



City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

Rick Mohler and Jamie Stroble, Co-Chairs
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, October 14, 2021

Approved Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present:	Mark Braseth, McCaela Daffern, Roque Deherrera, David Goldberg, Matt Hutchins, Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson, Rick Mohler, Radhika Nair, Alanna Peterson, Dhyana Quintanar, Lauren Squires, Jamie Stroble
Commissioners Absent:	Patience Malaba, Julio Sanchez, Kelabe Tewelde
Commission Staff:	Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; John Hoey, Senior Policy Analyst; Olivia Baker, Planning Analyst; Robin Magonegil, Administrative Assistant
Guests:	Jonathan Lewis and Joanna Valencia, Seattle Department of Transportation; Nathan Torgelson, Director, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections

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:

<http://www.seattle.gov/planningcommission/when-we-meet/minutes-and-agendas>

Chair's Report & Minutes Approval

Co-Chair Rick Mohler called the meeting to order at 3:04 pm and announced several upcoming Commission meetings.

ACTION: Commissioner David Goldberg moved to approve the September 23, 2021 meeting minutes. Commissioner Roque Deherrera seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

Announcements

Vanessa Murdock, Seattle Planning Commission Executive Director, reviewed the format of the meeting. She announced that Commissioner Alanna Peterson recently welcomed a baby boy.

Briefing: Seattle Transportation Plan

Jonathan Lewis and Joanna Valencia, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT)

Mr. Lewis stated that the Seattle Transportation Plan (STP) will create a renewed vision for Seattle's transportation system, integrate Seattle's four modal master plans (Transit Master Plan, Pedestrian Master Plan, Freight Master Plan, and Bicycle Master Plan) in a single plan with an integrated policy framework, and inform the next transportation funding package. Additional STP goals include:

- Align with the 2024 Comprehensive Plan growth strategy
- Refocus on equity (aligning with SDOT's Transportation Equity Framework) along with climate and safety
- Engage and build relationships with those typically less involved
- Plan to achieve key access, modal, climate, and safety goals
- Incorporate maintenance and operations
- Create cohesive priority modal networks, including vehicular
- Elevate other essential functions of the right of way (e.g., access, public space, and livability)
- Create a single plan document in everyday language

Mr. Lewis stated that Seattle continues to be a growing city but our street network is not getting any bigger. As a result, transportation policy in response to this growth is to focus on space-efficient ways of getting around. SDOT's goal is that seventy-five percent of non-work trips are made by modes other than driving alone by 2035. SDOT plans set targets to increase the number of trips made by transit, bicycling, and walking while reducing the number of trips made in motor vehicles.

Mr. Lewis stated that modal master plans:

- Establish a strategic long-range vision for mobility for people biking, walking, and using transit, as well as trucks for deliveries
- Identify citywide mobility networks to ensure key connections to destinations
- Guide and prioritize investments for building critical infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks, bike lanes, bus-only lanes) to support these networks

SDOT has already laid the groundwork for the STP in many ways, with community engagement informing each of the modal plans. However, Mr. Lewis highlighted the following components are missing from this approach:

- Community engagement focused on how to best meet the needs of people getting around, not just how to create mode-specific networks
- Strategic direction and accountability for meeting SDOT's climate and safety goals
- Funding strategies that align with SDOT's vision and values, including what to build and what to maintain
- Vision for and policies about other ways of getting around to ensure alignment with SDOT's goals (safety, equity, and sustainability)
- Vision and policies guiding the use of streets and sidewalks for other uses (e.g., using curb space for local business, using streets for public seating)

- SDOT does not have funding or a plan for creating and maintaining public and community spaces that are free to use and supportive of riding transit.

Mr. Lewis stated that by early 2024, SDOT will have a plan that tells the story of its shared transportation and public space vision with steps on how they will achieve it. With a proposed list of initiatives, the STP will capture SDOT's collective commitment to a racially equitable and socially just transportation and public space system that addresses safety, the climate emergency, and stewardship. The process will allow SDOT to build partnerships with community to create informed recommendations that center racial equity. SDOT intends to use this as an opportunity to advance the Transportation Equity Framework through improved transparency and accountability with community. The STP will provide a foundation for a future transportation funding package, including investment priorities for key projects and programs.

Mr. Lewis provided an overview of the project timeline. SDOT will spend the remainder of 2021 going through scoping, defining key questions and the technical analysis approach, and organizing the internal and external outreach team. Scoping conversations to date have included:

- Community Liaisons
- SDOT subject matter experts
- Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD)
- Transportation Equity Workgroup
- SDOT Complete Streets Steering Committee
- SDOT STP Executive Steering Committee

Themes heard during these conversations have included:

- Equity
- Climate action
- Safety/Vision Zero
- All modes (including General Purpose and emerging mobility)
- Mobility, access, and public realm
- 15-/20-minute neighborhoods
- Healthy communities, public health
- Affordable communities
- Capital costs and maintenance needs

Feedback from Community Liaison has included the following themes:

- Lead with compassion
- Consider the needs of those whose needs are often unmet—unhoused, people with disabilities, women, immigrants and refugees, non-English speakers, elderly, children
- Do no further harm

- Acknowledge the past and current indigenous lives and historic indigenous transportation waterways and paths
- Excited by "a true community-focused listening session" and scoping stage involvement
- Interest in working on the racial equity toolkit (RET) with staff
- Demonstrate accountability so that SDOT can confidently engage their communities
- Replace "maintenance" with "quality" as a driving priority; inspired by this comment, staff substituted "stewardship" as the fourth priority

Ms. Valencia stated that the preparation of the STP will be conducted in coordination with the upcoming Comprehensive Plan Major Update. This coordination is an opportunity to integrate transportation and land use planning, involve cross-functional advisory teams, adopt a parallel timeline, conduct coordinated outreach and SEPA review, and leverage investments in both the transportation system and land development. Inclusive engagement partners will highlight the involvement of community liaisons, community-based organizations, the Transportation Equity Workgroup, and other existing equity-centered committees.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners asked for more information on how the STP will be developed in coordination with the Comprehensive Plan Major Update. Mr. Lewis stated that planning guidance will be developed jointly between SDOT and OPCD. For example, if a new urban village is added, SDOT will want to make sure transit is added to that area to support growth. Similarly, SDOT will want to add freight networks to areas that might be adding a new commercial center. SDOT will need to follow OPCD's lead where they think the new growth areas are headed. Several scenarios may be considered in the Environmental Impact Statement. SDOT will develop transportation packages accordingly.
- Commissioners inquired about sources of funding for this planning effort and asked if community members will be compensated for their participation. Ms. Valencia stated that funding has been identified for 2021 to get started on the planning process, and funding for 2022 is in the Mayor's proposed budget. SDOT will be compensating community members for their time.
- Commissioners expressed concern that any projects identified in the modal master plans generally become less of a priority than projects for automobiles. For example, plans for a protected bike lane across 45th Street were eliminated because it would conflict with traffic. Mr. Lewis stated that there is always a delicate balance to achieve the most efficient use of the right-of-way, often involving complex tradeoff decisions. Creative solutions can often be identified such as bike lanes on parallel streets.
- Commissioners stated that SDOT should have an explicit planning goal for how to reduce automobile vehicle miles traveled (VMT). The default for planning is currently oriented toward serving single occupant vehicles.
- Commissioners asked how they can be involved and act as agents of integration for this effort. Ms. Valencia stated that SDOT staff are hoping to serve as agents of integration by working with OPCD. There may be certain topics and touchpoints that make sense for SDOT to communicate directly with the Planning Commission on.
- Commissioners inquired about the role and future of the Modal Boards. Mr. Lewis stated that the modal boards are part of SDOT's oversight structure. The department will continue to seek their guidance, but it is too soon to answer about their future.

- Commissioners asked about the source of SDOT's funding for community engagement. Mr. Lewis stated that SDOT funding is complicated, as it comes from a lot of different sources including the Move Seattle Levy and the Seattle Transportation Benefit district. The community engagement budget is approximately one-third of the total project budget.

Discussion and Approval: Community Engagement budget for the Major Update to the Comprehensive Plan

Ms. Murdock provided background and context related to the Planning Commission's statement on the proposed community engagement budget for the Major Update to the Comprehensive Plan. She stated that budget deliberations began at the end of September. The Mayor delivered her proposed budget to the City Council for their consideration. The Council Select Budget Committee is reviewing the proposed budget and identifying additional issues for consideration in the budget.

Ms. Murdock read the Commission's draft statement.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners stated that they strongly support this statement.

ACTION: Commissioner McCaela Daffern moved to approve the Planning Commission's statement on the community engagement budget for the Major Update to the Comprehensive Plan. Co-Chair Jamie Stroble seconded the motion. The motion to approve the statement passed unanimously.

Update: Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections

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

Director Torgelson offered to provide an overview of SDCI to any new Commissioners. He stated that SDCI continues to be very busy. SDCI staff continues to work remotely except for inspectors and code compliance staff. SDCI's proposed budget has been submitted to the City Council. Ninety-one percent of the department's budget is generated by permit fees. SDCI's proposed 2022 budget is \$109 million, which is the highest ever for the department. SDCI currently has 460 full time employees and continues to grow with more responsibility. SDCI continues to protect tenants during these vulnerable times.

Director Torgelson stated that some fees are proposed to be reduced, including a twenty-five percent reduction to the administrative fee for electrical permits, as well as a thirty-three percent reduction to various refrigeration and furnace installation fees. These reductions are the result of changing technologies in the industry, as well as efficiencies realized from SDCI moving towards automated workflows. Fees are adjusted so they only cover the department's costs.

Some new SDCI positions are included in the Mayor's proposed budget. These include four new proposed positions in Inspection Services. One of these positions was created to handle all new Energy Code requirements. Another position has been proposed to meet increased demand for inspections of elevators and boilers. A new position is proposed in the Code Compliance division to support increased policy and administrative work, funded by the General Fund. Other new positions are proposed in the

Finance and Accounting division for Race and Social Justice Initiative and Human Resources work. New programs and positions are aimed at safety and revitalization issues. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, SDCI was beginning to develop a program responding to concerns associated with unreinforced masonry buildings. The department is now considering a new position and consultant support to restart that program. SDCI has requested a full-time Emergency Response Program staff position, as the department will be on the frontline after a major earthquake. SDCI has also requested a Small Business Permit Facilitator in direct response to the recommendations of the Mayor for downtown recovery and the Mayor's Small Business Advisory Council.

Director Torgelson stated that the Code Compliance division has been extremely busy. SDCI will release the 2022 Tenant Services Grants Request for Proposals (RFP) on October 18. The RFP is announcing an expected \$1.72 million for community partners to perform legal, outreach, education, casework, or similar services to renters. A sizeable portion of the grant funding will support the City's right-to-counsel for eviction defense. Other areas of emphasis in the RFP are supporting COVID response and organizations serving BIPOC and other potentially underserved communities.

Several proposed technical code changes (building, mechanical, elevator, electrical, fuel gas, boiler, energy) all went into effect in March. The City's codes mirror the state's codes with the exception of the energy codes. The City's new energy codes are aggressive, as this one area where the City can address greenhouse gas emissions. There was a huge vesting rush before these new codes went into effect. One of the new regulations prohibits natural gas for space heating in commercial buildings and tall multi-family buildings. Another new regulation prohibits gas water heating for new hotels and tall multi-family buildings.

Director Torgelson summarized some current legislative issues of interest to SDCI. Trees is a hot topic right now and SDCI has received direction from the City Council to consider new tree protection regulations. SDCI and the Office of Sustainability and Environment conducted extensive outreach to various interest groups (homeowners, renters, builders, etc.) and to BIPOC communities. SDCI is working with the Department of Neighborhoods' community liaisons for outreach. The department is expected to propose legislation and begin State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review by the end of the year. The City Council passed new legislation during the pandemic that provided business occupation licenses to home-based businesses. This emergency legislation was only effective for one year. SDCI is currently doing research to find out how many home-based businesses took advantage of this legislation to inform the City Council's decision to extend this legislation or not.

SDCI is working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Port of Seattle to identify flood zone legislation that would be necessary for homeowners and new development. The department is working with Seattle Central College on their Major Institution Master Plan. The college would like a minor amendment to include housing, as there are currently limitations on housing for their campus. SDCI is initiating a review of the Design Review program. Design Review meetings have all been conducted online during the pandemic. SDCI would like to hear any feedback from the Planning Commission on the advantages and disadvantages of online, in-person, and hybrid meetings. Of the eight locations previously used for in-person Design Review meetings, only one has the

appropriate equipment to televise online meetings. SDCI is reviewing legislation on the Multi-Family Tax Exemption program. This program is currently popular with developers, but there has been some confusion about low-income tenants and eligibility for low-income relocation assistance.

Director Torgelson provided an update on the most recent permitting levels. Although permit intake values have decreased, SDCI is on track to issue a higher total issuance value in 2021 over 2020.

2020

- Permit Count: 9,228
- Intake Value: \$6.1 billion
- Issuance Value: \$2.9 billion

2021 (as of end of September)

- Permit Count: 7,320
- Intake Value: \$3.8 billion
- Issuance Value: \$2.5 billion

Residential units:

- 2019: 11,329
- 2020: 8,564
- 2021 (to date): 5,478

Master Use Permit (MUP) Intake

- 2019: 870
- 2020: 674
- 2021: 389 (through September)

MUP Issue

2019: 810

2020: 737

2021: 463 (through September)

Director Torgelson provided the Commission with updates on several Major Projects. The Seattle Kraken's practice facility at Northgate opened recently. The former Northgate Mall (now Northgate Station) will undergo a huge transformation as the property owner, Simon, will add 1,100 new housing units. Climate Pledge Arena will open next week. The City continues to work closely with the Convention Center on their major expansion project. SDCI is currently having discussions with Sound Transit about a more efficient permitting process for the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions project. The revised regulations for accessory dwelling units (ADUs) have been a great success. The Planning Commission was involved with reviewing submissions for detached ADU (DADU) standard plans. SDCI approved ten standard plans. Thirty-six DADUs have been issued permits or applied for permits under the pre-approved design program for compliance with structural requirements.

Permitting review for those projects has been reduced to two to six weeks. Site-specific permits are still required for environmental, zoning and drainage requirements.

SDCI will be holding two upcoming Home Fairs, one in the north end and one in the south end. These are an opportunity for the public to meet with SDCI staff and ask questions. The Home Fairs are scheduled for January 29-30, 2022. SDCI is planning to hold those virtually at this point.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners asked for more information on the unreinforced masonry buildings program. Director Torgelson stated that SDCI and the Office of Emergency Management commissioned a study to determine estimates of what the total cost for unreinforced masonry buildings would be. The department paused that work during the pandemic.
- Commissioners inquired whether permits for any specific housing types are going down. Director Torgelson stated that OPCD tracks that type of information and maintains robust permitting data.
- Commissioners requested more specific information about the number of apartments, condos, and single-family homes applying for permits. Director Torgelson stated that the latest permitting numbers do not include many condos. Permits for commercial uses have decreased significantly. SDCI is working on a better virtual applicant service center that will have more virtual services available. The department recently digitized millions of microfilms and microfiche
- Commissioners commented on the dramatic changes in the residential housing market, with recent trends indicating eighty percent market share for single-family homes and increased interest in ADUs/DADUs. Townhouses are no longer as popular as they have been in recent years.
- Commissioners stated that the City has been close to meeting tree canopy coverage goals. Many tree advocates use this as an excuse to fight development. Director Torgelson stated that the City is using LIDAR technology to conduct an updated assessment of tree canopy.
- Commissioners expressed positive support for virtual Design Review meeting. Virtual meetings have been much more accessible to the public.

The Commissioners thanked Director Torgelson for his briefing and for all of his department's hard work.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 pm.