



MINUTES (Approved as Amended on 5/6/15)

TIME: Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 4:00 p.m.
PLACE: Room 16, Tacoma Municipal Building North
733 Market Street, Tacoma, WA 98402
PRESENT: Chris Beale (Chair), Scott Winship (Vice-Chair), Donald Erickson, Meredith Neal,
Erle Thompson, Stephen Wamback
ABSENT: Benjamin Fields, Anna Petersen

A. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Beale called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m.

B. QUORUM CALL

A quorum was declared.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the regular meeting on April 1, 2015 were approved as submitted.

D. DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Mixed-Use Centers Review (Annual Amendment #2015-02)

John Owen, Makers Architecture and Urban Design, presented a summary of the key policy issues emerging from the Mixed-Use Centers (MUCs) review. He provided a brief review of past discussions and background information. Mr. Owen discussed how the Mixed-Use Centers were broken into two categories: Neighborhood Centers and Crossroads Centers. The purpose of the categories was to recognize that all centers are viable, though varying in redevelopment strategies and assets.

Greg Easton, Property Counselors, noted that the two centers differed economically by varying in the number and types of jobs and serving different sized trade areas. He emphasized that both types of centers would serve pedestrian traffic, but auto traffic from the larger trade area was necessary in the survival of either type of MUC.

Mr. Owen discussed how the MUCs were evaluated using the principles from the Tacoma Comprehensive Plan to develop parameters or metrics. The analysis summary was discussed with a chart displaying how each MUC is performing relative to achieving the goals set out in the parameters. Mr. Owen highlighted MUCs with long and near term potential that would benefit most from City intervention.

The three comprehensive strategies making up the overall strategy were reviewed:

1. Focusing on one or two centers for maximum effect. This would entail picking centers where public effort would have the most benefit. Lincoln and 56th & South Tacoma Way had already been selected for this strategy. The individual strategies and recommendations for achieving the objectives based on the Comprehensive Plan were discussed. Five criteria for setting future priorities were reviewed, having been created in discussion with members of City Council.

2. Addressing special opportunities as they emerge. This would involve recognizing opportunities that make an effective use of resources and addressing special needs. 34th and Pacific was used as example where development opportunities like the new County building could be leveraged. James Center was used as an example of a MUC where better pedestrian connections are needed. Narrows was noted as being a small MUC with where linkages in the larger west Tacoma area could be considered. 72nd and Portland was noted as needing improvements in quality of life. Mr. Owen noted that MUCs like Lower Portland Avenue and McKinley may not be ready for new development.
3. Realigning City programs for maximum effect. This would involve tweaking existing programs to support MUC goals and programmatic efforts to address equity. Capital improvements could include allocating funds for design so that Public Works could compete for grants. Several MUCs could benefit from new parks or better connections to existing facilities. There were also realignment recommendations for business district improvement and organizing, housing, and Local Improvement Districts (LIDs).

Commissioners had the following comments and questions:

- Commissioner Erickson asked if there were opportunities to tweak the boundaries to make the MUCs more viable. Greg Easton responded that tweaking the boundaries could create more development opportunities as many of the Centers have little vacant land.
- Commissioner Wamback noted that the criteria for determining where effort would be focused included selecting MUCs according to Council District. He suggested that they should also recognize the boundaries of neighborhood councils which do not match the boundaries of City Council districts. This would be particularly important on the east side.
- Commissioner Wamback suggested they could put something in the report on how they preserve character and charm in a neighborhood center as the area evolves.
- Vice-Chair Winship commented on the human capital aspect of the different neighborhoods and suggested that neighborhood sentiment should be considered.
- Commissioner Thompson commented that growth management, especially housing targets, was not addressed and should be incorporated.
- Commissioner Neal suggested looking into a community center in a vacant area of Westgate.
- Chair Beale, noting the recommendation for park space in 72nd & Portland, asked for more information on how Metro Parks Tacoma prioritizes level of service distance from other parks or MUCs and how they set LOS standards.
- Chair Beale, noting the importance of internal connections in Crossroads Centers, asked if they had looked at development standards and if there were any recommendations to improve infill development to have better interaction with street frontages and walking connections. Mr. Owen responded that it was a good suggestion and would be investigated.
- Chair Beale ~~noted~~ noting that the consultant's report indicates that McKinley and Lower Portland could be candidates for deletion, ~~and~~ asked what the next steps would be. Stephen Atkinson, Planning and Development Services, recommended allowing Lower Portland to remain with the possibility of evaluating an alternative center along Portland Ave. at Salishan. With McKinley he suggested a different configuration for the MUC moving away from a long, shallow development corridor towards a neighborhood oriented center.
- Commissioner Erickson commented he would like to see design guidelines addressed and suggested that they explore if there were areas that warranted that kind of consideration. Mr. Atkinson responded that they have design policy and code in the Generalized Land Use Element, but not necessarily design guidelines. He added that they would seek to clarify it.

2. 2015 Comprehensive Plan Update

Stephen Atkinson, Planning and Development Services, continued a discussion of the 2015 Comprehensive Plan update. He discussed the Draft Urban Form Element and the key building blocks in terms of location, distribution, relation, and differentiation. The building blocks included: centers, corridors,

employment areas, transit station areas, open space system, signature trails, and historic neighborhood pattern areas. Chair Beale commented that streets are buried in several other building blocks and deserve a building block of their own.

The Mixed-Use Centers Review was discussed in relation to the Draft Urban Form Element and land use designation update. Mr. Atkinson noted that the existing nomenclature within the Comprehensive Plan and the Generalized Land Use element creates confusion on whether areas like Downtown should be called “centers” or “regional growth centers”. He recommended cleaning up the categories by choosing one of the names. On the issue of policy differentiation between Community, Crossroads, and Neighborhood Centers Mr. Atkinson recommended a more structured approach focusing on policies specific to each center. He discussed recognizing Convenience Nodes, Employment Areas, and Signature Trails. A map showing Neighborhood pattern areas was discussed, Mr. Atkinson noting how the character areas could be identified and used to articulate policies.

The draft outline and policy framework for the revised Economic Development Element was reviewed. The draft outline included the following policy areas: expanding employment, business retention, expansion, and attraction, employment centers, and key industries. Discussion ensued on some of the trends that could affect Tacoma.

3. Plan and Code Cleanup (Annual Amendment #2015-10)

Elliott Fitzgerald, Planning Services Division, facilitated a discussion to continue a review of the proposed minor amendments to the Land Use Regulatory Code and the Comprehensive Plan, as part of the 2015 Annual Amendment process. He reviewed that at a previous meeting on February 18, 2015, staff had presented a full list of proposed amendments for the Commission’s review. Mr. Fitzgerald noted that they were seeking additional feedback on three code amendments:

- Allowing height variances for structures that are not accessory buildings, as well as those that are outside of the View-Sensitive Overlay District. Mr. Fitzgerald reviewed how exceptions to height limitations were currently permitted through variances, general exceptions, and conditional uses. He noted that three of the seven types of variances could be amended to accommodate the cleanup item. Mr. Fitzgerald commented that staff was recommending aligning different criteria throughout the code and, based on hardship criteria, allowing height variances where appropriate.

They were no major objections from the Commission. There was a comment that it would be important that the amendment did not conflict with ongoing discussion of the billboards issue.

- Allowing reasonably-sized apartment signs in Residential Districts. Mr. Fitzgerald reviewed the current code that allowed signs only for real estate and home occupation. He then discussed the sign standards for University Place, Brown’s Point, Puyallup, and St. Paul, Minnesota. The recommendation of staff was to allow signs of up to 6 square feet for residential developments of 4 or more dwelling units.

There was concurrence from the Commission on the recommendation of 6 square feet, with some support for allowing larger signs for developments with a greater number of units up to a capped size.

- Having a clear “sunset clause” for discontinued Conditional Use Permits. Mr. Fitzgerald noted that it is currently unclear if properties vacant for a certain amount of time would need to get a new Conditional Use Permit to reestablish a conditional use. He reviewed the number of years allowed by other jurisdictions before a new permit is required, with the typical range between 2 and 5 years.

There was concurrence from the Commission for three years as the standard. There was some support for allowance of a limited number of extensions and a request for additional information on how extensions are used in other jurisdictions.

4. Tacoma Link Light Rail Expansion

Lihuang Wung, Planning Services Division, continued a discussion of issues relating to the Tacoma Link Light Rail Expansion project. He reviewed that at the previous meeting, following a briefing from Sound Transit on the status of the project, the Commission raised some concerns including: whether the need for the Stadium Way & S. 4th station is justified, given the extremely low ridership projection; the need to ensure effective accessibility to the Stadium Way & S. 4th station, given the challenging hilly topography in the vicinity; the need for an additional station on MLK between S. 11th and S. 19th to provide better coverage of the ¼-mile walk sheds; and the need to properly address bicycling mobility and safety around any curbside station. Chair Beale added that he had also made a request for information on the cost of relocating the Theater District Station.

Mr. Wung reviewed the background material provided in the meeting packet including the Commission Letter of Comments; Council Resolutions 38837 and 39004; and the Hilltop and North Downtown Subarea Plans. The potential comments and recommendations that could be included in a letter to the City Council were discussed. Brian Boudet, Planning Services Division Manager, commented that many of the City Council actions had been part of streamlining the process to ensure that the City and Sound Transit would be able to get the necessary funding. Kurtis Kingsolver, Public Works Director, briefed the Commission on how the alignments and stations were chosen. He noted that the Federal Transit Administration grant process did not accommodate multiple options or alternatives for station locations.

Commissioners had the following comments and questions:

- There was support from some of the Commissioners for removing the Stadium and 4th station and using the money for infrastructure at other points. It was noted that the station would cost around \$200,000 depending on the amenities included.
- Chair Beale suggested keeping the Stadium and 4th station, not relocating the Theater District Station, and moving the 11th and 19th Stations along MLK closer together. It was noted that the 11th Street Station was near the County City building where people go to report for jury duty.
- Commissioner Wamback, noting the later addition of the Commerce Street station on the current system, suggested the letter could include a message about long term possibilities instead of recommending a new station.
- Commissioner Wamback suggested that anything written should be consistent with the earlier letter which he felt was in support of the alignment.

Chair Beale requested a letter capturing the options discussed and leaving the final decision to the City Council. Mr. Boudet commented that they would draft a letter based on the current discussion and return to review and finalize at the May 6th meeting.

E. COMMUNICATION ITEMS & OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Boudet updated the Commission on the Comprehensive Plan Update Community Workshops held in Council Districts – the next two would be on April 16 at the Stadium High School and April 23 at the Snake Lake Nature Center. He commented that the three workshops so far had included a good discussion with similar themes on connectivity and where each neighborhood's heart is.

Mr. Boudet reported that the American Planning Association's (APA) national conference would be held in Seattle April 18-22 and that there would be a mobile workshop on "Tacoma, Past and Future" planned for Monday, April 20.

F. ADJOURNMENT:

At 6:37 p.m., the meeting of the Planning Commission was concluded.