

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, June 25, 2024

5:00 p.m.

City Hall

Council Chambers

415 W 6th Street

Vancouver, WA

Commission Members Present:

Patrick Adigweme, Sandra Beck (remote), Nena Cavel, Marjorie Ledell, Zach Pyle, Jeff Prussack

Commission Members Absent:

Melissa von Borstel

Staff Present: Rebecca Kennedy, staff liaison, Julie Nischik, staff liaison, Becky Rude, staff attorney

The meeting was called to order at 5:01 pm by Chair Adigweme.

Motion by Vice Chair Pyle, seconded by Commissioner Cavel, and carried unanimously to approve the May 14, 2024 minutes.

Critical Areas Ordinance

Domenique Martinelli, Senior Planner, Keith Jones, Senior Planner, Community Development Department; Ethan Spoo, Senior Land Planner, WSP

Staff presented an update on the status of updating City regulations for critical areas, including updates to the State regulations for riparian areas, preservation of Oregon White Oaks in the code, options for wetland buffers, and updates to regulations for geologic hazard areas. Staff provided responses to questions from the last workshop with the Planning Commission and City Council, an overview of planned engagement that will occur during the public comment period on the proposed new regulations.

Members

Patrick Adigweme

Chair

Zach Pyle

Vice Chair

Sandra Beck

Nena Cavel

Marjorie Ledell

Jeff Prussack

Melissa von Borstel

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Commission discussion and staff responses:

- What are the intended benefits of the wetland buffer? Staff responded there is a direct correlation between encroachment of development in proximity to a wetland and overall wetland health. Development degrades the wetland quality which affects wildlife, and the best mitigation is to separate land uses and development activities from wetlands. In situations where the buffer cannot be accommodated, there are alternative pathways to mitigate impacts.
- How many Oregon White Oaks are present in Vancouver and what is the distribution? Staff responded the critical areas map doesn't specifically map out their locations in Vancouver, but they are mainly in existing open spaces, such as parks and along stream corridors.
- Why not differentiate regulations for wetland buffers between commercial and residential uses? Staff responded the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) provides land use categories in their guidance documents, and these are in the same category. The resulting regulations did not vary with different types of urban land uses.
- What is the impetus for changing regulations for riparian areas and wetland buffers and what about the existing regulations is not working well? Staff responded that current City regulations do not meet State requirements for the use of best available science and are currently out of compliance. Updates are required to align with state guidance and rules.
- Why are White Oaks specifically identified but not other species? Staff responded there is new State guidance on this species, and they provide valuable habitat for threatened animal species. They're not the only protected species but are a focus of this update because of the updated guidance.
- How do you determine the boundaries of a wetland? Staff responded that the Washington State Department of Ecology provides a manual on how delineate wetlands that accounts for soil type, vegetation, and time of year that is assessed by a qualified professional to determine the boundaries.
- In wetland mitigation, what is the application process? Staff responded a development application that could not meet the wetland buffer width would need to demonstrate through two alternative site plans that they are not able to reasonably deliver the project without a reduction in the buffer. There are then two alternative pathways to assess the area and determine potential changes to the setback.
- Are there mitigation options related to the riparian buffer? Staff responded there are mitigation options, but the goal of the critical areas regulation is to avoid impacts if at all possible. Mitigation is only a tool when this is not possible.
- Tools the City can develop to facilitate the development process while in compliance with the critical areas ordinance. Staff responded this topic will be addressed as part of the larger update to the Comprehensive Plan and future implementation of that plan.
- Support for prioritizing offsite mitigation to be within Vancouver as well as clear rules and expectations for the development community in terms of compliance with the new regulations.
- What was the feedback received regarding the White Oaks? Staff responded during the focus groups, staff heard comments on the value of the oaks and prioritizing preservation of the species. City Council indicated a preference for on-site mitigation for oaks when impacts cannot be avoided.

Community Forum

Johnny Cortez-Galundo provided comments on a state of emergency.

Motion by Commissioner Prussack, seconded by Commissioner Cavel, and carried unanimously to excuse the absence of Commissioner von Borstel.

Comprehensive Plan Update

Rebecca Kennedy, Deputy Director, Community Development Department; Patrick Quinton, Director, Economic Prosperity and Housing; Brittany Bagent, Project Director, ECONorthwest

Staff presented a review of policy direction informing the Comprehensive Plan, the purpose of an Equitable Development Plan, existing strategies and policies that will inform the Equitable Development Plan, key components of the plan, and anticipated outcomes.

Commission discussion and staff responses:

- Is it possible to have equitable outcomes without a ladder for wealth accumulation via support from the legislature? Staff responded they're hoping to both achieve density via multifamily housing as well as provide opportunities for ownership and wealth creation with more widely used tools.
- Are there model cities for equitable land use? Staff responded there are examples from other cities, but broadly, staff is focused on west coast cities with low vacancy rates, housing deficits, and majority single family housing as that is the context for Vancouver.
- Tools for prioritization of equitable resources and opportunity distribution. Staff responded the City's role is to process development applications in an efficient way that also balances the need for quality development while not suppressing production of market rate housing. When the City has an ownership stake in the development or where there is a master plan and/or development agreement in place, the City has a greater ability to influence development outcomes, but the vast majority of development in the City is private and is only required to meet zoning and building codes.
- How is community engagement equitable given it requires time and resources to engage with the City? Staff responded the City's community engagement team has led an effort to engage with a larger variety of people in places where they are comfortable and able to engage with us in ways they are comfortable. Other ways to increase engagement participation include providing language translation, reimbursing people for their time, providing options for transportation and childcare, among others. Another priority is building long-term, trust-based relationships in the community and partnering with community based organizations.
- How has planning as a general concept impacted inequality and how can that be counteracted? Staff responded that historically the most glaring examples are racial covenants that excluded people of color from owning homes and single family zoning that limits the types and sizes of units available in the community and restricts the amount of land available for new housing development. In the last 20 years, in Vancouver, there has been disproportionate investment in infrastructure on the east side of the city and not in the central part of the city where there is a concentration of rental housing, equity priority communities, and significant infrastructure deficits. Implementation strategies and policy choices drive where investments are made.
- How will the metrics to measure outcomes of the plan be made available to the public, and will they be accessible in terms of understanding impacts to individuals in the community? Staff responded there will be an evaluation process to monitor progress towards the desired outcomes. Staff are still working on ways to communicate that data to the public in a way that is useful and understandable.
- Programs to assist people to retain their existing housing. The City has an existing program for home repairs for homeowners. There is a funding and capacity issue with meeting all the demands. As part of Reside Vancouver, there is a recommendation to develop a program for updating aging rental housing.

The presentation continued with the development of the local economic development strategy, goals for this strategy, who has been involved in the development of this strategy, scope of work for strategy development, and the project timeline.

Commission discussion and staff responses:

- Information on engagement on land use possibilities. Staff responded that information will be available online. There will be tabling and online engagement opportunities. City staff will work with its Community Partners group and Community Working Groups on gathering feedback as well.
- Where do you expect to see the greatest impact on the local economy? Staff responded based on feedback in the focus groups, Vancouver is strong in comparison to the region due to the diversity of industries. Staff are asking more questions around the theme of economic diversity and how the City can intervene and support that.
- How does work from home affect the local economy and economic development? Staff discussed placemaking and creating mixed use spaces and buildings. Due to the timing of Vancouver's development, it has greater diversity in the mix of uses, which is beneficial in the current economy where office space is often now underutilized or empty. The density of workers per square foot has changed dramatically and we are able to accommodate more jobs in the city now with some of those employees working from home.
- Is the interstate bridge replacement an economic development challenge or opportunity? Staff responded it isn't playing a major roll in the strategy right now. Based on discussions in focus groups, the sense is that it needs to get done. The business community is largely supportive of the replacement and in the long term will be an opportunity for us.
- Are we in alignment with CREDC? Staff responded in the past the strategic plan's economic development sections aligned with CREDC's plans. Moving forward, we're working to better define the City's role in that larger regional plan while continuing to align with the goals.
- How will you manage the shift in planning over the next 20 years around land use development for housing and employment? Staff are engaging with the public to understand what the community wants to see in terms of placemaking and amenities, connectivity, and accessibility. The City can implement those visions through this strategy and the Comprehensive Plan. There will also need to be a shift in being less prescriptive about where we think jobs should go.

Communication from the Chair

None.

Communication from Staff

None.

The meeting adjourned at 7:51 pm

Patrick Adigweme, Chair