



2012 Annual Amendment to the Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Regulatory Code

Public Comments and Staff Responses Report March 28, 2012

The Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on March 7, 2012, and kept the record open until March 16, 2012, to receive public comment concerning the Proposed Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Regulatory Code for 2012 (“2012 Annual Amendment”).

Nine citizens testified at the public hearing (see Attachment A), and four written comments were received (see Attachments B-1 to B-4). Summarized below are the major issues and concerns reflected in the public comment and the corresponding staff responses.

Note that the 2012 Annual Amendment contains three applications, i.e., #2012-02 Housing Element, #2012-03 Transportation Element, and #2012-07 Minor Amendments and Refinements. The complete text of the proposed amendments and all relevant background information are compiled in the “Public Review Document”, which is posted at www.cityoftacoma.org/planning (and click on “2012 Annual Amendment”).

#2012-02 – Housing Element

1. The deleted paragraphs pertaining to special needs housing should be retained.

Staff Response:

Staff concurs with this comment and that special needs housing is an important part of the City’s housing continuum. These paragraphs are part of the intent statement for the policy category of “Housing Affordability” in the Housing Element (see Public Review Document, p. 27). These important policies are not reflected elsewhere in the element and thus should be retained here.

#2012-03 – Transportation Element

2. The trail system in the Puget Gardens area should be incorporated in the Transportation Element and all trail maps in the City’s documents.

Staff Response:

Metro Parks Tacoma is currently working on a planning exercise to create a management plan and to determine if there is public support for a boardwalk in the lower part of the Puget Gulch referred to as Puget Gardens. Metro Parks is the owner of this property and will be working with the residents of Tacoma as well as their Nature and Environment Advisory Council in upcoming months to determine how to move forward with this area. This area of Puget Gulch is a wetland and would require a wetland development permit to be developed. City of Tacoma staff are involved in the planning effort with Metro Parks and have determined it is premature to incorporate this detail on the City’s comprehensive plan maps until after the completion of Metro Parks’ planning process and their final determination about Puget Gardens.

- 3. Sidewalk improvements from McKinley Avenue to downtown should be given priority and added to the Mobility Master Plan, in order to provide safe walking environment, fulfill the Complete Streets policy, and accommodate the added pedestrian traffic and overflow parking during the Tacoma Dome (and the future LeMay Museum) events.**

Staff Response:

Upon completing a site visit, staff concurs with said comments and suggestion. Pedestrians clearly utilize the grassy areas adjacent to the curb where sidewalks are missing as evidenced by “goat trails” and this corridor is the link between the McKinley neighborhood and downtown. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Action Committee also discussed this matter at its meeting on March 19, 2012 and agreed it should be included in the Mobility Master Plan section of the Transportation Element. Staff recommends adding “McKinley Avenue between Wright and E. D St.” (Length = 0.31 miles) to Table 3 – Proposed Sidewalk Improvements, as Short Term Project #15 (see Public Review Document, p. 55).

- 4. Include S. Washington Street from S. 43rd to S. 60th as a bikeway to provide an extension from the bike lanes on South Tacoma Way and a connection to the South Tacoma Sounder Station.**

Staff Response:

Upon completing a site visit, staff concurs with said comments and suggestion. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Action Committee had determined at a meeting on November 21, 2011 that bikeway improvements on S. Washington were necessary for access to the new South Tacoma Sounder Commuter Rail Station and as an alternative to South Tacoma Way which parallels S. Washington and is too heavily trafficked for comfortable bicycle use. Staff recommends adding “S. Washington St. between S. 43rd and S. 60th” (Length = 1.50 miles, Cost Estimate = \$282,000, and Facility Type = Bike Lane) to Table 2 – Short Term Bicycle Project Priority List, as Short Term Project #10, in the Mobility Master Plan section of the Transportation Element (see Public Review Document, p. 49).

- 5. Prioritize bus movement on transit corridors and around Transit Centers, consistent with the Complete Street Guidelines, to insure the safety of bicyclists, bus riders and users of all modes of transportation.**

Staff Response:

The City agrees that a primary objective of a transit corridor is to provide for transit mobility, and believes that transit level of service and multimodal connectivity should be evaluated whenever changes are made to these corridors. The Mobility Master Plan section of the Transportation Element specifically calls for prioritizing transportation investment based on the “Green Transportation Hierarchy” which places pedestrians, bicyclists and public transit on top priorities. Also, safety of pedestrians and bicyclists is one of the guiding principles (others being accessibility, connectivity, people, equity, sustainability and multimodal) for implementing the Mobility Master Plan (see Public Review Document, p. 40 & 41).

- 6. Complete the city-wide sidewalk network with striped crosswalks at key intersections, maintaining stop bars and installing mid-block crossings where appropriate, particularly along arterials and streets served by transit.**

Staff Response:

Pedestrian safety is important to the City, and will continue to be addressed systematically through the City's curb ramp program, and with each roadway improvement project. Crosswalk markings will be considered along with other pedestrian improvement strategies during the design phase of each of these processes. The City will also continue seeking funding opportunities for maintenance of existing crosswalk markings.

#2012-07 – Minor Amendments and Refinements:

7. Allowing drive-throughs in the HMX – Hospital Medical Mixed-Use District is contrary to the Complete Streets principles, the anti-idling ordinance within the City's Climate Action Plan, and other efforts in the City.

Staff Response:

Drive-throughs are currently allowed in all other "commercial" X-Districts, subject to a number of special restrictions (such as preventing their location along the front of buildings, near bus or streetcar stops, near pedestrian streets, etc.). The initial proposal was to make this allowance consistent in the HMX District, subject to the same limitations. This inconsistency was raised when the Allenmore Hospital came forward to re-open their pharmacy, which has a drive-through window. It is important to note that this proposal was not intended to encourage drive-through restaurants, which is what many commonly think of when the term "drive-through" is used. As noted below, if the Commission elects to retain this change, it may be appropriate to provide further restrictions.

While the Climate Action Plan does call for the City to consider an "anti-idling ordinance," the City does not currently have one and anti-idling ordinances do not generally focus on drive-throughs. The Complete Streets Guidelines do not call for any restriction of drive-throughs, although they do encourage limiting driveways, particularly along main streets, avenues, and transit corridors. As noted above, the code includes numerous restrictions related to this policy intent. However, the testimony raises good questions and it may be that more discussion is necessary to determine if drive-throughs should be further restricted and/or prohibited in this and other X-Districts.

Staff proposes the following options for the Commission to consider:

- a) Limit the proposed allowance for drive-throughs in HMX to hospitals and associated medical uses, while prohibiting non-medical related drive-throughs such as fast food restaurants.*
- b) Withdraw the proposed amendment (i.e., no expansion of allowance for drive-throughs to HMX), and as appropriate, consider initiating a policy discussion in the future about whether drive-throughs should be further restricted, particularly in X-Districts.*

8. Requesting that doggy daycare facilities with outdoor space be allowed in the CIX – Commercial-Industrial Mixed-Use District.

Staff Response:

Staff has been in contact with Ms. Woolworth and discussed her request. While doggie daycare facilities are a permitted use in the CIX District, they are not currently allowed to include any outdoor space, which is common for these types of facilities. The CIX District allows a wide variety of uses, up to and including

numerous types of industrial uses. Additionally, this district, which only exists along South Washington Street in the 56th & South Tacoma Way Mixed-Use Center, is characterized by a mix of heavy commercial and light industrial uses and is adjacent to a heavy industrial area. Of all of the mixed-use districts, CIX is the most intense, both in existing and planned character. Considering this, allowing outdoor space for doggie daycare facilities in this district is probably very reasonable. However, it is acknowledged that the particular code change requested by Ms. Woolworth was not included in the original package of code amendments for this year's Annual Amendment. However, if the Commission is comfortable with adding this relatively minor code change, staff's opinion is that the requested change would be generally consistent with the intent of the CIX District and would allow Ms. Woolworth to establish her business in a very appropriate location.

Attachments

- A. Summary of Oral Testimony (received at the Public Hearing on March 7, 2012)
- B. Written Comments (received through March 16, 2012):
 - 1. Michael Mirra, Affordable Housing Policy Advisory Group, February 29, 2012
(Mr. Mirra also submitted a copy of the AHPAG Policy Recommendations to the City Council, dated December 3, 2010. Due to its size, the report is not attached to this staff report, but is posted online – go to www.cityoftacoma.org/planning, and click on “2012 Annual Amendment #2012-2: Housing Element”, then “AHPAG Policy Recommendations to the City Council (12-3-10)”.)
 - 2. Matthew Nutsch, Planning Commissioner, March 9, 2012
 - 3. Ken Peachey, Bicycle and Pedestrian Action Committee, March 14, 2012
 - 4. Chelsea Levy, Pierce Transit, March 16, 2012