



City of Tacoma
Planning Commission

January 4, 2012

Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council:

On August 30, 2011, the Council adopted Ordinance No. 28014, enacting a city-wide moratorium on the acceptance and processing of development applications for large scale retail establishments. The purpose of the moratorium was, in part, to review and update the zoning code to better implement the policies and goals of the Comprehensive Plan regarding large scale retail uses. The City Council's request was to address inconsistencies with the Comprehensive Plan policies and the concerns that were brought forward from the community with code amendments that could be achieved by the moratorium expiration date of February 29, 2012.

The Planning Commission acknowledges that the City Council, through the moratoria process, requested the Commission to focus its review of large scale retail businesses on utilizing size limits for such developments. The Planning Commission, however, recommends a more refined approach which recognizes that large retail developments are not inherently inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan but that how and where they are developed is critical, and that ensuring community input on such significant developments is appropriate and needed.

While the Commission is recommending a minor expansion of the City's existing large scale retail limitations, our primary recommendation is to institute a Conditional Use Permit requirement for large scale retail uses in most of the areas of the city where they are allowed. This approach will better align the Land Use Regulatory Code with existing Comprehensive Plan policies that specifically support a discretionary land use permit requirement for large scale retail development, particularly within the Mixed-Use Centers. Not only will this approach bolster the City's ability to review these projects and ensure consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and planned character of the area, but will open up these significant projects to substantial community outreach and input. This proposed review would include expansive public notice and a public hearing, as well as a unique requirement – a pre-application community meeting between the developer and the neighborhood. This special meeting will help provide early and open dialogue between the applicant and the neighborhood surrounding the proposed development and allow for an exchange of information about the project and the community.

During the moratorium review, one of the most repeated questions from the community was how projects of this scale could be allowed without community notification and input. We agree with the community – that public input is critical for projects of this scale, which can both significantly impact an area and dramatically affect the ability for the community and the particular neighborhood to achieve its long-term vision and goals. The proposed Conditional Use Permit review provides a mechanism to better ensure that new large scale retail development does not detract from this community's vision but can act as a catalyst for achieving it.

While these recommended amendments will significantly enhance the review of such projects, the Commission's brief analysis under this moratorium also highlighted that further work with the Zoning Code's design and development standards is warranted, particularly as they relate to our important Mixed-Use Centers. As noted in our October 19, 2011 recommendation, the Commission and Council led a multi-year effort, which concluded in 2009, to analyze and update the policies and regulations for

Mayor and Members of the City Council

Large Scale Retail Moratorium

January 4, 2012

Page 2

the Mixed-Use Centers. That review focused largely on the Neighborhood Mixed-Use Centers (such as Stadium, Proctor, 6th & Pine, McKinley and 56th & South Tacoma Way) and less so on the Community and Urban Mixed-Use Centers (such as Tacoma Central/Allenmore, Westgate, 72nd and Pacific, and the Tacoma Mall area). Ensuring that the centers develop in a manner that is consistent with the community's vision is critical to achieving our long-term land use and economic goals. We look forward to our continued work to more completely integrate the Comprehensive Plan's policies and the implementing regulations and the community's desires for development in these areas.

Therefore, on behalf of the Planning Commission, I am forwarding our findings and recommendations in response to the large scale retail moratorium. Enclosed you will find a copy of our Findings of Fact and Recommendations report that summarizes the public review process and the Commission's actions. The Planning Commission respectfully recommends that the City Council adopt the amended large scale retail regulations, as set forth in Exhibit A to our Findings and Recommendations Report.

Sincerely,



JEREMY C. DOTY

Chair, Planning Commission

Enclosures