



MINUTES (Approved on 5-20-15)

TIME: Wednesday, May 6, 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, Meredith Neal,
Anna Petersen, Stephen Wamback
ABSENT: Benjamin Fields, Erle Thompson

A. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Beale called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m.

B. QUORUM CALL

A quorum was declared.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the regular meeting on April 15, 2015 were reviewed. Chair Beale amended a bulleted comment on McKinley and Lower Portland being considered as candidates for deletion to note that the observation was based on the report of the Mixed-Use Centers Review and not his personal opinion. The minutes were approved as amended.

D. DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. 2015 Comprehensive Plan Update

Stephen Atkinson, Planning Services Division, reviewed subjects associated with the Comprehensive Plan Update, focusing on the Housing Element. The following three items were the focus of the discussion: Relevant highlights from the recent community workshops and outreach; Background on the existing conditions and housing needs that inform the update of the Housing Element; A draft of the proposed Housing Element.

Community outreach had included five workshops, non-English speaking outreach, walking tours, and a survey. Mr. Atkinson reported that the feedback had a focus on connectivity and public gathering places as part of neighborhood identity. He noted support for making community facilities, libraries, and cultural institutions more available to the community. A full summary would be provided at the next meeting.

Mr. Atkinson introduced the team of Graduate Students from Portland State University who had examined residential pattern areas throughout the city. The team had also conducted several walking tours and sent out a survey that dealt with visual preferences across the city. They discussed metrics that would be used to identify pattern areas across the city: topography; alleyways and block structure system; intersection junctions; median year built; and land-improvement ratio. The next steps would be to determine how to integrate the findings into the Comprehensive Plan as a design urban form component of the plan and return with recommendations for the Commission to consider at the June 3rd meeting.

The Housing Snapshot was discussed. Based on data from the many people who were looking at housing issues, the overall messages were: Tacoma is an affordable option to buy or rent, regionally;

Tacoma has high rates of cost-burdened households; and existing housing conditions continue to be a concern. Mr. Atkinson noted that the diversity of housing units was currently 64% single family, 33% multi-family, and only 14% of total structures between 2-9 units in size.

The Housing Element was discussed. Mr. Atkinson commented that the current Housing Element was in transition, with mixed messages and intents that don't go fully into policy statements. For the proposed Housing Element, Mr. Atkinson highlighted new policy directions for items in the Goals and Policies section. Diverse and Expanding Options would include goals of expanding and diversifying in all neighborhoods; maintaining sufficient capacity to meet housing targets; and striving to capture 35% of Urban Pierce County's Residential Growth. Housing Access goals would include equitable access and continuing to address fair housing concerns; fostering inclusive communities; recognizing affordability as barrier; anticipating and monitoring effects of investments, plans, and actions on displacement and taking corrective actions; and aging in place. Housing Location goals would include higher density housing in and around centers; promoting transit supportive densities on corridors; striving to accommodate 80% of new units within and around centers; and new affordable housing in high opportunity areas. Housing Affordability goals would include: household prosperity; supporting regional planning; and promoting a housing continuum. Health, Safety and Efficiency goals for new housing developments included support for healthy, active living; energy efficient, low impact, durable development; walkable site design and integration into community. Goals for current housing stock focused on repair and rehabilitation.

Commissioners had the following comments and questions:

- Commissioner Wamback reported that he was hearing concerns on the issue of turnover in housing with current groups of renters, who live and work locally, at risk of being displaced by people who commute to places like Seattle.
- Commissioner Wamback recommended clearer language establishing that neighborhoods targeted for increased density should be prioritized for investments.
- Commissioner Petersen noted that no policy directly focuses on the townhouses and asked why staff believed that more townhouses were needed. Mr. Atkinson responded that there was increasing interest in middle and lower densities, particularly in the corridor areas. He added that placing zoning priorities on Mixed-Use Centers while downzoning other areas has reduced the capacity to do things like townhouses.
- Chair Beale noting the issue of subarea demographics in terms of setting affordable housing goals in the Hilltop Subarea Plan, requested policy addressing the issue.
- Chair Beale suggested Policy H-4.2 be rephrased to "at least 80% AMI".

2. Affordable Housing Planning Work Program – Phase 3

Elliott Barnett, Planning Services Division, facilitated a review on preliminary staff recommendations of code changes for residential infill and affordable housing options. He noted that in the coming month staff would also be consulting with the Affordable Housing Policy Advisory Group (AHPAG) and other groups. They would likely return to the Commission in June with the full package of code revisions.

Mr. Barnett stated that the City of Tacoma still operates with the general zoning approach first adopted in 1953, with some changes over the years. However, while that system works well it has outlawed some of the smaller lot sizes and mix of housing types that were common in pre-zoning neighborhoods. This proposal is an opportunity to fine tune residential zoning to make it more reflective of current demographic and economic trends resulting in increasing need for more housing choices in walkable neighborhoods. The average single family lot sizes were reviewed, ranging from an average square footage of 11,796 in R1 to 4,168 in R4. Mr. Barnett discussed the "missing middle" housing types (from 2-units on up to lower density multifamily development), which are not being produced partly because of a lack of space zoned to permit these housing types. He added that the lack of a range of densities in residential areas limits how walkable, transit supportive, and affordable the centers can be.

Mr. Barnett then gave an overview of the policy proposals, including the following:

1. Lot size flexibility options were discussed. Mr. Barnett reported that there are a significant number of larger lots with a home in the middle, making infill difficult. Lot size averaging would allow lot area to shrink as long as the overall density for the short plat is achieved. The Critical Areas Preservation Ordinance is an existing tool that would provide credit for area with wetlands and buffers. Staff proposed simplifying the tool to make it more effective.

Commissioners requested additional details and clarification for lot size flexibility options. Mr. Barnett responded that the density bonus would be in the context of a single development; the initial lot size would need to be at least twice the minimum required lot size; and staff was still considering whether to also provide setback flexibility. It was recommended that it clearly be noted on the face of the short plat that the lot had been averaged.

2. Special Review Districts were discussed. Mr. Barnett discussed the proposal to make R2-SRD and HMR-SRD districts into smaller single-family lot districts with some options for 2- and 3-family development. He discussed the historic pattern of small single family lots, noting that in many areas currently zoned –SRD there are many smaller lots which would not be permitted under current zoning. The recommendation of staff was a reduced lot size and some modifications to Conditional Use Permits for 2 and 3 family unit development.
3. The Pilot Residential Infill Program was discussed. Mr. Barnett discussed the proposal to create a special administrative design review process for several new infill housing options.. The program would include a heightened review process incorporating design principles to ensure the infill was context sensitive. The options reviewed in the proposal included Detached Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) for R-2, R-2SRD, and HMR-SRD; Corner 2-family for R-2; Multi-family for R-3; and Cottage Housing for all residential zones. The Pilot program would generate input to help refine the code for these housing types.

Commissioner Petersen noted concerns previously expressed over Detached ADU's by the North End Neighborhood Council such as maintaining neighborhood character, the difficulty of enforcing the landlord occupation requirement, emergency access, additional strain on infrastructure, and the potential for Detached ADU's to be sold as condominiums. She recommended further discussion with the neighborhood councils on the potential impacts. There was a request for more information on the administrative design review process. Mr. Barnett explained that it provided an additional layer of review on a site specific basis and would seek to ensure that there would be positive examples of the pilot infill options. Chair Beale suggested including the neighborhood councils in the review process committee. Commissioner Wamback expressed concern from an equity standpoint that R-1 was not included.

4. Planned Residential Districts Updates were discussed. The major changes proposed for PRD's were to reduce the minimum site size to 1 acre, reduce the common open space requirement to 15% of the site, and to offer a density bonus of up to 2 times the base zoning density. 50% of the density bonus would be reserved for affordable housing. Chair Beale suggested including an incentive that allows for a mix of unit types.
5. Incentives and Upzones were discussed. To create the affordable housing incentives code section they would be following RCW 36.70A.540. There would be a focus on larger sites and a sliding scale with workforce housing at 80% AMI, lower income housing at 50% AMI, and an ability to do a fee in lieu option. Incentives would be available in the PRD's, Downtown, and in the form of fee reductions. The same ratios would be required for privately initiated upzone requests.

Mr. Barnett reviewed the AHPAG recommendations that they were not currently proposing including density bonuses in additional areas; a housing option for Transfer of Development Rights; and required affordability with City-initiated upzones.

The next steps were reviewed. Staff will return with draft code in June. They were still working on conservation districts, design standards, calibrating incentives, and sustainability features.

Chair Beale asked for additional information on the City process enhancements and the preapproved design library specifically for DADU's. There was support from Commissioners for building the design library in advance as part of the pilot program.

3. Tacoma Link Light Rail Expansion

Lihuang Wung, Planning Services Division, facilitated a discussion concerning a draft letter the Planning Commission was considering forwarding to the City Council regarding the Tacoma Link Light Rail Expansion Project. Mr. Wung reviewed the previous discussions in April leading to the decision to forward a comment letter to the City Council including the comments, concerns, and recommendations expressed at the previous meetings.

Commissioner Erickson noted that he had not been present for the discussion of comments to be included in the letter and suggested a possible addendum to the letter concerning station design and the need for a body to ensure the quality of the final design. Some Commissioners expressed support for the design review proposal as an opportunity to improve the public realm.

The following changes to the letter were recommended by the Commission:

- Removing the line discussing reevaluation of ridership projections from item 1.
- Adding a revised version of Commissioner Erickson's recommendation for a Link Expansion Advisory Committee to review and advise design for the new stations.
- Removing item 4.
- Combining items 5, 6, and the design review recommendation into a single recommendation.
- Language from the Hilltop Subarea Plan would be used to support the creation of an advisory committee.
- Removing from item 3 the reference to the Hilltop Police Substation as a significant community amenity.

Commissioner Petersen made a motion, which was seconded by Commissioner Neal, to approve the letter as amended. The motion passed unanimously.

E. COMMUNICATION ITEMS & OTHER BUSINESS

Lihuang Wung updated the Commission on membership vacancies. There were currently four positions available.

Brian Boudet, Manager of the Planning Services Division, updated the Commission on the following items:

1. The Landmarks Preservation Commission had recently held a public hearing on the West Slope Conservation District. Feedback had been largely supportive with some discussion on whether the Conservation District should regulate exterior materials or garages. The issue would likely come before the Planning Commission in June.
2. A study concerning Work/Live units was being reviewed to identify building code issues. It would be discussed at the Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee at the end of May.
3. The North Slope Historic District had submitted a private annual amendment application to change the district's intensity designation to single family.

Commissioner Wamback reported on having heard a number of concerns about the traffic impact of the new Chick-fil-A on South 38th street.

F. ADJOURNMENT:

At 7:10 p.m., the meeting of the Planning Commission was concluded.