



MINUTES

(Approved on September 6, 2023)

MEETING: Regular Meeting and Public Hearing (hybrid)

DATE/TIME: Wednesday, August 16, 2023, 5:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Anthony Steele (Vice-Chair), Morgan Dorner, Robb Krehbiel, Brett Marlo, Matthew Martenson, Jordan Rash, Sandesh Sadalge, Brett Santhuff

ABSENT: Christopher Karnes (Chair)

A. Call to Order

Vice-Chair Steele called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. A quorum was declared.

Vice-Chair Steele read the Land Acknowledgement.

B. Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Krehbiel moved to approve the agenda as submitted. Commissioner Santhuff seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

C. Approval of Minutes

- May 17, 2023
- June 7, 2023
- June 21, 2023
- July 19, 2023

Commissioner Krehbiel moved to approve the May 17, June 7, June 21, and July 19, 2023, meeting minutes as submitted. Commissioner Santhuff seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

D. Public Comments

Stephen Atkinson, Principal Planner, reported that 17 written comments were received regarding the proposed historic district moratorium and the College Park historic district nomination.

The following individuals addressed the Planning Commission:

1. Jeff Ryan, regarding the College Park nomination.

Public Comment ended at 5:11 p.m.

E. Disclosure of Contacts and Recusals

There were no disclosures of contacts or recusals.

F. Discussion Items

1. Historic District Moratorium

Reuben McKnight, Historic Preservation Officer, provided an overview of the proposed moratorium on the nomination and designation of historic special review and conservation districts, including Council Resolution No. 41226 and the proposed schedule.

Commissioner Krehbiel moved to set a public hearing for a historic district moratorium on September 20, 2023. Commissioner Marlo seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

2. College Park Historic District Nomination

McKnight presented the proposed College Park Historic District resubmittal, including an overview of the proposal, contents of the submittal, prior reviews and recommendations, and the Assessment Report.

The Commission discussed the proposal, including the goals around housing and affordability, how the nomination got to the Commission, the appeal process, redlining, timeline for the Code review, connection with Home In Tacoma, a potential timeline of reviewing the proposal, tabling the decision for a significant amount of time, census data on racial and ethnic composition within the area over time, and the differences between the original submittal versus recent submittal.

Commissioner Krehbiel moved to deny further consideration of the College Park Historic District nomination. Commissioner Rash seconded the motion. The motion passed with the following votes:

Ayes: 7 – Dorner, Krehbiel, Marlo, Martenson, Rash, Sadalge, Steele

Nays: 1 – Santhuff

The Planning Commission recessed at 5:58 p.m. and reconvened at 6:04 p.m.

G. Public Hearing

3. Urban Design Project Review (UDPR)

Vice-Chair Steele called the public hearing to order at 6:04 p.m. and outlined the procedures of the public hearing. Commissioners introduced themselves.

Stephen Antupit, Senior Planner, and Carl Metz, Senior Planner, presented an overview, including project background, timeline, goals, and elements; UDPR permits and applicability; the UDPR Manual; the Urban Design Board; Code amendments; and the tentative schedule.

Vice-Chair Steele called for testimony. Seven people testified, as follows:

- (1) **David Foster** – I've been practicing architecture for 33 years. I've designed many mixed-use buildings and multifamily buildings, and I've also developed a mixed-use building and a multifamily building right here in Tacoma. I live here now on Tacoma Avenue South. I also served on the design review board for the city of Seattle for four years. First of all, I don't wish to speak to design review, but rather to the proposed land use code changes. I've spent a few hours reading them in great excruciating detail. My conclusion is, don't do it. At least study them further. There are a lot of issues with them that I have. In particular, yard space/amenity space – the new language for that, the removal of exemptions for amenity space requirements. Here's where I'm at - infill development is really important to increasing the housing supply. I'm talking about lots, 50 feet wide, although maybe 25 or 75 feet wide, not the huge projects – fine, have at it. But mid-sized projects, it's so hard to get them to pencil out when there's layer upon layer of space requirements, whether they're amenity spaces or parking or 20-foot-wide driveways, bicycle parking, it's really hard. I don't think that these changes go in the right direction. For example, in 2010, Seattle drastically revised its amenity space requirements because it did a study where it hired local architects to do a black hat, white hat investigation and realize these just do not work for mid-sized lots. It totally revised its amenity space requirements. Now, for example, projects up to 20 units in size are automatically exempt in mixed-use districts. This is the thing I'm talking about. A lot more study is needed. I don't think that on the whole these changes are positive. I could say some similar things about the attempt to legislate aesthetics. It's a fool's game. The building design standards, I think, need a much closer look taken at them. Again, Seattle threw out its modulation requirements in 2010. Just threw them out, with the exception of U Village. They just don't exist anymore. Lastly, I want to say this. If you send this up to the council for a vote, please include a transition period of at least six months. People like me who have projects in development and in advanced stages of design, it's not fair to change the rules right in the middle of the game. I have a project in the 6th Avenue mixed-use center that will not work, and it wouldn't be fair to me.

- (2) **Reggie Brown** – I'm the owner of Louis Rudolph Homes. This year we'll deliver 75 housing units in Tacoma, mostly or 100% in mixed-use centers, and we build the middle. My concern here is not for today because today, as proposed, this project wouldn't impact me at all. But as I grow, it would impact me. But more importantly, it starts where it doesn't impact me. Then after a while, it's, "Hey, you know what? We need to add to these and then we need to add to these and then add to these." The next thing you know, we're all involved in it. And so here are my reasons for really being against it. One, it allows the continuation of exclusionary housing. Two, it allows the continuation of exclusionary housing. Design review boards are notorious for delaying permit times, increasing holding costs, and driving overall cost to construction up. I understand that the long-range planners spent a year and a half preparing for this. If there is some change that they, whoever they are, wants, I would suggest bringing us builders into a room and telling us. Debbie Bingham has done this several times when it comes to multifamily tax exemption. If you tell us what you want – more Craftsman homes or modern homes or this type of look or that type of look – we could and would do it much faster than any committee. We build what people want. It's the only way. If I had my way, I would only build a certain type. I love four square and Craftsman. I don't build them because the kids like the modern stuff. So, I build these flat roof things. This isn't without liability and risk to the city. There are lawsuits specifically in regard to design review boards. In Knick v. Township of Scott, the US Supreme Court recently overruled a precedent that prevented property owners from bringing cases against state and local governments in Federal Court. Number six, it allows the continuation of exclusionary housing. How? Because many don't want construction in their neighborhood. Going to a public hearing will block projects, not because we can't agree on design, but because of time delays and neighbors pushing against the project. It's not fair that once you move into a neighborhood, you get to decide if anyone else gets to move into that neighborhood or how their home looks. Meanwhile, the Tacoma Housing Authority has 15,000 applicants for 1500 vouchers. The majority of those units will come in mixed-use centers. We can't do anything that will slow down the permit process. We need to speed it up.
- (3) **Chris Dunayski** – I'm with Gordon T. Jacob. We're a design build firm here in Tacoma. We do small multifamily, typically in mixed-use centers, between four units up to 20 or so units. We do remodels in town, and we also are doing DADU's, and things like this. So, we're very focused on improving neighborhoods in Tacoma as well as providing quality housing in Tacoma. The thing that I wanted to add to what the other two said that wasn't really mentioned much is risk. Right now, developers, small developers, like me - we run a family-run business. Everyone in my company is family. When we decide to buy a lot and build eight doors or twelve doors, we are taking massive risk. I was just camping last weekend with somebody who's a leader in the city of Tacoma, and I described the risk, and her response was, "I would never do that" – because there's so much risk when you go into a project like this. So, I really oppose anything that's going to either increase the design review time because that leads to more risk because it impacts money. When we go through multiple reviews, what means is that I got to spend more money with engineers and architects, and all that does is increase my risk and make it more difficult for us to develop and provide quality housing. So, I'm for speeding up the process of us getting permits so that we can provide quality housing in Tacoma. So, anything you can do to make that happen would cause developers like me to want to keep investing in Tacoma rather than putting our money and our effort and our time on the sidelines waiting for the process to be faster.
- (4) **Jonathan Jarmon** – I'm a homeowner, and I've lived at my address in Tacoma for the past close to 30 years. I'm age 65, and I'm retired. But one thing I want to say first is that I view myself as a free American – a free American that owns land – and I view that I'm a Free American regardless if this is the United States of America or not. The thing is, I intend to live in my house until I die, and perhaps it might be in about 15 years or so, but I have no intent to sell my property just to sell it to be redeveloped, because the average rent in the city of Tacoma is approximately \$2550 per month. And if I were to sell my property and rent then basically my money would probably run out before 8 years and I'd have nothing. I'd end up living in a tent. I live sustainably and I live very environmentally friendly because I do not have an automobile. For the past 11 years, I've been writing electric bikes that get about 600 miles per gallon, both for my health as well as for transportation. I even use my bike and ride it into my grocery store, and I don't need a shopping cart, a parking space, a shopping bag, or anything else. Most other items I can have delivered

directly to my residence. I grow a tremendous amount of food in my backyard as well. I've got several apple trees. I even have a lemon tree in my backyard and got a hundred lemons off it last year. I have not taken any airplane flights. I just intend to live where I'm at.

- (5) **Yannick Rendu** – So historically design review boards have been just another exclusionary tactic that's been used on the side to prevent and complicate. As an example, we can look to Seattle and see within the past few years how they've prevented projects that looked great but added significant cost and reduced the housing capability of the units. And not necessarily purposely, but definitely increased the cost of housing for those areas. What I'm hoping is that if we do some kind of design review that it's mostly to ensure that the rules that we set in place are enforced and not just another "Oh, this doesn't look good. Let's do something more architecturally interesting." – which, in a lot of places, is just in the eye of a few architects. So, all I'm hoping for is that we don't create yet another exclusionary process in the name of design review.
- (6) **Marty Webb** – I live in the North Slope Historic District and we have design review. I'm in a 1949 ranch and we had earthquake damage. So, I had to go before the Landmarks Preservation Commission and talked to them about rebuilding part of my house. There was a design review and they were wanting to protect my little old ranch. I wanted to kind of change it, but no, this had value. So, when we go into these neighborhoods, what do we want from them? I think what we want is for them to fit in like my little house. We wanted it to fit in. We didn't want it to be something extravagant because it wasn't that way to begin with, and the one next door isn't extravagant, and that came into the picture even though there are guidelines. So it seems to me that what we want to do in these neighborhoods is have houses and buildings, no matter how big they are, we want them to fit in. We have an awful lot of big white buildings trimmed in black in Tacoma right now, and they're glaring. We don't want that. So, it seems to me we should be able to write something like that into the design review guidelines that it needs to fit into the neighborhood, not necessarily the houses on either side of it but the neighborhood. We have some beautiful architecture in the Lincoln District that is not protected, and I think as a city we need to protect it. As a historic neighborhood, I am willing to step in and talk about that and help other neighborhoods come to grips with this.
- (7) **Karen Kelly** – As I drive around the city, I'm distressed as I see multifamily homes, multistory builds that are nothing more than flat front square boxes and long expanses of fronts with a smattering of windows. There are more of these types of new builds than not. As the multi-use areas in the city are beginning to be developed, design consideration needs to be given to the overall character and style of the surrounding neighborhood. So many builders throw these unsightly buildings up, get their tax benefit, and move on to the next build without regard for the community they are impacting. Those of us who live in those builds will feel no pride in their living space, which will result in a lack of care for their community, poor upkeep, and deterioration of the surrounding community. Nobody wants to live in or near ugly buildings. Builds that demonstrate articulated fronts, backs, and sides that reflect the character of the nearby community create community pride in the surrounding area, which results in overall long-term care and upkeep. Please consider supporting a design code limiting the number of feet on a front, back, or side build that would be allowed before an articulation or return is required.

The commission provided clarification requests from staff regarding yard/amenity standards, how pre-existing projects will be affected, spacing requirements, an implementation grace period, departures process, and exclusionary housing.

Vice-Chair Steele closed the public hearing at 6:45 p.m., reiterated that written comments are accepted until 5:00 p.m. on Friday, August 18, 2023, and thanked those who testified.

H. Upcoming Meetings (Tentative Agendas)

- (1) Agenda for the September 6, 2023, meeting includes:
 - Chair Election
 - Pacific Avenue Corridor Plan ("Picture Pac Ave")

- Home in Tacoma – Phase 2

(2) Agenda for the September 20, 2023, meeting includes:

- Urban Design Review Program – Debrief
- PC Annual Report and Work Program
- Historic District Moratorium – Public Hearing

(3) Agenda for the October 4, 2023, meeting includes:

- Home In Tacoma – Phase 2
- Historic District Moratorium – Debrief

Atkinson outlined the Commission's tentative calendar for the remainder of the year.

I. Communication Items

The Commission acknowledged receipt of communication items on the agenda.

Atkinson informed the Commission of the following:

- Pierce Transit's Bus Rapid Transit Project will be put on hold, and they will be moving ahead with an enhanced bus service to the Pacific Avenue/State Route 7 corridor.
- City Council took action on August 15, 2023, on the 2023 Annual Amendment package, mostly consistent with the Commission's recommendation
- City Council adopted Resolution No. 41259 on August 15, 2023, directing the Commission to review the City's home occupation standards.

J. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:57 p.m.

**These minutes are not a direct transcription of the meeting, but rather a brief capture. For full-length audio recording of the meeting, please visit:*
http://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/committees_boards_commissions/planning_commission/agendas_and_minutes/