 9:05.