



MINUTES (Approved as Amended, 08-21-19)

TIME: Wednesday, August 7, 5:00 p.m.

PLACE: Council Chambers, Tacoma Municipal Building, 1st Floor
747 Market Street, Tacoma, WA 98402

PRESENT: Anna Petersen (Chair), Carolyn Edmonds, Ryan Givens, David Horne, Jeff McInnis, Brett Santhuff, Andrew Strobel, Alyssa Torrez

ABSENT: None

A. CALL TO ORDER AND QUORUM CALL

The meeting was called to order at 5:02pm. A quorum was declared.

Susan Haigh, City's Clerk Office, swore in Chair Petersen for her re-appointed 3-year term as Commissioner.

B. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

The agenda was approved. The minutes for the July 17, 2019 meeting was approved as submitted.

C. PUBLIC COMMENTS

One public comment from Gary Knudson was submitted via email prior to the meeting, summarized as follows:

- Mr. Knudson commented on the Urban Design Studio and the Design Review Program as a design professional, Director/President of Historic Tacoma, a private citizen, and a member of the Project Advisory Group. He commended the UDS Operations Manual by Winter & Company and encouraged the Commission to continue supporting the program.

No other public comments were received at the meeting.

D. DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Urban Design Studio

Mesa Sherriff, Planning Services Division, introduced two consultants that have been working on the program, Noré Winter from Winter & Company and Keith Walzak from VIA Architecture. Mr. Sherriff gave an overview of what would be presented. He informed the Commission that they had met with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Project Advisory Group (PAG). Feedback from that meeting was being compiled for the Commission's review.

Noré Winter, Winter & Company, explained that his role focused on the technical aspects of the program and proceeded to present the Internal Operations Manuals (IOM), which would be the instructions for the program once completed. The IOM includes recommendations for organizational structure, review implementation, timeline, resources, etc. The recommendations are based on the One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan and research on peer communities. Mr. Winter also detailed roles of staff, Design Review Board, and the public. While there are communities where staff conduct all reviews (no review board) or the review board is only advisory, it is recommended to have a Design Review Board with decision-making authority for special projects.

Commissioner Edmonds asked how the researched communities were chosen and how they were compared to Tacoma. Most of them are Western cities that have similarities to Tacoma and some sort of Urban Design Review (UDR) program. Other cities are former clients to Winter & Company that could offer valuable input on how their programs work. To determine the success of the program, evaluation would come from the number of projects, quality, staff report, periodic review, and public comments, etc.

Commissioner Santhuff expressed his support for the Design Review Board and inquired about the possibility of expanding the eligibility to allow non-resident professionals to join the board. Mr. Winter pointed out that many communities provided such opportunities by having a statement of qualification that focuses on experience and active participation, instead of residency.

Commissioner Givens was excited about guidelines for UDR but cautious about the Design Review Board. He suggested utilizing the Design Review Board only for high-profile projects or ones that are beyond our codes. An option is to include an intent statement broad enough to allow for alternative compliance.

Three fee structures were presented to the Commission: 1) full cost recovery, 2) reasonable cost recovery (recommended), and 3) minor fee. The reasonable cost recovery means fixed fee with multiple tiers based on the scale of project. A different committee will determine the fee structure but the Commission is welcomed to provide input. Mr. Winter also went over some data on administrative work load such as staff time to review a project, board meeting length, etc.

Commissioner Santhuff wanted to make sure that periodic reviews would include both administratively approved projects and design reviewed projects, and that the public would be able to comment on both.

Keith Walzak, VIA Architecture, began his presentation with the seven Main Community Design Themes from the Tacoma Comprehensive Plan, which played a primary role in shaping the design principles provided in the packet to the Commission. Mr. Walzak went on to review the study areas (Mixed-Used Centers, Downtown District, and Pedestrian Corridors), highlighting the characteristics of each area and how they would affect the design guidelines. Also presented was an outline of the Table of Contents for the design guidelines.

Commissioner Edmonds questioned if there was any requirement on having someone from the Arts Commission or a professional artist on the Design Review Board. She also wanted to be cautious about the fee and funding of the program, so as to not burden the development communities and clients.

Commissioner Givens expressed two main concerns. He wanted to ensure the guidelines would not require total reconstruction of the whole site for there are buildings that should be preserved. He is also concerned about streetscape; the streets sometimes do not match with the vision of the project. He suggested having a streetscape pattern book. In addition to a fixed fee, there could be an hourly rate for larger projects.

Commissioner Strobel commented on the importance of having someone from Historic or Landmarks Commission on the Design Review Board. Additionally, the “Distinctive Character” principle should be more of “integrative.” It is preferable to identify and unify characters of a neighborhood to preserve, rather than assigning a character during development.

Given the broad range of information, Chair Petersen requested outlines for the Commission on what to focus on. Regarding fees, she wanted staff to consider charging hourly fee in addition to the base rate for extended projects. There should also be consideration for historic structures while developing the guidelines and how it would apply to them.

Commissioner McInnis ~~concurred with Commissioner Strobel on his “Distinctive Character” comment, as well as with Commissioner Givens and Edmonds with their view on fees.~~ followed up on Commissioner Strobel’s “Distinctive Character” comment, noting that “distinctive” did not necessarily mean “beautiful” or “fitting.” It would be valuable to have clarifying language to ensure the design fit with the setting. He also raised a concern about fees and wanted to ensure that the fee structure would not create an additional process on top of the design process and make it difficult for developers.

Commissioner Santhuff noted that streetscape had an important part in the place-making process of a neighborhood. He used the Lincoln District as an example where the City used the streetscape to create a unified identity. The Mixed-Used Centers in this program have not been looked at in such way, and he

wanted staff to look more carefully into that. He also suggested a couple of design principles, “Resiliency” and “Thoughtful Transition.”

Following Commissioner Santhuff’s “Resiliency” remark, Commissioner Torrez pointed out that the community had been working to include youth and family-friendly spaces, which should be considered in the design principles.

Commissioner Givens commented that the principles were not specific enough. In response to this concern, Mr. Walzak explained that the principles were universal guidelines; finer details would be included in the intent statements and policies.

Mr. Winter added that if the footing of a building did not reach a specific size, it would not be subject to the UDR. Staff and consultants would not recommend changing that unless the Commission instructed otherwise. He also clarified that the UDR were only addressing mixed-used centers, commercial, and multi-family areas. Formally recognized historic sites, properties, and districts will adhere to Landmarks review process.

The vantage point of the UDR program is to enhance human scale, whether it be experience, quality, safety, etc.; it does not limit to visuals.

Commissioner Edmonds urged caution when catering a principle to a specific age group, for another age group might demand the same attention. Commissioner Strobel agreed and noted that this issue might categorize under “Accessibility.” The design elements should be accessible and attractive to all.

Chair Petersen pointed out that there were laws to make sure new developments would be accessible to older citizens while there was none in place for younger citizens.

The meeting was recessed at 6:20pm and resumed at 6:28pm.

2. Planning Commission Rules and Regulations (“Bylaws”)

Lihuang Wung, Planning Services Division, gave a brief overview of the Planning Commission Rules and Regulations (“Bylaws”). The Bylaws is generally reviewed and updated every year, but can be done anytime as needed.

The only change that actually needs to happen is the meeting location, from Room 16 of the Tacoma Municipal Building North to the Council Chambers of the Tacoma Municipal Building.

The nominations and elections of Chair and Vice-Chair normally take place at the first meeting of September. This year’s first September meeting might be canceled since it is right after Labor Day. The nominations and elections could be postponed until the next meeting in September or moved up to the meeting on August 21.

Chair Petersen did not see a need to amend the Bylaws.

Mr. Wung presented the proposal for telephonic participation modeled after the City Council’s rules, and explained the pros and cons of this proposal.

Commissioner Strobel pointed out that the 48-hour notice requirement would not serve the purpose of “quorum saver,” but recognized the telephonic participation as a good alternative while a Commissioner was away or in traffic.

Commissioner Edmonds concurred with Commissioner Strobel. From her experience when she was on the phone to establish a quorum, it was difficult to follow the conversation and tell the voices apart. She made a suggestion to exclude telephonic participation from public hearings. It is important for the public to see the Commission and for the Commissioners to be present at public hearings.

Commissioner Horne voiced his support for the proposal and suggested including some language to discourage frequent use.

Chair Petersen restated her stand on making no changes to the Bylaws, reasoning that the current Bylaws allowed telephonic participation by default and the 48-hour requirement would not solve the quorum issue. In the case that telephonic participation was added to the Bylaws, its requirement on hardware might actually prevent the Commission from having a meeting instead of helping.

Commissioner Santhuff noted he would be okay with the amendment if the 48-hour notice was modified. He asked staff to look into Zoom or Skype meetings to provide the remote participant with a visual of the Commission.

Commissioner Strobel directed a question towards Commissioner Edmonds regarding her comment on public hearings. He wanted to clarify whether she meant exclusion during voting after a hearing or exclusion from the hearing itself. Commissioner Edmonds was mostly concerned about the public reception.

Both Chair Petersen and Commissioner Edmonds agreed that utilizing Zoom or Skype meeting was a good option.

Commissioner Givens stated that he was leaning towards making no changes.

Commissioner Torrez expressed her support for the telephonic participation and concurred that the 48-hour notice would need revising.

Based on the Commission's input, Mr. Wung would revise the language of the proposal and return at the next meeting. He then moved on to review the guidelines on absences in the Bylaws, emphasizing that the verb choice ("should," "may," etc.) was advisory rather than commanding, and presented the number of absences each Commissioner has in the past year. Overall, the Commission does not have an issue with absences, except the special meeting that was scheduled outside of the Commission's regular calendar.

Chair Petersen noted that the advisory language in the Bylaws was intentional.

Discussion ensued. Commissioner Strobel suggested excluding special meetings from the absence count by amending the Bylaws language on the subject. Other Commissioners commented that, given the advisory language, such a change by itself would be too minor to go through the amendment process. They would be more inclined if other changes were necessary.

Commissioner Edmonds had questions about the meeting location. Mr. Wung explained that all after-hour meetings had been moved to the Tacoma Municipal Building for security reasons. There are other meeting rooms in the building, but none is available at the Commission meeting times. It was also clarified that the official records of the Planning Commission meetings are the meeting minutes, not the recordings, since the Commission has an approval process for the minutes.

On the topic of "public comment" as an agenda item, Commissioner Strobel commented that it was within the public's rights to make public comments, even when they were similar and repetitive. He also recommended having an established cut-off time for meetings. According to the Robert's Rules, the Chair has the ability to adjourn a meeting at any time following proper procedures. Commissioner Santhuff stated that he enjoyed hearing public comments but the Chair also had the discretion to allow public comments on discussion items or not. Former Chair Wambach had not exercised the aforementioned discretion due to concern for consistency to the public, and Chair Petersen agreed.

In conclusion, no action was taken at the meeting. Mr. Wung would come back at the next meeting with revised language for the Bylaws.

E. TOPICS OF THE UPCOMING MEETING (AUGUST 21, 2019)

- (1) Environmental Action Plan Update
- (2) Planning Commission Bylaws

F. COMMUNICATION ITEMS

The Commission acknowledged receipt of communication items on the agenda. Mr. Wung suggested that the Commission's meeting on September 4, 2019 be canceled. The Commission concurred.

G. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:27pm.

**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/