

Members

Jeremy C. Doty, Chair
 Donald Erickson, Vice-Chair
 Chris Beale
 Sean Gaffney
 Tina Lee
 Ian Morrison
 Matthew Nutsch
 Erle Thompson
 Scott Winship



Minutes

Tacoma Planning Commission

Community and Economic Development Department

Ryan Petty, Director
 Peter Huffman, Assistant Director
 Charles Solverson, P.E., Building Official

Public Works and Utilities Representatives

Jim Parvey, City Engineer/Assistant Director, Public Works Department
 Heather Pennington, Water Distribution Engineering Manager, Tacoma Water
 Diane Lachel, Community and Government Relations Manager, Click! Network, Tacoma Power

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(Approved as Amended on 11-16-11)

MEETING: Regular Meeting

TIME: Wednesday, October 19, 2011, 4:00 p.m.

PLACE: Room 16, Tacoma Municipal Building North
 733 Market Street, Tacoma, WA 98402

Members Present: Jeremy Doty (Chair), Donald Erickson (Vice-Chair), Chris Beale, Sean Gaffney, Tina Lee, Ian Morrison, Matthew Nutsch, Erle Thompson, Scott Winship

Staff Present: Donna Stenger, Chelsea Levy, Ian Munce, Jana Magoon, Shanta Frantz, Lihuang Wung, Noah Yacker (CED); Josh Diekmann (Public Works)

Chair Doty called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m. Commissioner Scot Winship, appointed on October 11, 2011, representing District No, 1, was sworn in by Acting City Clerk.

The minutes for the regular meeting and public hearing of September 21, 2011 were approved as submitted.

GENERAL BUSINESS

1. Large Scale Retail Moratorium

Chair Doty recused himself from participating in the discussion, because his employer has a business relationship with Wal-Mart. Commissioner Morrison indicated that he has accepted a job offer with a law firm in Seattle that represents Wal-Mart, and he would also recuse himself. Vice-Chair Erickson presided during the discussion.

Ms. Shanta Frantz, Building and Land Use Services, reviewed the oral testimony received at the Planning Commission's public hearing on October 5, 2011 and written comments received through October 7, 2011. The public comment was overwhelmingly in favor of maintaining the moratorium and extending its duration, except for a few letters in opposition citing such concerns as economic growth and jobs.



Ms. Frantz also facilitated the Commissioners' review of the draft letter of recommendation and the draft Findings and Recommendations report that were prepared based on public comment and staff analysis. According to the draft letter and report, the Commission would recommend to the City Council that the duration of the moratorium be extended to 12 months, its geographical applicability be limited to Urban and Community Mixed-Use Centers, and its scope be clarified as to how it is intended to affect remodels and additions to existing large retail establishments. Upon approval of the Commission, the letter and the report would be forwarded to the Council for its consideration. The Council will conduct a public hearing on October 25, 2011 and subsequently make a decision to rescind, retain or modify the moratorium, Ms. Frantz indicated.

Vice-Chair Erickson asked for clarification of why more time was needed. Ms. Donna Stenger explained that extending the moratorium through August 2012 would be needed to accomplish the necessary tasks to resolve all the issues and concerns of the community that came up during the public hearing. She reviewed the proposed 12-month work plan as attached to the draft Findings and Recommendations report and discussed how the tasks would be accomplished in a timely manner. She also pointed out that the planning activities associated with this moratorium, as well as two other moratoria currently in effect (concerning billboards and medical cannabis), will take precedence over other work activities, causing delays, reduction of scope and reduction of effort to those activities. She went over a list of projects currently included in the Planning Commission Work Program for 2011-2012 that are being impacted, such as the Container Port Element, the Platting and Subdivision Code Revisions, the Plan and Code Refinements, the Sign Code Revisions, and the Downtown Parking Requirements.

Vice-Chair Erickson asked the Commissioners to consider three questions: (a) are they in support of the moratorium; (b) should it be in effect for 6 months or a year; and (c) what should be the geographic scope of the moratorium.

Discussion ensued and a consensus was reached that, in order to allow all the City entities involved in this issue and to address community expectations, sufficient time was needed to develop appropriate regulations and 12-month duration would be required. The Commissioners also concurred with staff's assessment that the moratorium should be limited in geographic scope and only applicable to Urban and Community Mixed-Use Centers, where the discrepancies between Comprehensive Plan policies and the associated land use regulations are particularly problematic. Other issues considered by the Commissioners included whether the size threshold should be changed; should the moratorium pertain to maintenance or modification of existing retail establishments; and should the reuse of an existing vacant buildings by another retailer be affected by the moratorium.

With a vote of 7 Ayes, 0 Nays, and 2 Abstentions (Chair Doty and Commissioner Morrison), the draft Finding of Facts and Recommendations report and the draft letter of recommendation were approved, as amended per Commission's discussion. In summary, the Planning Commission recommended that (1) the moratorium is needed; (2) the duration of 6 months should be extended to 12 months, until August 30, 2012; (3) the moratorium should be applicable to only Community and Urban Mixed-Use Centers; (4) the moratorium should only apply to new large scale retail buildings, substantial alterations of an existing large scale retail building, and additions to an existing large scale retail building that creates an increase of more than 10% in square footage; and (5) the moratorium should not apply to minor alterations and tenant improvements for existing large scale retail buildings; nor should it apply to the reuse of an existing large scale retail building.

2. Downtown Parking Requirements

Chair Doty resumed. Chelsea Levy, Long Range Planning, facilitated the Commission's review of the proposed code revisions regarding parking requirements in Downtown Tacoma. Her presentation focused on two issues, i.e., Surface Parking Lots on Primary Pedestrian Streets and public comments received at the Commission's public hearing on September 21, 2011.

Concerning surface parking lots, part of the proposed regulations would limit new surface lots associated with an on-site use to 60 feet in width, unless there is a 60-ft setback, and prohibit expansion of existing on-site surface parking lots, unless there is a 60-ft setback. Ms. Levy stated that Councilmember David Boe recently suggested the Commission to consider changing the 60-ft setback to 40 feet, because most of the existing lots on Primary Pedestrian Streets are 100-ft deep and a 40-ft setback would allow a 60-ft parking area behind the setback which would accommodate an efficient parking layout. Ms. Levy indicated that currently there are only three sites within the proposed Reduced Parking Area (RPA) that would be affected by the regulations. Other sites would require demolition of an existing building to be affected.

At this point, Commission Winship recused himself from participating in further discussion, citing that he is a board member of United Way, which owns one of the three sites in question (at Pacific Ave. and Hood St.).

Discussion ensued, and the Commissioners reached a consensus that the 40-ft setback would be reasonable. The Commissioners also discussed what uses could go in the setback area, be it a building, landscaping, or public amenities. Ms. Levy indicated that she would return with a proposal for a minimum requirement of landscaping and a "pick list" for amenities (including such items as water feature, planters, bike racks, decorative lighting, and public art) from which the developer can choose. The Commissioners also suggested that the language in the Code be carefully reviewed by the Legal Department when it pertains to easements for public access.

Ms. Levy reviewed the oral testimony received at the public hearing on September 21, 2011 and written comments received through September 30. The Commissioners focused their discussion on parking maximums versus minimums and allowances for providing public parking. Ms. Levy provided some alternatives for consideration. The Commissioners recognized that the main goal is having a code amendment that limits the development of parking lots but promotes a vibrant downtown that is pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented, as envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan. Some Commissioners felt that maximums/minimums should not be set but rather let the market dictate the parking requirements and that if parking requirements were mandated it could act as hindrance to development downtown. Ms. Stenger noted that the City has the mechanism of Development Regulation Agreements (DRAs) in place that would provide the developer an opportunity and the flexibility to make certain adjustments tailored to the specifics of the proposed project if significant public benefits are secured.

Discussion continued, and the majority of the Commissioners agreed to reduce the parking maximum within the RPA from 3.6 (stalls per 1,000 square feet of floor area) to 2.5, which was an approximate average of five benchmarking cities that staff had surveyed. The same maximum would be reintroduced in the IFSA where currently there is no maximum.

3. Brewery District Subarea Plan

Ian Munce, Long Range Planning, provided an overview of a planning effort currently underway in the South Downtown Tacoma, which includes the areas generally known as the Brewery District, the Dome District, parts of the Hillside, the University of Washington Campus, the Museum District, and the Thea Foss Waterway. The area has significant and well-documented capacity for additional density, and access to multi-modal transportation (e.g., transit, light rail, and commuter rail), offering great potential for redevelopment and job creation, as well as an access point to the region's largest job centers.

This subarea plan is being conducted as part of the regional "Growing Transit Communities" effort undertaken by the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC), focusing on executing the region's long-term growth and transportation strategies, *VISION 2040* and *Transportation 2040*. If the region is to meet VISION 2040's resource protection, climate change, smart growth, and sustainability goals, the City of Tacoma, as one of the region's metropolitan cities, must support approximately 8 percent of the region's total population and employment growth between 2000 and 2040. Much of this growth can be accommodated in a revitalized downtown Tacoma, which has targets for an additional 60,000 jobs and 70,000 people by 2030.

The Federal government is willing to invest in regional centers to accomplish this projected growth. A new federal partnership involving three entities (Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Transportation, and Environmental Protection Agency) has set up the Livability Principles and awarded HUD grants nationwide to competitive planning projects. The Growing Transit Communities program has received \$5 million, of which \$500,000 has been awarded to Tacoma's subarea plan. This regional planning effort emphasizes affordable housing, transportation choices and linkage, economic competitiveness, and community outreach, which are among some of the Livability Principles.

A critical aspect of the development of the subarea plan is a new SEPA approach which would allow cities to conduct upfront environmental review on an area-wide basis relieving subsequent investors from conducting expensive environmental analysis. Mr. Munce explained how the new approach would work to attract new regional investment incented by improved permit processing times.

Mr. Munce also reviewed the schedule of the subarea plan, the scoping process, the community outreach efforts, and the regional collaboration and major players. He encouraged the Commissioners to be involved in the process. Commissioner Lee indicated that she has been and will continue to be involved from the public transit perspective.

COMMUNICATION ITEMS

None.

COMMENTS BY LONG-RANGE PLANNING DIVISION

Ms. Stenger reported that the City Council's Environment and Public Works and Economic Development Committees met jointly on October 12, 2011 to discuss the Shoreline Master Program Update; they focused on issues associated with S-6 and S-7 Shoreline Districts and the eastside of the Thea Foss Waterway. They will continue their discussion on October 26.

Ms. Stenger noted a change that the City Council is considering, which would allow the reconstruction of damaged/destroyed nonconforming structure no matter how much the structure is damaged, i.e., the current threshold of allowing reconstruction if 75% or less of the structure is damaged would be removed.

Ms. Stenger also reported that the City Council is scheduled to conduct a public hearing on October 25, 2011, concerning the Large Scale Retail Moratorium.

COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSION

Chair Doty welcomed new Commissioner Scott Winship and Commissioner Winship gave brief comments on his business and personal background.

Commissioner Beale inquired about the schedule of the Mobility Stakeholder Funding Task Force. Jose Diekmann of Public Works responded that he will provide.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:12 p.m.