

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Vancouver City Hall – Council Chambers – 415 W. Sixth Street
PO Box 1995 – Vancouver, Washington 98668-1995
www.cityofvancouver.us

Marjorie Ledell • Steve Schulte • Larry Blaufus • Zachary Pyle
Nena Cavel • Patrick Adigweme • Melissa von Borstel

April 11, 2023

REGULAR MEETING

Vancouver City Hall - 415 W. Sixth Street, Vancouver WA

CALL TO ORDER

The April 11, 2023, meeting of the Planning Commission was called to order at 4:30 p.m. by Chair Ledell.

ROLL CALL

Present: Marjorie Ledell, Zachary Pyle, Patrick Adigweme, Larry Blaufus, Nena Cavel, Steve Schulte, and Melissa von Borstel

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Motion by Commissioner Schulte, second by Commissioner Cavel, and carried unanimously to adopt the March 14, 2023, minutes.

RECUSAL

Vice Chair Pyle recused himself from the Downtown Building Footprints workshop.

Commissioner von Borstel recused herself from the Downtown Building Footprints workshop and the Evergreen & Grand Commercial Corridors Strategy Implementation workshop.

WORKSHOP

REMOVAL OF DOWNTOWN BUILDING FOOTPRINT TAPERING REQUIREMENTS

Bryan Snodgrass, Principal Planner, Community Development Department

Bryan Snodgrass presented an overview of the current requirements for downtown building tapering requirements and the rationale for considering changing these to address downtown activation, commercial activities, and to add housing in an area well-served by infrastructure and intended for higher density development. Staff contacted the Vancouver Downtown Association to discuss the proposed change as part of public outreach.

Commission Discussion

- Restriction on building heights for Pearson Field Airport. Staff responded building heights are limited in certain areas in proximity to Pearson Field Airport. The removal of tapering requirements does not impact maximum building heights.

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- Any changes that have affected the desire for street level sunlight. Staff responded there is increased private sector demand in downtown and public policy interest to meet demand, to allow for housing and office space to help meet citywide needs, and to help activate downtown
- Are there other parts of the code that support street level sunlight after this potential change is made? Staff responded they would need to do further research to answer this question. The Downtown Design Guidelines may address this.

EVERGREEN & GRAND COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Bryan Snodgrass, Principal Planner, and Becky Coutinho, Associate Planner, Community Development Department; Pauline Ruegg and Jamin Kimmell, Cascadia Partners

Becky Coutinho introduced the workshop and presented a review of the adopted strategy vision and goals. Pauline Ruegg presented a review of the project to date and public input received at the recent open house. Jamin Kimmell presented on the draft code language, detailing applicability of the new standards to existing buildings, changes to the use regulations, the height step down, and parking requirements.

Commission Discussion

- Rationale for 500 square feet threshold for existing building expansion. Staff responded any addition over 250 square feet requires a building permit. There are examples of this standard used in other similar commercial corridors.
- How to determine if a modification to an existing building is visible from the street. Staff responded the applicant would need to show in the application that the change is not visible from the street.
- Percentage of design standards an applicant is required to comply with. Staff responded with exterior modifications to a building, they must not increase non-conformance with the standards, but the modifications do not need to meet the new design standards. Meeting the new standards could be cost prohibitive. For example, it could be very costly to meet the window area requirements in an existing building that does not currently meet the standard.
- What is the typical square footage on the ground floor? Staff responded that lots on these corridors tend to be smaller, around 5,000 to 10,000 square feet. Ground floor spaces may be around 2,000 square feet but it varies.
- Will these standards and type of code be applied to other corridors in the future? Staff responded the Comprehensive Plan update will address commercial corridors work and similar standards will be applied to other areas of the City. This specific code language is for Evergreen and Grand but the intent is that a neighborhood commercial corridor overlay will be applied to other appropriate corridors through the Comprehensive Plan update, with the caveat that tweaks and changes may be incorporated to respond to specific conditions on different corridors.
- Subjectivity of new overlay standards if the use is changed. Staff responded the development and design standards only apply when a physical modification is proposed to the exterior of the building. There may be other requirements that apply when a change of use occurs though, per existing code.
- What are the sacrifices of including the building height step down adjacent to lower density housing. Staff responded there is an impact to density with the step down. With the other design standards, the buildings will be oriented to the front of the site with parking in the rear, which will limit the depth of the building. This standard is intended to apply to development that abuts

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existing single family development and will not apply to development abutting higher density zones, which are already intended for higher intensity development.

- Incorporating the community's vision for the corridor. Staff responded the corridor strategy document is guiding the code, which the community was heavily involved in shaping. Where the current proposal deviates from specific recommendations included in the strategy, it is responding to new information and conditions but still aligns with the intent of the vision articulated in the strategy.

Staff continued the presentation with refined goals for design standards for building orientation, main entrances for commercial and residential uses, ground floor commercial uses, ground floor residential uses, façade articulation, and screening and fencing.

Commission Discussion

- Are parklets and off-street dining facilities allowed? Staff responded its part of the right of way code and is currently allowed through an existing permit process.
- For the residential step down, will the depth of the ground floor elements, such as a terrace, be specified? Staff responded there would be specific dimensions for the setback, and the open space such as a terrace would be in the setback.
- Code for bike storage. Staff responded they will do more work to integrate code language requiring bike storage. Currently there is no citywide bike storage requirement for bike and small mobility device parking, but this larger citywide issue will be addressed through the Comprehensive Plan and Title 20 update that is currently underway.
- Plans for overhead wires along this corridor. Staff responded it is not addressed in the overlay district. There is not a citywide requirement to underground utilities. It's expensive and difficult to coordinate on a development-by-development basis.
- Consideration for including materiality for cohesion on the corridor. Staff responded it was left off to strike a balance with the requirements. Early in the process staff conducted a site log of materials on the façade exteriors, and it wasn't consistent enough to warrant requiring new buildings to repeat a pattern.

Staff concluded the presentation with additional potential design standards addressed with a points-based system and examples of those design options.

Commission Discussion

- Would small businesses be allowed to work together on design options or elements? Staff responded there could be an option for lower required points for an addition or modification to an existing building. Typically, one developer applies, rather than multiple small businesses or property owners.
- Design standards for commercial and residential, and public access to amenities at a residential development. Staff responded these standards are for both types of development. Public access to residential amenities is something to think about with the points system and could be addressed in a few different ways. Other cities have allowed resident-only access to amenities. This could also be addressed in the points system by assigning fewer points if an amenity is not accessible to the public.
- Can a point system and design guidelines coexist? Staff responded typically it's one or the other. The intent is to have objective standards based on the vision from the strategy document. There

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is a purpose statement in the code which serves the purpose of defining the intent of the design standards.

- How long to build out the full corridor on Evergreen and Grand. Staff responded that full build out under the new standards is not necessarily the end goal, and the speed of redevelopment is hard to predict. There are a lot of existing houses and businesses that positively contribute to the overall character of the area and are not likely to be economically viable to redevelop right now, nor is that the intent of the new standards. Instead, the goal is to ensure new development advances City policy priorities for housing and 15-minute neighborhoods and enhances the existing development pattern. In addition, the City does not have a property interest in this corridor, so redevelopment will occur on a property-by-property basis, which is subject to market forces and occurs at the discretion of individual property owners. There is some market pressure here for redevelopment, and we know that what is built now will last for many decades. We want to regulate those new developments with a cohesive vision and structure.
- Consideration for cost of development for these design options. Staff responded that information can be included as context in the code language. With the points system, a developer can consider the cost of each option and choose based on that to minimize cost if needed.

COMMUNITY FORUM

No members of the public were present to speak during Community Forum.

PUBLIC HEARING

SHORT TERM RENTAL REGULATIONS

Jason Nortz, Development Review Manager, Becky Coutinho, Associate Planner, Community Development; William Cooley, Community Engagement Manager, City Manager's Office

Jason Nortz presented an overview of the project timeline, the number and size of short-term rentals in the City, and responses to community and operator surveys. Becky Coutinho presented an overview of the proposed development code and requirements for a short term rental operator to obtain a permit. Jason Nortz concluded the presentation with direction from Planning Commission and City Council that was incorporated into the proposed code, the staff recommendation, and next steps with City Council and implementation of the proposed code.

Public Testimony

Sheila Dickinson was present to speak in favor of allowing short term rentals in Vancouver with reasonable regulations. She manages short term rentals in Vancouver as well as other states. She did not support a requirement for owner occupied rentals. Short term rentals serve a specific need for visitors to Vancouver.

Scott Dickinson was present to speak in favor of allowing short term rentals in Vancouver. Short term rental properties contribute positively to the neighborhood, including high quality landscaping and property maintenance in order to stay competitive in the short term rental market and appeal to visitors. Short term rentals are an alternative to traditional lodging for those who want to stay with family members or prefer that type of lodging.

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Commission Discussion

- Composition of respondents to the outreach survey. Staff shared that of the more than 700 respondents to the survey, approximately 90 were short term rental operators and 81% of those 90 operators were homeowners within the community.
- Are the proposed regulations similar to regulations in other cities throughout Washington? Staff responded the proposed regulations considered examples of regulations from other jurisdictions throughout the state, but also responded to the Vancouver context. In general though, the proposed regulations are in line with other cities in Washington.
- Process for complaint follow up. Staff responded the code enforcement department would respond to complaints and follow the traditional path for any code complaint, where the severity of the violation determines next steps, which can include a letter to the operator up to revoking the permit. Title 22 of the municipal code outlines the path for corrective action when code compliance violations occur.
- Limits and measurements for residential use related to noise, smoke, dust, etc. Staff responded it's a subjective limit and is not specifically defined in code. The nuisance code addresses noise levels and would apply to short term rentals the same as other residential uses.
- Monitoring the number of short term rentals. Staff responded there will be two ways to monitor the number of rentals in the City; the first is with the Host Compliance platform, and the second is through the permit process. When these don't line up, staff will be able to contact operators that do not have a City permit and instruct them on how to get one.
- Framework for escalation in response to non-compliance. Staff responded Title 22 outlines a course of action, starting with corrective notice, then civil violation, up to revoking the permit.

Motion by Commissioner Cavel, seconded by Commissioner Blaufus to recommend to City Council to adopt new short term rental regulations based on the findings and conclusions outlined in the staff report and presented at the April 11, 2023 Planning Commission public hearing.

Commissioner Cavel supported the recommendation as the proposed regulations are the least restrictive necessary standards for short term rentals in Vancouver.

Commissioner Blaufus supported the recommendation and the motion.

Vice Chair Pyle supported the recommendation as the policies are compatible with residential use and the efficient permitting process.

Roll Call Vote

Commissioner von Borstel	Yes
Commissioner Adigweme	Yes
Commissioner Cavel	Yes
Commissioner Blaufus	Yes
Commissioner Schulte	Yes
Vice Chair Pyle	Yes
Chair Ledell	Yes

COMMUNICATIONS FROM CHAIR AND STAFF


No communications from the Chair or staff.

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ADJOURNMENT 7:12 P.M.

DocuSigned by:

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Marjorie Ledell, Chair

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