



PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Vancouver City Hall – Council Chambers – 415 W. Sixth Street
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www.cityofvancouver.us

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

April 26, 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 26, 2022, meeting of the Planning Commission was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Chair Ledell.

Present: Marjorie Ledell, Zachary Pyle, Larry Blaufus, Steve Schulte, and Nena Cavel

Absent: Hannah Burak

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Motion by Commissioner Cavel, second by Commissioner Schulte, and carried unanimously to adopt the April 12, 2022, minutes as written.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM STAFF

Rebecca Kennedy, Deputy Director, indicated the May meeting was cancelled, and the next meeting in June will be a hybrid of in person and remote participation.

Motion by Commissioner Schulte, second by Commissioner Blaufus, and carried unanimously to excuse the absence of Commissioner Burak.

WORKSHOPS

4:05 P.M. HOUSING CONDITIONS OVERVIEW

Michael Wilkerson, Senior Economist and Director of Analytics, ECONorthwest

Rebecca Kennedy introduced the workshop, which provided a report on the conditions of the housing market at they exist in Vancouver and the broader region. This workshop is intended as an initial discussion to support the Commission's upcoming work updating the City Comprehensive Plan, which will include policy and regulatory updates intended to address housing needs at a variety of income and affordability levels and increase housing supply to support future growth, in alignment with City policies and goals for equity, climate action, and economic opportunity.

Michael Wilkerson presented on the current conditions of the housing market in Vancouver and the region.

Commission Discussion

The Commission and staff discussed the following topics:

- Income requirements for rental properties. Staff responded it's common to see a landlord require a renter's income be two or three times the monthly rent, which aligns with HUD's guidance that says no more than 30% of your income should go to housing. This can pose challenges to those who have lower incomes, and limits what housing is available.

The presentation continued, covering housing demand, population growth rates, and a comparison of incomes.

Commission Discussion

The Commission and staff discussed the following topics:

- What policies are used in counties where the population is growing but cost is moderate. Staff responded it can be challenging to find specific policies to replicate. Some of those counties may have been shrinking previously and has an abundance of housing. Most communities on the west coast are seeing high costs and growing markets.
- For the household income data, does it assume one earner or more per household? Staff responded the data is a 1% sample of the county population, which may not perfectly align with HUD data. HUD conducts extensive studies every 10 years and uses inflation data to grow incomes without resampling, so income targets may deviate from what is actually observed. When setting policies, its best to look at actual income for the area, rather than estimates from HUD.

The presentation continued, covering housing supply, permit applications in Vancouver, apartment production, and housing units at the state and county level.

Commission Discussion

The Commission and staff discussed the following topics:

- What percentage of existing units are available in the market versus units that are occupied and not available. Staff responded it's a small number and has been decreasing over the last few years. The number of houses available for sale is much lower than demand, which has created an imbalance in the market.
- Impacts of short-term rentals and vacation homes on affordability. Staff responded that in markets that are highly constrained, removing units has a greater impact than in a market where there is an abundance of housing. You also need to look at the local conditions such as location of the units, price, quantity, and occupancy rates, as well as the need these are filling and what otherwise may occur if that need goes unmet.
- The number of units demolished recently. Staff responded they would follow up with the exact details, but a relatively small number of units that were demolished in the last year.

The presentation continued with housing market economics, income sorting and cost burdening, and how renting down reduces the availability of affordable units. The next section of the presentation covered homeownership impacts, housing price to income ratios across the US and in Washington, homeownership readiness, sizes of new build homes, and middle housing.

Commission Discussion

The Commission and staff discussed the following topics:

- The previous trend of people downsizing later in life is no longer happening as expected. Staff responded that it used to be that older generations would downsize their homes once there were fewer people living there, but that trend has changed lately. There are a variety of factors affecting this, but the result is a mismatch in the housing ladder, where it's less attainable to buy a house as a first time buyer.
- Comparing wage growth and renter filtering with appreciation and paying down a principal on a mortgage. Staff responded historically these two have not been similar, with homeownership the predominant vehicle for wealth generation

The presentation concluded with policy options, a balanced approach to the growth development pattern, the environmental and economic benefits of this approach, housing density, land use policies to promote density, incentive programs for density, and predictable processes for development.

Commission Discussion

The Commission and staff discussed the following topics:

- Opportunities for projects like the Heights in Vancouver. Staff responded the Heights was a unique opportunity, but there are other smaller properties that the City is looking at in terms of strategic value. One example is the Operations Center site on Fourth Plain, which will be available in a few years and the City will look to redevelop. Regarding privately owned property, areas such as Columbia Tech Center and the Vancouver Innovation Center still have housing to develop.
- Height limits for timber frame residential structures. Staff responded it's limited to eight stories, with some exceptions. The national building codes are out of date related to mass timber, and around the world there are examples of 20 and 30 story buildings with mass timber.
- Coordination between cities and counties to solve housing issues. There are a few examples of this, though they have not necessarily been successful in providing affordable housing. Metro in Portland is another example. In Clark County, it's unusual to have such a large urban growth area.
- Opportunities to update the zoning in urban growth areas. Staff responded the annexation process now typically assigns the most similar zoning within the jurisdiction annexing, but this is generally used in individual annexations, and it is possible to change zoning for both small and large annexations if desired. Staff noted the County will similarly go through an update to their Comprehensive Plan, so there is opportunity to coordinate efforts.
- The economics of incentive programs and the benefit of density to a community. Staff responded in the cost and benefit spectrum, there's a myriad of benefits. The primary benefit of density is more units, and with that shared affordability across the region. The costs of not incentivizing density can include fewer or no units. Other public benefits include job growth and sales tax for the local jurisdiction. In cases where housing is developed as part of a mixed-use building or development, there may be other benefits as well. The goal is to align the market with what is planned by the City. Incentives can help bridge those gaps to avoid underutilization of a site.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Glen Yung was present to provide comments on home ownership opportunities and equity. He supports the Commission's work to consider ways to increase the opportunities for home ownership. He suggested looking into the causes of larger home development. He stated that he believes there is trend emerging

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where fewer builders are operating in the region due to changes in the process to become licensed, and that this will likely impact development in the future.

ADJOURNMENT 6:36 PM

Marjorie Ledell, Chair

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