



City of Seattle Seattle Planning Commission

Jerry Finrow, Chair
Barbara Wilson, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION NOVEMBER 9, 2006 APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

Commissioners in Attendance

Jerry Finrow – Chair, Tony To – Vice Chair, Linda Amato, George Blomberg, Mahlon Clements, Tom Eanes, Chris Fiori, Valerie Kinast, Amalia Leighton, M. Michelle Mattox, , Kirsten Pennington.

Commissioners Absent

Hilda Blanco, Martin Kaplan, Kay Knapton, Kevin McDonald, Steve Sheehy

Commission Staff

Barbara Wilson – Director, Casey Mills – Planning Analyst, Robin Magonegil-Administrative Specialist

Guests

Rebecca Herzfeld, Council Central Staff; Steve Modemeyer, John Rahaim DPD

In Attendance

Jackie Roberts, Linda Styrk

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 3:10pm by Chair Jerry Finrow.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

- **Approve October 26, 2006 Minutes**

ACTION: Commissioner Valerie Kinast moved to approve the October 26, 2006 minutes. Commissioner M. Michelle Mattox seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

▪ **Chairs Report**

- Upcoming Meetings

Chair Finrow noted several upcoming meetings including the November 14th Housing, Neighborhood Planning and Urban Centers Committee. He noted that this meeting will adjourn at 8:30 for a Special Executive Session to discuss the Executive Director annual performance review. Chair Finrow stated that the review should be finished by December 1, and said should any commissioners wish to weigh in on the review; they should call either Chair Finrow or Commissioner To.

Commissioner Kinast requested a job description for the Executive Director.

Chair Finrow noted the November 16th Land Use and Transportation Committee meeting, the November 21st Executive Committee meeting. He announced that the Mayor's scheduled visit with the Commission today had to be rescheduled at the last minute due to an unavoidable conflict. He noted that the Mayor will be invited to attend the next Full Commission meeting which will be on December 14th.

Chair Finrow invited all of the Commissioners to the holiday party on December 1st at 6:30 pm. He added that the party will be at his home in the Eastlake neighborhood.

▪ **Updates and Review**

- * **SR 520 Bridge & HOV Project: SPC Recommendations to Council (Approval of Letter)**

NOTES FOR THE RECORD:

Chair Finrow called for any disclosures or recusals. There were no disclosures. Commissioner Sheehy and Pennington have recused themselves from all discussion and action on this matter. Neither was present for the discussion.

Director Barbara Wilson stated that the Commissioners would now be addressing a revised letter to the Council. She noted that the Commission had already sent comments to WSDOT regarding the 520 bridge rebuild. She noted that in the letter, the Commission ultimately does not strongly endorse one position.

Commissioner Linda Amato mentioned that there were some typos and grammatical errors, which she said she would forward on to Ms. Wilson. Commissioner George Blomberg asked if the Commission had only received one letter from the public on the issue. Ms. Wilson replied, yes, and it had come from Mr. Leman who had also testified in person at the last Commission meeting.

ACTION: Commissioner Linda Amato moved to approve the letter to the Seattle City Council which pertains to the Commission's comments and observations regarding the important considerations for the City in recommending a preferred alternative for the SR 520 Bridge and HOV Project. Commissioner Mahlon Clements seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

*** Commercial Code Proposed Regulations including Green Factor and Ground-Floor Residential - SPC Recommendations to Council (Approval of 3 Letters)**

Chair Finrow called for any disclosures or recusals on the matter of Planning Commission recommendations regarding the proposed changes to the Commercial Code regulations including the issues of Ground-Floor Residential and the Seattle Green Factor.

NOTES FOR THE RECORD:

Commissioner Tom Eanes disclosed that he is employed by Hewitt Architects and that they could potentially develop in a commercially zoned area in the future.

Commissioner Tony To disclosed that he is employed by Homesight, a non profit housing developer, and that they could potentially develop in a commercially zoned area in the future.

Commissioner Chris Fiori disclosed that he is employed by Heartland LLC, and that they could potentially develop in a commercially zoned area in the future.

Commissioner Knapton has disclosed in past meetings but was not present for the discussion today.

Commercial Code – Ground Floor Entrances

Ms. Wilson stated the first letter on the Commercial Code revisions concerned the ground floor residential entries and privacy requirements. Ms. Wilson said she had changed the letter to reflect the proposal that was outlined at a meeting between Council staff, a sub-committee of Commissioners, and DPD staff on ways these code revisions could be altered to address the concerns of the Commission. Commissioner Eanes stated that the meeting was very successful, and allowed everyone to come to a resolution on all the issues the Commission had concerning ground floor residential entries and privacy requirements.

Commissioner To asked what the word ‘subcommittee’ referred to in the letter. Commissioner Eanes replied that is meant an ad hoc group of some Planning Commissioners. Commissioner Blomberg stated it might be useful to emphasize in the letter as to how the Commissioner’s concern related to their broader interest in commercial zones.

Commissioner Eanes stated the Commission’s broader interest in the issue was that they had endorsed the effort to not require ground floor commercial everywhere in commercial zones. He added however, if residential uses were allowed, the Commission was concerned about how to best keep these uses from just having blank facades facing the street. Commissioner Blomberg suggested that Commissioner Eanes’ explanation be added to the letter.

ACTION: Commissioner Tom Eanes moved to approve the letter with the changes in language to reflect that, where it states ‘sub committee’, it actually means ‘ad hoc group’. This letter regards Commercial Code revisions concerning the ground floor residential entries and privacy requirements. Commissioner Mahlon Clements seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Commercial Code - Green Factor

Ms. Wilson stated that the current letter from the Commission regarding the Green Factor was the result of extensive meetings with Commissioners, Council staff and DPD staff. Ms. Wilson recapped the main details of the Commission draft letter as follows.

The letter states that the Commission is supportive of the Green Factor, considers it innovative, and agrees with its goals. The letter also states that the Commission hopes to point out some possible unintended consequences which come down to two main concerns;

- 1) The SGF needs to be extremely sensitive to the needs of neighborhood businesses. It should be sensitive to the neighborhood businesses dependence on on-street parking, pedestrian safety and visibility of signage. The responsibility for maintenance of landscaping, especially on small sites, is important. The Commission would like to see further exploration of possible enforcement tools so landscaping remains well maintained. One possibility would be revised street front standards that include outdoor water and utility access, allowing for better maintenance of landscaping
- 2) The other main concern pointed out in the SPC letter involves the implementation of the Green Factor. Because the SGF incentivizes landscaping in the right of way, it will require the early involvement of SDOT in the entitlement process if that objective is to be met. The Commission is concerned that it may not be realistic at this time to expect SDOT to work through the entitlement process in the same time frame that DPD does. Decisions about what may be permitted in the right of way are often complex, involving a wide variety of technical issues such as utility lines and vaults, traffic, pedestrian safety, curb cuts, on-street parking, commercial parking zones, load zones, bus stops, light poles, and stormwater management, as well as street trees, curb bulbs, planting beds and other "green" elements. Often these issues may conflict with the desire to provide extensive landscaping in the right of way, and the time required to resolve such conflicts may far exceed a reasonable time frame for entitlement. The Letter goes on to explain the issue in more detail and to offer a few proposed solutions for Council's consideration

Commissioner Eanes stated the Commission's main concern was getting the Green Factor to work. He noted that in particular, they were concerned that the menu provided by the city to reach the required Green Factor may not be as long as it seems to be, due to improvements in the right of way possibly being delayed by SDOT and green walls being susceptible to the intense moisture in the region.

Chair Finrow stated that he felt the letter was tremendously better due to the meetings that took place.

Steve Moddemeyer stated that DPD had heard the Commission's concerns and that the issue was up to Council now. He stated that he appreciated the Commission's level of concern and noted that, as a result of it, he is much more engaged with SDOT on the implementation of the Green Factor.

Chair Finrow stated he felt it would be wise for the Commission to continue to monitor the Green Factor concept, as it would likely migrate to other parts of the city.

Commissioner Clements asked Mr. Moddemeyer if the Green Factor was being considered in other places. He answered that it was being considered in Multi-family zoned areas, South Lake Union, and South Downtown.

Chair Finrow stated that it would be worth discussing with insurance companies just what the effect green walls would have on home insurance.

Commissioner Eanes stated that DPD planned on having trainings on how to implement the Green Factor. Mr. Moddemeyer agreed that DPD would hold these trainings.

Ms. Wilson stated that there would be a hearing on the commercial code updates and on the Comprehensive Plan amendments on November 28th. She added that December 1st would be a good time to discuss the changes with the Council's UDP Committee.

ACTION: Commissioner Mahlon Clements moved to approve the letter which pertains to the Commission's general support of the Green Factor and outlining their concerns about unintended consequences and making it to work (as outlined above). Commissioner Valerie Kinast seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

▪ Planning Director Report – John Rahaim, Department of Planning & Development, City Planning

John Rahaim reported he had attended an event in Cambridge, Massachusetts with other planning directors from many of the country's biggest cities. He noted that many cities are struggling with the question of what to do with Industrial Land. There was also a lot of discussion about how to fund the fixing of the aging infrastructure. Mr. Rahaim stated that there was a big difference between cities who were trying to figure out what to do with all the new development, and the cities who were trying to get more development or do something with abandoned spaces and buildings.

Mr. Rahaim reviewed the new initiatives that DPD would be working on in 2007 and places for the Commission to consider some involvement and assistance to DPD City Planning.

He stated that the first was Green Seattle (a.k.a the Urban Forestry Initiative), an effort to plant 600,000 new trees in the city. Mr. Rahaim noted that DPD will play a major role in the regulation and enforcement of both tree planting and cutting down. DPD will also work to promote incentives for planting trees and better education.

Mr. Rahaim stated that Northgate will continue to be a priority in 2007, particularly the area north of the mall. He added that the issues will primarily be related to zoning and working with the three developers who want to develop in the area.

Mr. Rahaim mentioned that the Shoreline Master Plan had to be adopted by 2009 and that it would be a major effort, one that would include developing a Shoreline Restoration Plan.

Mr. Rahaim noted that the Symposium and Conference on Great Places was going to be a large effort by DPD, but that City Council had apparently removed it from the DPD's budget.

Mr. Rahaim stated that an area in the University District would undergo a planning effort in 2007 around several sites recently acquired by the University of Washington from Safeco. He added that DPD would like the Planning Commission and the Design Commission to engage the community in the effort. He noted that it would include 2 workshops, the first focusing on land use issues, the second on urban design with the goal being to finish it by the end of 2007. He noted that the joint commission workshops were actually an idea put forward by SPC Director Barbara Wilson. Ms. Wilson stated that the Planning Commission has a strong history of working with the community and this provided another great opportunity for the Commission to add a lot of value and expertise this discussion. She noted that she had talked to members of the Executive Committee to get some initial feedback on potential Commission involvement and to date Commissioners have been supportive. She asked for Commissioner to give feedback on committing to this effort.

Chair Finrow said he supported the idea and that it sounded very interesting.

Commissioner Eanes stated he liked the idea of the Commission pursuing this, and like Roosevelt; he hoped the community would consider increasing density due to its proximity to a light rail station.

Commissioner To said it was a good opportunity to be proactive and not reactive to changes in the city.

Commissioner Fiori stated that, looking at the large work plan the Commission has for 2007, that they needed to prioritize the work plan but he is initially supportive of moving forward with this work.

Commissioner Kinast stated she hoped that they would not just look at zoning but the possibility of making the right of way into an open space and other important issues that could have a positive impact on the community.

Commissioner Pennington noted that this is an exciting project and could benefit from the SPC participation and she concurred with Commissioner Kinast that this would area should be looked at in a broader planning context.

Commissioner Leighton stated she was supportive of the Commission being involved in this effort.

Commissioner Amato stated that she supported Commission involvement and thinks we could add a lot of value and that this would also be a lot of fun.

Commissioner M. Michelle Mattox stated that she also believed this would be a great opportunity for the Planning Commission to engage with a community in a positive way and to lend its independent expertise.

Commissioner Clements said there will be a lot of important issues to address including integrating the light rail station, enhancing connections to the University, thinking about housing development and potential open space, etc. He noted that all of these issues are clearly in the realm of the Commission purview and thus the Commission should move forward.

Commissioner Blomberg stated he was supportive of the Commission joining with the Design Commission to lend our assistance to the city by holding workshops or charrettes.

Mr. Finrow noted that based on this discussion it seems clear there is strong support from the Commissions involvement on this effort and that we will look forward to working with Mr. Rahaim on the details.

Ms. Wilson noted to Mr. Rahaim that several parties, including the Mayor's office and Councilmember Steinbrueck's office, have suggested that the Commission assist in looking at city's policy on public benefit zoning and density bonus programs.

Mr. Rahaim stated that he thought the Commission could play a role in helping to think this through. He stated from his perspective he agrees with the Mayor and Council that any type of up zoning should consider public benefits, particularly around affordable housing. He noted that there was currently a big debate about how much public benefits' funds should go towards affordable housing versus other amenities.

Commissioner To stated that he thought the possibility of minimum density requirements should be explored and are integrally connected to the issue of public benefits.

Commissioner Clements noted that any conversation with the public about public benefits should explain why its good policy to require public benefits and that it was not just about squeezing developers.

Ms. Wilson noted that it is useful to clarify that public benefits zoning is a voluntary incentive or bonus and that this is quite different from other proposed requirement such as impact fees.

Chair Finrow stated that some Comprehensive Plan amendments should be tracked including the Starbucks expansion, Colman Dock, and the Port of Seattle site.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Finrow adjourned the meeting at 5:20 pm.