



MINUTES (Approved as Amended on 4-1-15)

TIME: Wednesday, March 4, 2015, 4:00 p.m.
PLACE: Room 16, Tacoma Municipal Building North
733 Market Street, Tacoma, WA 98402
PRESENT: Chris Beale (Chair), Scott Winship (Vice-Chair), Donald Erickson, Benjamin Fields,
Meredith Neal, Stephen Wamback
ABSENT: Anna Petersen, Erle Thompson

A. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Beale called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m.

B. QUORUM CALL

A quorum was declared.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the regular meeting on February 18, 2015 were reviewed. Commissioner Erickson proposed two corrections to discussion item D2 – Code and Plan Cleanup; the corrections would clarify issues relating to “pedestrian streets” and “fencing standards.” The proposed amendments were accepted and the minutes were approved as amended.

D. DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. 2015-2019 Consolidated Plan

Shannon Johnson, Community and Economic Development, provided an overview of the draft Tacoma-Lakewood Regional Consolidated Plan for 2015-2019. The Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development is a five-year plan that sets goals and actions for expenditure of several federal grants. Funds are generally intended to benefit lower-income persons and neighborhoods, but can be used for housing, services, neighborhood improvements, and job development. Ms. Johnson noted that the three priority needs and associated goals described in the summary are consistent with many of the relevant policies within the Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan including neighborhood quality, housing preservation, affordability, and housing fairness.

Ms. Johnson discussed the goals of the plan which included establishing a 5-year strategy and investment plan; addressing housing, homeless, and community development needs across the city; establishing funding priorities and objectives; setting goals and performance indicators; and allocating available CDBG, HOME, and ESG funds to address priority needs. The City’s success in meeting the annual goals is reported following the end of each program year in the Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report (CAPER).

The 2015-2019 plan would be different from the 2010-2015 plan because it is a regional 5-year strategic plan for Tacoma and Lakewood. Aspects that would be similar to the previous plan included the separate annual action plans for each city, community and stakeholder involvement, and the strategic plan needs assessment.

The Consolidated Plan would also include items such as geographic priorities, priority needs, and anticipated resources.

Public Outreach and Participation had involved the Community Involvement Consultant and CED housing staff to connect various organizations and agencies since September 2014. They had also reached out to local leaders for one-on-one interviews, held focus groups with first responders, and conducted a public hearing. Upcoming outreach efforts would include Board and Committee meetings, a public hearing in April, and a City Council Study Session presentation in March. The Council is scheduled to adopt the plan on May 5th and the final online submission of the Consolidated Plan to HUD would be on May 15th.

Commissioners had the following comments and questions:

- Ms. Johnson was asked to clarify the relationship between Tacoma and Lakewood in the Consolidated Plan. She responded that it was a home consortium with Lakewood where the City of Tacoma receives the home funds and, through a consortium agreement, allocates a certain portion to Lakewood. Staff within Lakewood would administer the home funds with oversight from housing staff.
- Commissioner Wamback asked if they address the need for connectivity between housing and transit. Elliott Barnett, Planning Services Division, responded that there are many connections between the Consolidated Plan and other documents, but it is more focused on implementation.
- ~~Commissioner Wamback~~ [It was also](#) noted a project that had subsidized public transit for certain income levels and asked if there was any possibility of using housing money to support transit. Ms. Johnson responded that the Consolidated Plan was more general and that specific projects would be part of documents like the Annual Action Plan, but she would investigate the possibility.
- Chair Beale asked how infrastructure like street lighting would be prioritized. Ms. Johnson responded that they have a public improvement program to use CDBG dollars for public improvements and that she could follow up on how the priorities were determined.

2. 2015 GMA Update

Stephen Atkinson, Planning Services Division, facilitated a discussion of two issues related to the Comprehensive Plan update: the community workshops scheduled for March-April 2015 and the land use designations with a focus on the 6th Avenue and Pacific Avenue corridors.

Mr. Atkinson reported that they were planning a Community Workshop in each of the five council districts. The workshops would provide an opportunity for people to provide feedback on how they define their neighborhoods, where they perceive the center to be, and how they would market their neighborhood to people considering moving there. There would be questions on aging in place and neighborhood completeness to determine what kind of facilities, services, and housing options people would need to consider staying there long term. There would also be discussion on project prioritization to establish prioritization criteria. Mr. Atkinson requested that the Commissioners consider if there would be any interest in attending or participating.

Mr. Atkinson discussed the relationship between the land use designation review and the affordable housing work program. The goals for the housing strategy that would be most relevant to the current discussion were expanding the number and location of housing opportunities throughout the city and concentrating new housing near centers and corridors. Mr. Atkinson noted that 65% of current housing units are single family and 88% of the total residential land area is single family as well. He added that as residential areas have been downzoned over time the amount of area available for multifamily had been decreasing leaving few areas with significant capacity for that pattern of development.

The Corridor approach was described as being supported by the Comprehensive Plan implicitly with policy discussion about concentrations. Mr. Atkinson commented that the language within the plan encourages compatible land use along these corridors. He noted that there were opportunities to establish patterns of development that create housing and commercial opportunities that are currently supported by transit. The approach would maintain existing patterns, with transitions between residential

and commercial areas, while looking at opportunities for enhancing and intensifying those uses. They would generally follow the plan guidance, consider potential non-conformities, and promote transition areas. The corridors being studied for the proposed approach were N. Pearl Street, 6th Avenue, S. 12th Street, S. 38th Street, E. Portland Avenue, and Pacific Avenue. He noted that it was a good point to consider the zoning changes that might be made in the coming year to better implement the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Atkinson and Mr. Fitzgerald then provided more detailed descriptions of how the general approach would be applied by looking at case studies along the 6th Avenue and Pacific Avenue corridors. The implications for the approach were discussed. In some areas they would be looking at downzones from general commercial to neighborhood commercial zoning. In some circumstances they would need to revisit some of the development standards and use allowances in the neighborhood commercial zones.

Commissioners had the following comments and questions:

- Commissioner Neal asked why the Pearl corridor that was highlighted ended at N. 26th. Mr. Atkinson responded that they would be looking at areas outside of what had been highlighted but the study areas were being focused mainly due to inconsistencies between the current Comprehensive Plan and the zoning that is in place.
- Chair Beale suggested that S. 56th might be an interesting case study as well.
- Commissioner Wamback suggested considering S. 72nd between Portland and Pacific as a case study, noting an eclectic mix of uses.
- Commissioner Wamback asked if there was any conflict between the 20-minute neighborhood concept and the corridor concept. Mr. Atkinson responded that the nodes that made up the 20-minute neighborhood concept were often along the corridor and that there were also small commercial four corner nodes throughout neighborhoods.
- Commissioner Erickson asked to clarify that the focus would not be limited to old transit lines, but include current ones as well. Mr. Atkinson responded that the 20-minute neighborhood concept factors in current transit service including bus stops and station areas and that it is one of the considerations included in the corridor approach.
- Commissioner Wamback expressed concern that on the charts, labeling some things residential and others multifamily, as though they are not residential, could be perceived as bias. He noted that on other charts it had been referred to as “multifamily residential”.
- Commissioner Wamback commented that he recognized that the western side of 6th Ave., including big box stores, was an existing use, but was concerned about having C2 be the big box zone and that they could have more creative criteria like being near freeway exits.
- Commissioner Erickson asked about whether including single family along corridors meant an existing single family residential use or whether the structures were being used for offices or other commercial use. Mr. Atkinson responded that the areas proposed to remain single family in designation were predominantly single family in use and not just in structure.
- Commissioner ~~Wamback~~-Erickson commented that he felt that single family nodes along the corridors provide good breaks in the urban fabric.
- Commissioner Neal commented on the issue of transition areas around centers, stating that there may be more support for context sensitive transitions than area wide rezones.

3. Affordable Housing Planning Work Program (Annual Amendment #2015-08)

Elliott Barnett, Planning Services Division, facilitated the continuation of a discussion on the Affordable Housing Planning Work Program and preliminary options regarding Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's), Small Lots, and New Housing Options in Residential Districts. He recognized that Michael Mirra and Connie Brown, members of the AHPAG, were present. He anticipated returning to discuss Cottage Housing and PRDs, after which they would be able to put together a draft package. Mr. Barnett noted that the AHPAG Planning recommendation and Housing update was part of a broader discussion about housing affordability.

Mr. Barnett stated there are multiple reasons to consider infill strategies. In addition to housing affordability, mix, and choice, infill also supports transportation choice, economic development, sustainability and multiple other fundamental city policy objectives. On the other hand, infill strategies typically generate concerns from community members about how change might negatively impact on residential character. Mr. Barnett stated that staff's approach is to lay out a middle-of-the-road approach characterized by incremental, rather than rapid change. The work program would identify approaches supported by the community, ensure compatibility, fit infill into the zoning framework, and understand community priorities for incentives approaches.

Whether Detached ADU's should be allowed in single family areas was discussed. The current approach allows ADU's in all residential districts with detached allowed in R-3 and above, with updates from 2014 providing additional flexibility to the parking requirements and review process. Staff presented their preliminary recommendation to allow Detached ADU's in all R districts through an enhanced ADU permit with notice to immediate neighbors and discretion to examine any issues. In terms of standards, they could consider looking at parking and height/privacy.

Commissioners had the following comments and questions:

- Commissioner Erickson commented that he would hesitate to allow detached ADU's in all R districts at this time, as it would likely result in a backlash. The case would need to be built through quality design and smart siting. He added that the cities that are most successful do demonstrations to establish that it could work and also possibly provide incentives.
- Commissioner Erickson commented that Cottage Houses were popular due to being a built environment of architecturally compatible dwellings, which is a contrast to DADU's which could potentially clash with the character of the neighborhood. He also noted that there could be issues with car access and additional cars parking in the streets.
- Commissioner Neal asked if the three year home improvement property tax exemption could be used as an incentive. She commented that detached ADU's should be allowed in residential districts and suggested starting around business districts or transit centers to aid in acceptance of the concept.
- Commissioner Fields concurred that detached ADU's would be good in residential districts, but if they limit detached ADU's to R2 and up they should get rid of the parking standard and minimum lot size requirements.
- Commissioner Wamback commented that there would need to be continuity between the design of the ADU, the existing house, and the overall character of the neighborhood. Commissioner Wamback also commented that they would need to consider access issues or alleys could potentially become pedestrian access to ADU's. He also suggested allowing the detached ADU's only on owner occupied properties. Mr. Barnett responded that there are existing design and access standards in place intended to address these issues.
- Commissioner Fields expressed opposition to tying the design standards to the existing structure on the property, adding that construction technology and craftsmanship has changed. Mr. Barnett responded that in the design standards of the earlier proposal they had changed the language to require the design to be "compatible" rather than "the same".
- Vice-Chair Winship asked if a private covenant would preclude allowance of an ADU. Mr. Barnett responded that is possible, but enforcement would be a civil matter.
- Chair Beale, noting that there had been a similar proposal before the Planning Commission before, requested a review of what had been proposed and what the major concerns were from the community in anticipation of the feedback that will be received from neighborhood councils. He also expressed support for Commissioner Erickson's suggestion of a demonstration similar to what had been done in the City of Seattle some years prior where detached ADU's were allowed in certain areas to build a case before expanding.

Allowing further reduction in lot sizes was discussed. Mr. Barnett reviewed that in 2008 requirements for lot sizes had been reduced, provided that some design standards were met, and in 2014 they had provided additional flexibility on lot width. He then presented staff's preliminary recommendation to add

flexibilities to the code by updating the existing Critical Areas density bonus tool, allowing lot size averaging, and allowing smaller lots in transition areas such as on arterials and transit routes.

Commissioners had the following comments and questions:

- Commissioner Erickson asked, [based on the examples shown by staff](#), if the process of getting a lot to the minimum size could, through a lot line adjustment, increase the lot size of an adjacent property. Mr. Barnett responded that with the current setback standards, you wouldn't have a cascade that goes down the block.
- Commissioner Fields commented that if cottage housing is going to be added as an option, more flexibility will be needed for small lots, or cottage housing will be the preferred option as it would allow more units. Mr. Barnett acknowledged that they would need to return to discuss small lots after cottage housing to make sure they work together.
- Commissioner Wamback expressed concern that there could be scenarios where an investor buys a block of marginal housing to build what is in effect multifamily housing, in which case the more effective path would be a rezone. He added that he wouldn't want to create a tool that reduces owner occupied housing.
- Chair Beale commented that they should consider moving more aggressively towards considering smaller lot sizes. It was noted that other jurisdictions like Seattle allow lots as small as 2500 square feet while Tacoma has a minimum of 4,500 square feet.

Allowing denser housing types in single family areas was discussed. Mr. Barnett noted that the current approach permits denser housing types in higher zoning districts and allows it in single family through PRD's and Historic CUPs. Staff's preliminary proposal would be to update the existing tools and look at some limited new options. Specifically, staff recommended consideration for allowing two-unit developments on larger corner lots [\(i.e., a duplex unit or a "great house" with frontage on each street\)](#), updating the existing criteria allowing two and three-family development in the R-2 SRD and HMR SRD Districts, and making multi-family a conditional use in the R-3 District. Design standards would be developed for each of these proposals.

Commissioners had the following comments and questions:

- Commissioner Neal requested more details on allowing denser housing within walking distance of the centers, adding that many people want to be within walking distance of centers particularly the elderly and people with disabilities. Chair Beale added that he would prefer the walking distance requirement rather than the corner lot requirement.
- Commissioner Wamback commented that these proposals being discussed were ranked as a low priority options within the AHPAG report. He cautioned that they were drifting away from the initial goal of affordable housing and towards housing flexibility.
- Commissioner Neal asked if there would be a way to require an architectural designer be part of the process to ensure quality. Commissioner Fields responded that State Law requires an architect for anything over 4,000 square feet. Mr. Boudet added the discretionary permit proposed for detached ADU's would ensure a level of quality, dependent on the standards established by the process, though quality was difficult to quantify in administrative design standards.

Brian Boudet, Planning Services Division Manager, commented that the history in Tacoma's residential areas for the last three decades has been downzoning. This was attributed to lack of trust from the community to increase density in a reasonable way, which had been a factor as to why proposals for ADU's had failed in the past. This makes it important to make sure that design issues are properly addressed. On the other hand, increasing design standards, particularly if it involves creating a design review process like those used in other jurisdictions, can raise concerns from the development community. Commissioner Fields added that design review can become too focused on details and take freedom away from the architect and owners. He commented that design review ideally focuses on quality without being prescriptive. Commissioner Erickson noted that the City of Tacoma does not have a design commission for public projects.

Mr. Barnett discussed next steps. He would plan on a discussion of cottage housing and PRDs at the next meeting and follow up with a discussion on all of the recommendations to examine how they interconnect. He added that the residential character study, being worked on by Portland State University graduate planning students, was going to be completed on the same timeline and would hopefully inform the design standards.

E. COMMUNICATION ITEMS & OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Boudet updated the Commission on the Billboard Community Working Group presentation to the Council Study Session covering the discussion so far and the work to be done to put mechanisms in place. The next step is to go to Council for a formal resolution to accept the report. He noted that digital billboards had not been part of the Working Group's recommendations and that the Mayor had made a statement that digital billboards could have been a mechanism for significant change. Commissioner Erickson suggested that there should be an examination of previous work by the Planning Commission in comparison to the final report of the Community Working Group. Discussion ensued on the issues to be considered as the process moves forward.

Lihuang Wung, Planning Services Division, noted the resignation of Commissioner Sean Gaffney on February 28, 2015 due to the increasing demands of his daytime job and that his leadership and dedication would be missed. The Architecture, Historic Preservation and/or Urban Design position that is being vacated is scheduled to expire on June 30, 2016. Mr. Wung commented that he had contacted the City Clerk's Office regarding that position and three other positions that are expiring in June 2015 to begin the recruitment process. He would provide further information in late March/early April as the openings are posted online.

Chair Beale asked when they would return to the discussion of Mixed-Use Centers. Mr. Wung responded that they would resume the discussion of MUCs either at the next meeting or on April 1st.

Chair Beale asked for an update on how things are working with the planned action EIS's associated with the three Downtown Tacoma subarea plans and if there were issues that the Commission would need to consider to make the process successful.

F. ADJOURNMENT:

At 7:04 p.m., the meeting of the Planning Commission was concluded.