

**Tacoma Permit Advisory Task Force**  
Virtual meeting  
Meeting #30 – December 9, 2021, 10:30am

**Task Force Members in attendance:** Layne Alfonso, Clinton Brink, Jim Collins, Ben Ferguson, Jessica Gamble, Justin Goroch, Joshua Jorgensen, Evan Mann, Mandy McGill, Claude Remy, Chuck Sundsmo  
**Excused:** Jim Dugan, Michael R. Fast, Jason Gauthier, John Wolters  
**Absent:** N/A

**10:33 AM: Welcome**

**Approval of October meeting minutes**

- Meeting #29 on October 14, 2021 –Layne Alfonso moved. Claude Remy seconded. No discussion. Motion approved.

**New items of interest**

Lynda Foster provided the following updates:

- PDS Floodway Development Code Change
- Trees in the Right-of-Way Code Updates
- Home in Tacoma Project status update
- Chair meeting with the Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability (IPS) Committee Chair regard Impact Fees

**Quick Update: Engineering subgroup**

Justin Goroch had a meeting with local engineers to discuss sidewalks and curb ramps. They covered two main categories:

1. Process:

- More predictability is desired, mainly upfront with the pre-app and potentially a site walk of really nailing down what needs to be replaced, what's broken/damaged, defective, which curb ramps are needed, so on.
- Greater desire to have this figured out early in pre-design instead of inspector changing things later down the line.
- Internal coordination between the City - Site Development, Traffic, Planning, Critical Areas – to have one person take and facilitate conflicts/gaps/overlaps in comments rather than push that out to applicant and consultants. That would be desired to be done on City side, Site Development group was nominated to be that group.
- Desire to simplify smaller projects, have less complexity.
- An idea thrown out to do a site walk process, maybe an advanced pre-app, especially on larger complex projects.

2. Standards:

- Increasing sidewalk widths - if there is an existing 5ft sidewalk, why is there a need to increase a sidewalk to 7-10 feet in area that might not be used if it's functional today? In a more residential area, what's wrong with 5ft sidewalks?

- When you require sidewalks to be torn up, removed and replaced, you impact street lighting, other utilities, more impervious surface and need for storm water, resulting in cascading cost increase.
- Why is the City requiring curb ramps that are existing non-conforming now to be replaced with curb ramps non-conforming? What's benefit there?
- Why can't we allow a curb ramp in the center of mid-radius instead of two that go each direction? We know it's desired, but it might be a solution...
- Why does Tacoma require more information on plans than other jurisdictions?
- When sidewalks are touched, street lights need to be replaced...
- When are street lights required and when are they not?
- Standards of nothing being put in sidewalks, leading to no place to put utilities like vault lids, outlets, etc.
- PROWAG requires 4ft sidewalk, why does Tacoma require 5ft?
- What's good enough in terms of cross slope and running slope?
- What's the hierarchy of requirements when you have non-conforming curb ramps?
- Desire to have tip sheet as guidelines

Chris Johnson's comments:

- One key point is the ability to get ahold of reviewer, how necessary that is early on. The flexibility for staff to go out on site early on is a big deal but we need to look into it as it is a big ask to do site visits at the same time as providing plan reviews.
- What we are trying to do now is strategize how best to address it.
- What we owe the team is to provide an explanation and work with you to come up with solutions that you would agree on.
- Very well received feedback, great conversation.

Ben Ferguson's comments:

- This is exactly the level of conversation I was hoping for.
- Wondering when staff would come back to us & bring things in the future. Would it be appropriate to can adopt certain ones without having to go through a whole brainstorming and discussion if there is already a reasonable solution?

### **10:48 AM: Driveways and parking lots off-site presentation**

Chris Johnson, Jennifer Kammerzell, and Jana Magoon took turns presenting the slides.

11:19 AM: Discussion, comments, and questions

Ben Ferguson:

- Regarding the drawing in middle of a diagram where there were an alley with driveways on the other side crisscrossing, which is a challenge. One thing not at play but should be, is the number of trips that are involved in the crisscrossing – distinguish between amount of traffic from each driveway and make it relevant as part of the discussion. He specifically asked staff to consider this item and report back.

- Does City have process to review situations where parking requirement for particular zone make uses intended in that zone impossible? For instance, C2 has a parking challenge. If you have a restaurant, you need 3 parking stalls per 1000 square feet. In a C2 neighborhood, a 3,000 square-foot restaurant makes the lot be able to handle nothing more. We have projects that die the minute we do a quick feasibility. It would be good for staff to address/have a way to off-ramp that.
- Ben agreed with the assumption that redevelopment should have more flexibility. If you are doing something from scratch, you can make it work, but more flexibility is needed for remodels. For example, when there's an existing building on existing site with existing parking lot, it is impossible to move a building 4 feet. Parking requirements can make a project impossible. He would send Jana and Jennifer a diagram of a site that did not work.

Layne Alfonso:

- Focus on a conflict resolution process – consider conflict between new buildings and existing uses of neighborhoods.
- It is important to maintain the best use of the community and balance that with the proposed development.

Evan Mann:

- Reiteration of Ben's comment – non-conforming issues triggering parking lot and other things will turn away business in Tacoma.
- Request for a maximum amount of flexibility feasible, not getting straight to 100% conforming.
- He did not think we were moving away from car-centric area and wanted to make sure with the passage of Home in Tacoma project, standards necessary for triplexes and townhome development are considered. He's seen a lot of conflicts in Seattle and other jurisdictions where cars were pushed to the rear and they ended up needing to redevelop a whole alley.

Mandy McGill:

- Advocate for formal escalation process. Similar to Ben's example, it usually comes down to... "had we known, the project wouldn't have been killed."
- If we were to do this, how is it problematic for your department? If it is problematic, how can we make that better?
- Jana's response in regards to the escalation process: There is a formal escalation process in place and a tip sheet for that, but it is not intended as a means to waive requirements. We serve both development community and residential community. One of the things that has been done is we process variances. As we see trends in ways that we can make them work without a public process, then we can incorporate those into the code.

Justin Goroach:

- In reference to Jana's question about when is the right time to bring it up, it's as early as possible. It's good to give heads up when we think there is a potential challenge.

Chris Johnson:

- Echoing Jana, there is a permit dispute resolution process, which gets you to the right people to work through that. It's all the way from the pre-application process.
- The questions are more about where the City is flexible.

Justin Goroch:

- Folks in the room know how to connect with City, but what about everyone else? We need something published for them to know how to tackle things

Ben Ferguson:

- Regarding his example, he tried to off ramp it 1.5 years ago and it did not work.
- Goals for 6<sup>th</sup> Ave are good, but current zoning requirements are killing projects that would help achieve the goals.
- Tacoma is the best agency to work with but there are still frustrating things.
- C2 should be having lots of development right now but it's not. Why?

Mandy McGill:

- What would make the escalation process easier?

Ben Ferguson:

- Typically, when he reached out saying how something did not make sense, he got the response of "here's the rules and that's that," instead of "here's how we work through it."
- It's a black and white approach and rarely has follow-up.

Jana Magoon:

- This is a great example of a policy conversation. There are areas where our only option is to do a variance. That's not the desired approach and may not be approved. That's a policy conversation.
- As sites get smaller, there are more conflicts with the site and ROW amenities.
- Many codes are meant to work together in a small space. Sometimes when the LU code says we want it, it does not mean that the other standards can be bent.
- If we want restaurants in C2 and we want these kinds of uses, we need to make this allowed.

Lynda Foster shared that the City Council was discussing the Multi-Family Tax Exemption (MFTE) at their session on Tuesday. Councilmember Ushka referenced a policy she would be developing during the MFTE discussion. Lynda would send out details about where "neighborhood commercial nodes" are, and asked Taskforce members to share their thoughts about other commercial zoning like C2 and what's in mixed use centers.

### **11:48 AM: Quick review of structure change of Task Force**

This group was created as a task force, supposed to discuss specific problems and have an end date. There is no end date for this task force so there comes a need to reappoint people, but the appointment process is not in alignment, Lynda Foster was looking at which structure would be in alignment. This is not intended to change the work of the task force, just to align it with the available structures of the City and make sure the City requirements are met.

### **11:50 AM: Review priorities set by Task Force**

Justin Goroch stated that the taskforce had moved through Impact Fees and were discussing off-site improvements. He raised the question of whether they should continue spending time on off-site improvements or move on to another subject.

Layne Alfonso felt the list still resonated and trusted Lynda & leadership group would bring it to the group's attention if something new comes up and needs to be prioritized.

Ben Ferguson thought the group could spend all of their time on offsite improvements for a year or two as it is such a broad area. It might be okay to jump to a different topic so that other expertise in the room can get involved. The RCW one is very important to Master Builders.

Jessie Gamble would like to see move on and tick off the boxes, but still recognize that Impact Fees and other topics may have urgent development that might need to be discussed.

Justin Goroch commented that with Home in Tacoma entering Phase 2, the taskforce would need to get on the topic of Design Review (DR) soon.

Mandy McGill strongly believed that DR was going to become a hot topic and wanted to address it.

Justin Goroch suggested moving onto design review next, with caveat that if there was a need to go back and revisit something, they would.

Ben Ferguson was concerned that it might be premature for the DR conversation.

Lynda Foster would check in with staff to figure out the timing that would work for this conversation.

Ben Ferguson indicated that there would likely be a design review process, so the taskforce should engage and help steer it to something that might work better.

Lynda Foster would provide the language in the draft legislative agenda.

### **11:59 AM: Final comments**

Comments of appreciations and well wishes for the holidays from Justin Goroch.

### **12:00 PM: Adjourned**