



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 • Hannah Burak • Nena Cavel

March 8, 2022

REGULAR MEETING (Convened telephonically, no in person attendance)

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

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The March 8, 2022, meeting of the Planning Commission was called to order at 4:30 p.m. by Vice Chair Pyle.

Present: Zachary Pyle, Larry Blaufus, Steve Schulte, Hannah Burak, and Nena Cavel

Absent: Marjorie Ledell

Motion by Commissioner Schulte, second by Commissioner Cavel, and carried unanimously to excuse the absence of Chair Ledell.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Motion by Commissioner Burak, second by Commissioner Cavel, and carried unanimously to adopt the February 22, 2022, minutes as written.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM STAFF

Rebecca Kennedy, Deputy Director, notified the Commission that staff will be working on plans to move to hybrid in-person/virtual meetings in the next few months. Commissioners, staff, and the public will be able to participate in Commission meetings both virtually and in person, with more details coming soon. Lon Pluckhahn, Deputy City Manager for Community Services, was present to introduce himself to the Commission.

WORKSHOPS

4:37 P.M. HOUSING CODE UPDATES

Bryan Snodgrass, Principal Planner; Becky Coutinho, Associate Planner

Rebecca Kennedy, Deputy Director, introduced the workshop. The overall purpose of the Housing Code Updates is to provide greater flexibility within the code for the private market to build different types and sizes of housing in the community. It's not intended to address the deep affordability needs in the community, which are not typically addressed by the private market. The goal is to have an incremental impact on the supply of housing over time. City Council has not directed the Commission to using the zoning code to require the private market to build affordable housing. Bryan Snodgrass, Principal Planner, continued the presentation begun at the Feb. 22 meeting, starting with cottage cluster housing.

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Commission Discussion

The Commission asked questions on cottage cluster development, and staff provided the following responses:

- Ownership of common areas and structures and maintenance of common areas. Staff responded there would be an ownership option for the structures, where they could be owned together under a site plan or divided and sold separately. There is draft language regarding the ownership and management of the common areas as well.
- Why the clusters are limited to two. Staff responded that since this is a new allowance, the thinking was to limit the size of cluster developments to understand how early projects develop and avoid unforeseen consequences. Part of staff's thinking is that cluster developments will be located in single family zones. If new regulations limit this to two clusters, it's a doubling of the density. With more than two, it would be more than doubling the density of the surrounding area. The review process will look at traffic and other impacts, but thus far generally staff have been cautious with the scale of development the new standards would allow. Staff can develop alternative proposals if desired.
- Reasoning for the requirement of 200 square feet per unit for the courtyard. Staff responded they looked at other jurisdictions to set this and used a lower amount to be more flexible.
- Threshold for adjustment for this code that would not go to a hearings examiner or planning commission? Staff responded there isn't one built into the cluster ordinance. There is a variance process that is a staff decision. Up to 20% is a Type 1 application, meaning it is not noticed to the public. Type 2 is greater than 20% and is noticed to the public. Density and lot sizes cannot be changed using a variance. Variances are meant for something exceptional, and if staff continue to see requests for a variance, it means something isn't working correctly and the code needs to be changed or updated.

Becky Coutinho, Associate Planner, continued the presentation, covering setbacks for new apartments next to existing homes.

Commission Discussion

The Commission asked questions on the following topics, and staff provided the following responses:

- How was the standard of one foot of setback for every three feet of height determined? Staff responded there is a similar standard for commercial setbacks.
- Whether this a step-back, whereas building steps-back as it gets taller, or is the proposal for a setback from the property line for all developments. Staff responded they hadn't considered a step-back approach, but will discuss internally and consider whether this may be a more appropriate tool to address concerns received from community members.

Staff continued presenting on micro-housing, ADUs in existing garages within setbacks, and new homes to allow aging-in-place.

Commission Discussion

The Commission asked questions on the following topics, and staff provided the following responses:

- The motivation behind support for aging-in-place and the balance of housing stock turnover. Staff responded that having options for people to stay in their homes will put less pressure on new housing stock to meet their new needs. Staff don't expect a lot of homes to be built this way. This type of universal design can also address the needs of other age groups- for example, community members with mobility challenges- who require wider doors, single level living, etc.

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- Which type of housing will have the highest demand? Staff responded they don't expect there will be high demand for any of these types. The ADUs might show up sooner than others given that they are already happening, and this is just a tweak to expand them to certain types of garages, and expect the micro-housing may come to Vancouver soon as it's grown in popularity elsewhere.
- Maximum unit size of ADUs for existing structures. Staff responded that for the garages, if it meets the ADU standards, it can be converted. If it's too big relative to the house, it wouldn't meet the ADU standards.

Staff continued presenting on the new single-family R-17 zoning district standards.

Commission Discussion

The Commission asked questions on the following topics, and staff provided the following responses:

- Any changes to the garage standards since the last meeting. Staff responded there has not been an update or further feedback on garages but expect to hear some at the public hearing. There are opportunities for larger garages in other zones.

Staff continued presenting on the proposed new multi-family R-50 zoning district and State mandated parking reductions near transit.

Commission Discussion

The Commission asked questions on the following topics, and staff provided the following responses:

- Concern regarding a minimum lot size of 800 square feet per unit and limiting density. Staff responded it may be a legitimate concern and will discuss it with the development review staff.
- For senior and disabled parking requirements, calculated by employees rather than per unit. Any evaluation of the current amount of parking for senior and disabled housing and how it would change under the new rules. Staff responded that the table with current city rules shows the existing requirements. The state mandate does not allow parking for residents, but it is allowed for staff. There are not many comparable standards for visitor parking, so this was a best estimate and staff are investigating the visitation rate in Vancouver and Clark County.
- For senior and disabled parking, are the parking spots divided by user? Staff responded parking spots will likely not be designated by user. Minimum parking requirements are in the code and required at the time of site plan review for individual developments, but ongoing maintenance of parking is the responsibility of the individual facility.
- For market rate housing, it's a challenge to depend on transit with a 35-minute service interval. Staff responded it's meant to be consistent with other standards throughout the City, including provisions adopted a few years ago that waive the ground floor commercial component of projects in mixed use zones if they provide affordable housing near transit. Limiting this to areas with 15-minute interval service would make the areas where the parking reductions apply much more limited. There is a relationship between transit supported land uses and transit frequency and investment. The corridors that have frequent transit are those that generate ridership to support those investments. Reducing parking requirements where appropriate help support this and help reduce barriers to building housing and other transit-supportive uses leads to greater transit investment over time. If builders are targeting a market where people want to drive, they can elect to build more parking.

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Staff continued presenting on the density bonus for affordable housing.

Commission Discussion

The Commission asked questions on the following topics, and staff provided the following responses:

- Concern with interpreting owned or controlled by faith-based organizations. Staff responded they will open it up to any organization, so should sidestep any issues with language interpretation.
- The City is not able to define affordable housing as 70% of AMI, per the state mandate? Staff responded that's correct. We can choose the amount of the density bonus, but the state set the affordability threshold.
- What would these bonus's look like on the group; are there examples for each scenario. Staff responded for the 25% bonus, in R-50, which allows up to 50 units per acre, the bonus would add 12.5 units, or allow up to 62.5 units per acre.
- Request for examples of what different densities look like, such as how many stories a building might be. Staff said they would develop this and provide it to the Commission.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Heidi Cody was present to provide comments on the fossil fuel moratorium. She was supportive of the moratorium and switching to cleaner fuels. The City should complete a SEPA analysis that will demonstrate the environmental justice impacts of large-scale fossil fuel projects. Any expansion of existing facilities would add to the burden and be inconsistent with the City's efforts to address climate change and pollution. The Commission should support an ordinance that prohibits all new large fossil fuel terminals, prohibits the conversion of existing facilities to fossil fuel facilities, and prohibits the expansion of storage facilities for large-scale quantities of fossil fuels.

Glen Yung was present to provide comments on the home ownership opportunities and equity. There is a large disparity of net worth between people who own a home and those who rent. Many of the upcoming developments are rental properties and he supports the Commission's work to consider ways to increase the opportunities for home ownership.

WORKSHOP

6:39 P.M. FOSSIL FUEL FACILITIES PROPOSED CODE CHANGES

Chad Eiken, Director, CDD; Bryan Snodgrass, Principal Planner, CDD

Rebecca Kennedy introduced the workshop item. Chad Eiken presented on previous workshops before the Planning Commission, background on the moratorium and direction from City Council, current regulations for bulk fossil fuel uses and the approach to revising VMC Title 20, current fuel storage facilities in Vancouver, and a summary of stakeholder input. Staff requested Planning Commission input on the proposed threshold for large-scale fossil fuel storage facilities.

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Commission Discussion

Commission and staff discussion on the threshold for facilities:

- What is the cost to build new clean fuel storage facilities and long-term costs if all existing facilities are eventually closed? Staff were unsure of the cost and will bring this question to the consultants for further input. There may be some limits on the ability to do a broad economic analysis.
- In the current moratorium list of exemptions, what percentage of total fossil fuel do the exempted uses represent? Staff indicated they don't have a full inventory of fossil fuel users and will ask the consultant to assist with gathering that information.
- Is expansion required to be on existing or contiguous properties? Staff responded the Washington State Petroleum Association requested allowing expansions at a new site, or essentially a replacement and relocation of a facility. It's not clear how much this occurs but it's something to bring up with the consultant.
- Are there concerns regarding providing natural gas to homes? Staff responded they would review the feedback from utility providers and will reach out to the stakeholders again through this process.
- Any concern for unintentionally banning infrastructure for clean fuel storage and processing? Staff responded that this is a concern, and they will be looking at ways to keep options open for a facility that wants to convert to a cleaner fuel. In Tacoma, they allow fossil fuels to convert to clean fuel, with specific definitions for clean fuel and it is required to go through a conditional use process. They are not allowed to convert back to fossil fuels.
- Council's direction for the moratorium, with concerns for public health and safety, as well as climate concerns. Staff responded it initially started as a public safety moratorium to protect aquifers. As Council's climate action plan progresses, it also aligns with Council's goals related to that plan.
- Request for a cost study of preventing new facilities from being built and converting existing facilities to clean fuels.

Staff requested the Planning Commission input on allowing expansion of existing facilities.

Commission Discussion

Commission and staff discussion on expansion of facilities:

- Concerns of efficiency of scale, where a slightly larger facility might have a much greater output and is therefore more efficient than multiple smaller facilities.
- Support for restricting the expansion of new fossil fuel facilities and new facilities would only be allowed if they are for clean fuels, regardless of size.
- Support for continuation of bulk storage or even an expansion if it came with significant health and safety upgrades for seismic events.

Staff requested the Planning Commission input on amending VMC Title 20.

Commission Discussion

Commission and staff discussion on amending VMC Title 20:

- Supportive of the staff recommendations.
- Suggest consistency with the size of facilities in the area.
- What is biomass? Staff responded there was a biomass facility proposed, which used wood pellets. There are no existing facilities in Vancouver.

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- Does biomass include fuels which are not fossil fuels? Staff responded it likely does and will need input from the consultant on this topic.

ADJOURNMENT 7:28 PM

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Zachary Cooke Meagher Pyle
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Zachary Pyle, Vice Chair

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