

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 Cavell

April 12, 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 April 12, 2022, meeting of the Planning Commission was called to order at 5:03 p.m. by Chair Ledell.

Present: Marjorie Ledell, Zachary Pyle, Larry Blaufus, Steve Schulte, Hannah Burak, and Nena Cavell

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Motion by Commissioner Schulte, second by Commissioner Cavell, and carried unanimously to adopt the March 8, 2022, minutes as written.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM STAFF

There were no communications from staff.

WORKSHOPS

5:06 P.M. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE – PROJECT INITIATION

Rebecca Kennedy, Deputy Director, CDD; Domenic Martinelli, Senior Planner, CDD

Rebecca Kennedy introduced the workshop and presented an overview of the Comprehensive Plan, a brief review of the planning process, an explanation of why this process is happening now, and key factors and trends that will inform the update to the Comprehensive Plan. The four key factors include land use and development, housing, equity, and climate change and the environment. The presentation highlighted other policy efforts that are currently underway at the City.

Domenic Martinelli presented the methodology for the development of the Comprehensive Plan, including the importance of defining core values early in the process through community engagement that will inform the principals, processes, and attributes of the Plan. The presentation covered specific data needs for this project in the areas of land use, housing, and climate, and expected deliverables for the end of the project. Staff presented this topic to City Council on April 4, and their feedback will be incorporated into the project plan. The Planning Commission will serve as the primary citizen oversight committee that will make a recommendation to Council related to approval of the Comprehensive Plan.

Commission Discussion

The Commission and staff discussed factors and considerations that are critical in the update process:

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- The top challenges to work through as a community. Staff responded some of the top issues include managing growth in a way that enhances the community, addressing climate change, and affordability.
- Engaging with the community that will be affected by this plan many years from now. Staff responded that is an important thing to consider during this process, and the project team will need to find ways to more effectively engage with youth.
- Research and data to help inform what the City might look like in 20 years. Staff responded they are looking in depth at what trends exist today, in hopes that that will inform what might happen in the next few decades.
- How the changes in the workplace today, due to the pandemic, might affect the workforce and economy in the future. Staff agreed that was an important factor to consider for this Plan.
- What data sources will be used in addition to Census data. Staff responded they will use a variety of sources to gather employment data, real estate and housing data, including from subscription data providers as well as institutions like universities.
- Using clear and non-technical language throughout the Plan. Staff agreed it was important that the document use plain language as much as possible and include simplified document and graphics to convey important concepts.
- Finding a balance between adaptability to changes over time, responding to trends in a purposeful way, and following the values set at the beginning of the process.
- Consideration for a hierarchy of values to help decision makers weigh options that will align with the goals of the Plan.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Melissa von Borstel was present to provide comments on climate change impacts in Vancouver. In planning for the future, the City should consider sustainable sites, open spaces, protection and restoration of natural habitats, rain water management, heat island reduction, and reduction of light pollution. She emphasized the importance of the Fruit Valley for fruit and vegetation production, which is crucial to diversity and self-reliance for the area.

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. He supports the Commission's work to consider ways to increase the opportunities for home ownership and review current policies that lead towards a high volume of rentals. He was also supportive of ownership models for the proposed cottage cluster housing.

PUBLIC HEARING

6:40 P.M. HOUSING CODE UPDATES

Bryan Snodgrass, Principal Planner, CDD; Becky Coutinho, Associate Planner, CDD

Rebecca Kennedy introduced the hearing item, emphasizing incremental changes to the housing code to allow for more housing options in Vancouver. Bryan Snodgrass presented an overview of the project goals, the proposed single family R-17 zone standards, the multi-family R-50 zone standards, and the new parking reductions near transit.

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Commission Discussion

Commission and staff discussion on the proposed parking standards:

- The public input regarding clarifying parking at housing that serves people with disabilities. Staff noted there was an omission in the proposed language. The code for parking requirements discusses the Downtown CX zone and everywhere else and revised the proposal language to include senior and disabled in both areas.
- Concerns regarding the market rate housing type and the practicality in terms of not needing a vehicle if living near a transit stop that is serviced only every 35 minutes.

Staff continued the presentation, covering the density bonus for affordable housing and cottage cluster housing.

Commission Discussion

Commission and staff discussion on cottage cluster housing:

- Flexibility in the courtyard or common areas and proximity of the houses to those areas. Staff responded it can be difficult to have the houses clustered immediately adjacent to the common area, so the standard was modified to allow a percentage of those units to be further than 25 feet away from the common area.

Becky Coutinho continued the presentation, covering setbacks for new apartments next to existing homes, micro housing, and ADUs in existing garages.

Public Testimony

Glen Yung was supportive of the overall proposed changes. He expressed concerns regarding the density bonus for affordable housing defined at 80% of AMI as required in state statute, as well as monitoring and compliance issues. He asked for clarification if the density bonus could be combined with other bonuses. He also discussed ADU setbacks, allowing existing buildings to remain in non-compliance regarding vision clearance requirements, and his support for increasing ownership opportunities.

Phil Wuest, representing Ginn Group, was supportive of the proposed changes to address housing affordability. He encouraged the City to continue to review the code after these changes are made. He noted a technical revision needed on page 33 of the staff report.

Roy Johnson, representing the Vancouver Housing Authority, was supportive of increasing density and the reduction in parking requirements near transit. He hoped that for profit developers will develop affordable units that utilize the lower parking ratio. He was also supportive of no parking at senior and disabled housing other than staff and guest parking. He believes the proposed housing code updates will be helpful to start to address the current shortages and overall trends.

Siobhana McEwen, representing the Council for the Homeless, raised concerns regarding micro housing. She noted there may be unintended consequences of codifying micro housing that could lead to further economic and racial segregation. Micro housing with shared kitchen and bath can lead to a decrease in standard of living and stated that people of color and people with disabilities do not need a lower standard of living in order to make housing and homeownership accessible. Rather than controlling the middle of the market, efforts should be towards controlling luxury buildings in Vancouver.

Brendan Sanchez, representing Access Architecture, was supportive of the proposed changes to the housing code. He emphasized the housing density bonuses for affordable and market rate housing.

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Regarding the changes to parking, when designing a site, parking takes up a disproportionate amount of space on smaller lots, and when developing middle housing, the parking requirements can constrain the design. He encouraged tying parking requirements to transit as well as quantity of units.

Commission Discussion and Deliberation

Commission and staff discussion on the staff recommendations:

- Vice Chair Pyle asked if the density bonus would apply to micro-housing. Staff responded they did not intend to combine micro housing with the density bonus and could verify that there is not a loophole to allow that.
- Commissioner Blaufus asked for clarification of 80% AMI at market rate. Staff responded there is a comparison between Area Median Income (AMI) and its estimate of what people can afford to pay, and Fair Market Rent (FMR), which is what people are currently paying based on the market. In one case, a 1-person household at 80% AMI is \$1,354 and the fair market rent is \$1,416. There is a difference between the two, though it is relatively equivalent.
- Commissioner Burak asked Vice Chair Pyle to clarify his concern for density bonuses for micro housing. Vice Chair Pyle clarified that if the density bonus is combined with micro housing style apartments, it is overly incentivizing very small units when there is a need for larger units (2-3 bedrooms) that are underrepresented in the market.
- Commissioner Cavel noted that the setback increase is a limit to housing density and the size of buildings and number of units on a given lot, which may constrain the supply of multi-family housing.
- The Chair noted recommendations 3, 6 and 7 will be considered separately.

Motion, by Vice Chair Pyle, seconded by Commissioner Burak, and passed unanimously to forward to City Council a recommendation for approval of the proposed Housing Code Updates zoning code text changes for items 1, 2, 4, 5, and 8 based on the findings of the report and the April 12, 2022 public hearing.

Roll Call Vote

Larry Blaufus	Yes
Steve Schulte	Yes
Hannah Burak	Yes
Nena Cavel	Yes
Zachary Pyle	Yes
Marjorie Ledell	Yes

Motion, by Commissioner Burak, seconded by Commissioner Cavel, and passed unanimously to forward to City Council a recommendation for approval of the proposed Housing Code Updates zoning code text changes for item 3 based on the findings of the report and the April 12, 2022 public hearing with the amendment to table 20.945.070-1 to include people with disabilities along with senior housing in the land use column.

Roll Call Vote

Larry Blaufus	Yes
Steve Schulte	Yes
Hannah Burak	Yes
Nena Cavel	Yes

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Zachary Pyle Yes
Marjorie Ledell Yes

Motion, by Commissioner Cavel, seconded by Commissioner Burak to strike the proposed changes regarding setbacks in item 6 and keep the original 5-foot setback requirement between single family and multi-family homes.

Amended motion, by Commissioner Cavel, seconded by Commissioner Burak to not recommend the proposed changes regarding setbacks in item 6.

Roll Call Vote

Larry Blaufus No
Steve Schulte Yes
Hannah Burak Yes
Nena Cavel Yes
Zachary Pyle No
Marjorie Ledell No

Motion fails due to a lack of a majority vote. The Commission discussed the outcome of the vote and potential steps to take following the vote. City Attorney Becky Rude clarified that a majority vote is required for an affirmative recommendation against item 6. The Commission agreed that Council can review the actions take tonight, along with the discussion at the hearing and previous workshops to inform their decision on this item.

Motion, by Vice Chair Pyle, seconded by Commissioner Blaufus to forward to City Council a recommendation for approval of the proposed Housing Code Updates zoning code text changes for item 7 based on the findings of the report and the April 12, 2022 public hearing with the amendment to disallow the affordable housing density bonus to be applied to proposed micro housing apartment projects.

Commissioner Cavel noted that dense or small units are not inherently negative, and the real issue is not having enough housing for people to live in. If there is demand for small units, the City should support it.

Commissioner Blaufus agreed with both sides but noted that the intent of recommendation 7 was not to allow for the density bonus to be applied to micro housing projects.

Commissioner Burak asked for clarification on buildings with micro units, and if they would be mixed with other larger units in the same building. Staff indicated typically the building only has micro units, but a mix of unit sizes would be allowed.

Roll Call Vote

Larry Blaufus Yes
Steve Schulte Yes
Hannah Burak No
Nena Cavel No
Zachary Pyle Yes
Marjorie Ledell Yes

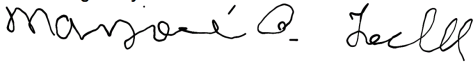
Motion passes 4-2.

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ADJOURNMENT 8:29 PM

DocuSigned by:

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Marjorie Ledell, Chair

To request other formats, contact Julie Nischik, Community Development Department | 360-487-7813. WA Relay: 711 | julie.nischik@cityofvancouver.us