



City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

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

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, June 22, 2023
Approved Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present:	McCaela Daffern, Roque Deherrera, David Goldberg, Matt Hutchins, Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson, Rick Mohler, Radhika Nair, Dhyana Quintanar, Julio Sanchez, Kelabe Tewolde
Commissioners Absent:	Mark Braseth, Dalton Owens, Alanna Peterson, Lauren Squires, Jamie Stroble
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 8:05 am and announced several upcoming Commission meetings. Co-Chair Goldberg offered the following land acknowledgement:

'On behalf of the Seattle Planning Commission, we'd like to acknowledge that the city of Seattle is on stolen Coast Salish land, specifically the ancestral land of the Duwamish, Suquamish, and Muckleshoot Tribes. We strive to remedy this injustice through our beliefs and actions in helping to steward our land and communities in Seattle.'

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 June 8, 2023 meeting minutes. Commissioner Matt Hutchins seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

Public Comment

Ms. Murdock read the following public comment, which was submitted via e-mail.

Good morning,

As part of today's SDCI briefing, I'm asking the Commission to please address an issue for which its shown support: managing the sharp and steady rise in Seattle's urban freight deliveries. Three years ago, SDCI recognized the problem and worked with other departments and community stakeholders on a plan. The resulting Director's Rule 12-2020 called out the shortage of curb space and required on-site loading for new residential towers in the City core. But the Rule was suddenly shelved. Now, three years later, a Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) (SDCI 602 001-023) is calling for SDCI to once again put forward the Director's Rule or similar legislation by June 30.

The Seattle Freight Advisory Board agrees and sent a letter supporting the SLI's advancement last month. In it, the Board focused on equity and safety when it wrote: "The proposed ordinance will help all residents more quickly and reliably receive their goods while also supporting the essential workers that deliver everything from parcels to medical supplies. Between 2009 and 2015, vehicles carrying goods have been involved in crashes at an increasing rate and these crashes are more likely to occur on weekdays between 6am and 4pm when freight demand is high. A consistent means of building access and off-street delivery space – especially in dense urban areas such as downtown Seattle– provides people working in the final 50 feet of the supply chain a chance to move goods more safely."

Without legislation, we are making irreversible decisions. Recently, a tower to hold 1,000 residents and workers was approved without a single loading berth on the same block a UW study shows delivery vehicles circle up to 10 minutes just trying to find a place to off-load. Trucks circling congested streets create more emissions and encounters with pedestrians and cyclists.

It's time for the city to follow through. The deadline is just over a week away but the Department has yet to say if or how it will answer this legislative request. Please ask how the Department intends to lead on this issue.

*Thank you,
Megan Kruse
Downtown resident*

Update: Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections

Nathan Torgelson, Director, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI)

Director Torgelson stated that he last updated the Planning Commission on December 7, 2022. He replied to the issue identified in the public comment. SDCI received a Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) from City Councilmember Lewis. The Department hired consultant Fehr and Peers to conduct a study on loading zones and make recommendations for changes to City Code. The Mayor’s Office is currently reviewing that study. SDCI hopes to send it to the City Council and make it public very soon.

On December 10, 2022, SDCI piloted a Virtual Applicant Service Center (ASC) customer experience, using a software product called ZenDesk, that mimics in-person services that were previously provided at the Department’s Applicant Service Center (ASC) on the 20th floor of SDCI’s offices in the Seattle Municipal Tower (SMT). Members of the public and applicants can live-chat with a staff member and talk to a live person online to help answer questions and resolve permit issues. Both Spanish and Chinese translation services are available. Director Torgelson stated that customer service ratings for this virtual service are in the ninetieth (90%) percentile. He stated that there is still great frustration from customers trying to reach various SDCI staff on the phone. The Department is working on that now and will replace old numbers with a new phone tree system soon. Even though the SDCI offices are closed to the public, applicants can still schedule appointments with SDCI staff in person. SDCI is also working with the Department of Transportation (SDOT) Street Use Section to create a joint in-person kiosk on the fourth floor of the SMT. This kiosk will hopefully be in operation by the end of this year.

Director Torgelson provided an update on permitting trends as displayed below:

	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
Building Permit Intake and Value	9,248 permits, \$3.4 billion in value	9,567 permits, \$4.3 billion in value
Building Permit Issuance and Value	8,827 permits, \$3.2 billion in value	8,962 permits \$3.9 billion in value
Master Use Permit (MUP) Intake	457 applications accepted	507 applications accepted
MUP Issuance	526 applications issued	582 applications issued

Trade permit issuance for 2022 showed considerable growth in refrigeration, furnace and electrical over the counter (OTC) permits. However, boiler, conveyance and sign permits continue to run behind pre-pandemic levels.

Director Torgelson stated that SDCI recently hired Peter Fuebringer to focus on outreach to small business and arts and cultural organizations, and downtown businesses to help them with the permitting process. Director Torgelson provided several updates from the Code Compliance division. A Small Landlord Stakeholder group was recently convened and has developed a series of recommendations that SDCI staff will review and send to the City Council this year. SDCI recently hired

a new Unreinforced Masonry (URM) coordinator, Amanda Herzfeld. Her team is currently beginning the public comment period for a voluntary URM technical standard. Two public webinars were held on June 8 and June 12 with ninety people attending. This standard will be adopted by a Director's Rule. The goal is to have a mandatory URM standard but there is still a lot of work to do.

Director Torgelson stated that the Washington state legislature passed a bill earlier this year that exempts all housing projects from the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) environmental review requirements. This legislation becomes effective in mid-July and SDCI will be notifying all applicants that they can opt out of the SEPA process. City Councilmember Strauss is moving ahead with legislation to raise SEPA thresholds for both residential and commercial downtown projects.

Design Review Board meetings continue to be virtual, which has been very popular with both the public and applicants, as this allows architects to present from wherever they are, and the public can join from home. A SLI was recently passed by the City Council asking SDCI to analyze how to make the Design Review process more efficient using a Race and Social Justice lens. A consultant has made numerous recommendations. City Councilmember Strauss has the consultant report and will submit it to the entire Council before going through a formal process and making it public. This work could result in procedural and code changes in the future.

The Mayor and City Council are working on separate Design Review legislation that has been transmitted to the Council. The Office of Housing recently submitted legislation that would permanently exempt affordable housing (rental and ownership) from Design Review. SDCI recently submitted legislation that would temporarily exempt projects with on-site Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) requirements from Design Review. Recent state legislation requires that Design Review guidelines must be objective. The City will need to incorporate this requirement in the next Comprehensive Plan.

Director Torgelson stated that the City Council recently passed new legislation that increases the number of trees to be protected. The ordinance allows up to eighty-five percent lot coverage for future development and includes a fee in lieu option. He stated that the homebuilder community and tree advocates were not completely happy with the final legislation.

SDCI held a Home Fair on February 25 and will hold another in person session at the Filipino Community Center on October 21. To honor Building Safety Month in May, SDCI held online sessions on electrical inspections and other important safety issues (earthquake preparedness). SDCI assisted with permitting and coordinated with other City departments to respond to the recent South Park King Tide flooding that resulted in damage to homes and businesses.

Director Torgelson provided an update on several large projects. The Seattle Storm recently broke ground for their new practice facility in Interbay. That project is on a very aggressive schedule. SDCI recently issued the temporary occupancy permit for the new Convention Center addition. Northwest Hospital will soon initiate a Major Institute Master Planning process. The Northgate Mall redevelopment will eventually have more than 1000 housing units. SDCI recently issued a temporary

occupancy permit for the new Central Park and private road (NE 105th Street) which extends from the park west towards the light rail station. Both are now open to the public, although the park will have a few elements to complete before final occupancy.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners requested Director Torgelson to provide either a presentation or notes in the future. He replied that he would be happy to do that.
- Commissioners requested additional information related to the tree legislation, specifically asking about who is responsible for the fee in lieu and whether it accounts for escalation costs. Director Torgelson stated that the fee is intended to go into a fund for SDOT and Seattle Parks to plant trees on public property. SDCI is working closely with both departments to set up that program. There is an incentive for applicants to plant trees onsite.
- Commissioners asked Director Torgelson if he had data on new housing units built over the last few years. He stated that he did not have that information but will send it later. That information is also available on the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) website.
- Commissioners inquired about the Mayor's initiative to convert office space to housing, including the anticipated schedule for that program. Director Torgelson stated SDCI has had numerous discussions with OPCD and the Mayor's Office to encourage office to residential conversion. This program will require a series of interesting code changes. SDCI is still working on an update to the City's building code. Several stakeholders have suggested that conversion from commercial to residential uses should be exempt from MHA requirements.
- Commissioners asked whether the payment in lieu option for trees would be available for use by Seattle Public Utilities for green infrastructure. Director Torgelson stated that he will follow up with an answer to that question.
- Commissioners asked whether there are any issues in the upcoming Comprehensive Plan that are anticipated to be challenging. Director Torgelson stated that the new statewide missing middle housing legislation requires up to six units on every lot citywide. The City will need to do a lot of work to implement this requirement. He noted that areas with restrictive covenants are exempted. These tend to be in wealthier neighborhoods. This could prove to be a complicated legal issue.
- Commissioners asked whether the new SEPA exemption is a requirement or optional for cities. Director Torgelson stated that SDCI's interpretation is that it is mandatory. One question that remains to be answered is what to do if an applicant is in the middle of the SEPA appeal process. The Department is currently contacting all its applicants to inform them of this new requirement. He stated that SDCI anticipates most applicants will notify the Department choosing to opt out.

Resources

[New SEPA exemptions for housing authorized statewide by the Washington State Legislature](#)
[OPCD Quarterly Housing Report Dashboard](#)

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 am.