



**MINUTES** (Approved on 12-7-16)

**TIME:** Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 4:00 p.m.  
**PLACE:** Room 16, Tacoma Municipal Building North  
733 Market Street, Tacoma, WA 98402  
**PRESENT:** Chris Beale (Chair), Jeff McInnis, Meredith Neal, Anna Petersen, Brett Santhuff  
Dorian Waller, Scott Winship, Jeremy Woolley  
**ABSENT:** Stephen Wamback (Vice-Chair)

**A. CALL TO ORDER AND QUORUM CALL**

Chair Beale called the meeting to order at 4:04 p.m. A quorum was declared.

**B. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES OF OCTOBER 19, 2016 AND NOVEMBER 2, 2016**

The agenda was approved. The minutes of the regular meetings on October 19, 2016 and November 2, 2016 were reviewed and approved as submitted.

**C. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Chair Beale opened the floor for public comments. The following citizens provided comments:

- 1) Valarie Fyalka-Munoz, Michael's Plaza:  
Ms. Fyalka-Munoz reported that she was the property manager at Michael's Plaza. She asked where the City planned to move the businesses that the road goes through in the Tacoma Mall Subarea Plan. She commented that they would like to keep their tenants and that they would like to keep doing business as a retail shopping center.
- 2) John Brekke:  
Mr. Brekke reported that he was a commercial property owner in the Tacoma Mall area. He expressed concern that the connectivity plan has aspects that would harm property values and create disincentives for owners and businesses. He asked that the Commission consider recommending a practical connectivity plan that is tied to parcel development, is mindful of private property rights, and provides detail on who is financially responsible for connectivity improvements. He commented that owners need high thresholds for compliance with connectivity and that typical tenant improvements should not trigger connectivity requirements.

**D. DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**1. Dialogue with Neighborhood Councils – North End**

Dave Prather, Jodi Cook, and Jim Merritt of the North End Neighborhood Council facilitated a discussion with the Planning Commission on their neighborhood's issues, concerns, needs, and priorities.

Ms. Cook shared feedback from citizens on the visible changes that had been taking place around the district and changes to the zoning. She noted that one of the comments provided had expressed concern about the amount of dramatic change that they had witnessed occurring since they had moved to the neighborhood the previous year. Ms. Cook reviewed photos of a new building on North Prospect Street between two turn of the century homes. She commented that based on the descriptions in past Comprehensive Plans it wasn't what people had been expecting, resulting in concern that similar zoning and development would be coming their way. Ms. Cook commented that they would like to be part of the discussion that is occurring on density, rather than how it is currently evolving.

Mr. Merritt discussed the need for community stakeholders and single family residential investors to be made aware of what is happening early in the process, before significant money had been spent on a new project. He commented that the purpose was not to make an exhaustive review of design detail, but instead to engage the public early enough that they can still have meaningful input.

Residential and commercial zoning was discussed. Mr. Merritt discussed excessive commercial space taking away from land that could be residential, commenting that that it would be better to have people living in some areas than commercial uses that would not make enough income to survive. He added that more residential zoning would be a positive for supporting the commercial space that would be available. Mr. Merritt recommended maintaining compactness of mixed use centers with buffers between higher density and single family residential. He noted duplex and triplex concerns due to absentee owners which can lead to a lack of maintenance and supervision problems. Mr. Merritt noted support for accessory dwelling units (ADUs) so long as the owner lives on the site.

Ms. Cook discussed the public engagement process, reporting that there had been consensus from the public that they are not being engaged in the process early enough. Ms. Cook expressed concern that with the Proctor South development the developer had been responsible for doing the traffic study which had focused on nearby intersections but had not considered effect of additional cars cutting through the neighborhood. There were similar concerns that the focus of the parking study had also been too limited, Ms. Cook noting that people who had lived in the area for many years could not find parking in front of their homes. She commented that they had also heard concerns related to children who walk to school with increased traffic coming from the developments.

The Cushman substation was discussed. Ms. Cook commented that it was a beautiful historic building and that there was support for adding it to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places. She highlighted policies from the Comprehensive Plan concerning the repurpose of electrical substations and preservation of Tacoma's historic character. Ms. Cook noted that a study of mixed-use centers had determined that the Proctor area lacked open space and that the location could potentially provide it for the surrounding neighborhood. Mr. Merritt commented that Tacoma Public Utility (TPU) is part of the ownership of the City of Tacoma and that the building was an asset of the City of Tacoma. He wanted to have a discussion about whether the only thing that they could do with the building would be to sell it at a fair market value. He noted policy UF-13.28 which encouraged the conversion of electrical substations for recreational purposes, adding that he would like to see a public debate on the final use.

Commissioners provided the following questions and comments:

- Chair Beale commented that it was interesting to see an area that was getting the kind of growth and development that would be coming to other neighborhoods. He commented that it was encouraging that the Planning Commission and the people experiencing the impacts were on the same page on topics like design review and public notification.
- Commissioner Petersen commented that the Planning Commission shares their concerns about school safety and safe walks to school. She encouraged the representatives present to consider attending the Safe Routes to School discussion and open house that evening.
- Commissioner McInnis asked what the timing was on the final decommissioning of the entire Cushman substation facility and what would need to take place if the City was to step into that process. Mr. Prather responded that TPU would be completed by the end of 2017, but the bylaws required that the site be sold at fair market value. Mr. Merritt noted that TPU has other uses on properties that are part of the ownership of the City of Tacoma, noting recreational activities near the Alder Dam on properties owned by the City through TPU.

## **2. Tacoma Mall Neighborhood Subarea Plan**

Elliott Barnett, Planning Services Division, provided an update on the status of the project, focusing on the proposed street network and key issues related to connectivity. He reviewed that they had pushed the timeline of the project back several months for additional outreach. Mr. Barnett reviewed the outreach to date, reporting that there had been support from commercial stakeholders for things that support a positive vision of the area like parks and schools; for City regulatory tools like an up-front SEPA review; and City leadership in the area to attract regional funding. He reviewed that they had also received

comments on permit process streamlining, offsite improvement costs, and business retention tools. Comments focused on the plan included discussion of the street network, interest in limiting the connectivity requirement, emphasis on voluntary actions rather than requirements, City commitment to prioritize investments in the area, and specific comments relating to the zoning proposals.

Mr. Barnett reviewed that issues with existing transportation conditions included the large block pattern, the lack of connectivity, existing traffic being channeled towards arterials, issues related to safety, lack of bike facilities, gaps in pedestrian facilities, and street conditions. He reviewed a map of the existing street network, noting the presence of large parcels.

The connectivity already in the code was discussed. Mr. Barnett reviewed that much had changed since the existing development patterns were set and that the current code requirements would prevent the neighborhood from being rebuilt with the current layout. He noted that the reasons for the street network changes being proposed included anticipating population growth; creating value with visibility and additional access; that the large block patterns were creating zoning challenges; and the desire to create a more cohesive and connected system than what they would get by applying the existing access standards in the code. Mr. Barnett reported that based on the input that had been received, they had a number of updates to the plan including street network changes, a tiered street system, connectivity requirement specifics, and funding.

Street network changes were discussed. Mr. Barnett reviewed that the first draft of the street network had two areas with significant changes proposed to the existing street network: in the Tacoma Mall area and in the northwest quadrant where there had been a significant amount of change that had generated concerns from the property owners. The revised street network would follow more of a grid pattern in the northwest quadrant, rather than following the topography. There were also additional minor refinements made to the revised street network and the addition of the I-5 off ramp to the map.

Mr. Barnett discussed the tiered street system concept. Tier 1 included projects critical to the system such as the loop road. Tier 2 streets would create 600 by 600 block structures, which would establish a good overall distribution of trips. Tier 3 streets would establish site access and overall mode shift. They would also require a large block connectivity plan similar to the model used by the City of Lacey. He noted shaded blocks on the map where an additional connection would be required, meeting certain performance standards. They had also identified where it would not be feasible to make a connection due to topography or limited access roadways.

The connectivity plan concept was discussed. Mr. Barnett reviewed that they would establish the alignments for Tier 3 streets and create connectivity standards to allow a 650 foot maximum frontage, a 1800 foot perimeter maximum, and a 350 foot pedestrian frontage maximum. Once the connectivity plan was put into place they would start treating it as a future street in terms of building placement with dedication occurring when major redevelopment occurs.

Mr. Barnett discussed connectivity thresholds, reviewing that their proposal was to require a plan for the Tier 3 connection at a lower threshold, though they hadn't determined how low that threshold should be. Mr. Barnett commented that it would be difficult for many people's business models if the threshold was at the level of a tenant improvement or maintenance. For dedication of right of way or street construction, Mr. Barnett commented that they recognized that the threshold would be for a much larger action. He discussed the thresholds used in Bellevue, which were lower, and Lacey, which were more flexible.

Mr. Barnett discussed funding. He noted that there were a range of approaches from other cities for public funding helping the systems work. Whether the City would provide funding to construct the new roadway was not in direct control of the Planning Commission, but Mr. Barnett expressed interest in the Commission's thoughts on the appropriate level of contribution to make it equitable.

Commissioners provided the following questions and comments:

- Commissioner Petersen asked for clarification on the 350 foot pedestrian frontage maximum. Julia Walton, 3 Square Blocks, clarified that it was the maximum linear distance allowed before a 3rd Tier connection would be required.

- Commissioner McInnis asked what the pedestrian connections would look like and what they would require. Ms. Walton responded that she had been looking at through block connections 24 feet wide, but that it could be as narrow as an urban trail or alley.
- Commissioner McInnis commented that people would not want to walk through the industrial areas. Commissioner Petersen commented that it was still important to have walkability through industrial areas if they are trying to promote walking for health or to get to work.
- Commissioner Neal expressed concern that they were adding a lot of infrastructure that would require a great deal of maintenance.
- Commissioner McInnis commented that there were pieces of the plan that he loved and that he hated to see those pieces held up because of other ideas like the new connections in the northwest quadrant. Mr. Barnett responded that if they get the thresholds right, the new connectivity would only occur with a major redevelopment.
- Commissioner McInnis commented that the Union Avenue area and the 38th Street Connection to South Tacoma Way both were great spots for an entry to the neighborhood.
- Commissioner McInnis commented that connectivity had not been an issue for him when driving into the area but that the road conditions were bad. He suggested that it would help a great deal if they would improve the streets. Mr. Barnett commented that the new connectivity concept should be considered in the context of projects proposed by the City to enhance the existing streets.
- Chair Beale commented that he was interested in how the connectivity thresholds would work in terms of dedication. He reviewed that at a previous meeting he had discussed functional equivalency in terms on parking lot connections in the interim between developments.
- Chair Beale expressed concern about the lack of predictability in the Street Network Tiers for Tier 3, commenting that that it was okay to predict where the Tier 3 roads would go because it was a long term vision and the City was built on a street grid. He added that the tradeoff was that they would be confining those blocks to certain development envelopes.
- Commissioner McInnis asked if they would have specific threshold numbers before providing the final draft to the Commission. Mr. Barnett responded that they would begin to present the entire plan at the December 7<sup>th</sup> meeting, but the connectivity threshold piece was still under development.
- Chair Beale noted that he had not heard any objections from the Commission to the concept of having the higher threshold for whole parcel or major parcel redevelopment, with lower thresholds for minor infill and tenant improvements.
- Chair Beale asked whether they have capacity from a civil utilities standpoint to support redevelopment or if there were major improvements that would be triggered. Mr. Barnett responded that there was capacity in terms of utilities with one major bottleneck in terms of transportation that would need to be fixed at a certain point. In terms of utilities, the capacity was present except for stormwater where they were doing a lot of proactive work.

## **E. COMMUNICATION ITEMS & OTHER BUSINESS**

Brian Boudet, Planning Services Division Manager, provided the following updates:

- There was interest in taking a group photo if all Commissioners were available on December 7.
- The final reading and adoption of the City's 2017-2018 Biennial Budget would occur the following week. At the first reading there had been an amendment adding funding for fire and police, while removing funding for the design review program and historic preservation enhancement.

Lihuang Wung, Planning Services Division, asked the Commission to consider a motion to cancel the December 21 meeting. Commissioner McInnis motioned to cancel the meeting. Commissioner Woolley seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

## **F. ADJOURNMENT**

At 6:03 p.m., the meeting of the Planning Commission was concluded.