



MINUTES (Approved on 11-16-16)

TIME: Wednesday, October 19, 2016, 4:00 p.m.
PLACE: Room 16, Tacoma Municipal Building North
733 Market Street, Tacoma, WA 98402
PRESENT: Stephen Wamback (Vice-Chair), Meredith Neal, Anna Petersen, Brett Santhuff
Dorian Waller, Scott Winship, Jeremy Woolley
ABSENT: Chris Beale (Chair), Jeff McInnis

A. CALL TO ORDER AND QUORUM CALL

Vice-Chair Wamback called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m. A quorum was declared.

B. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved.

C. PUBLIC COMMENTS

No members of the public came forward to provide comments.

D. DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Dialogue with the Neighborhood Councils – South Tacoma

Pennie Smith and Beverly Bowen-Bennett from the South Tacoma Neighborhood Council had a discussion with the Planning Commission regarding their issues, concerns, needs, and priorities. Ms. Smith reviewed that she was currently the South Tacoma Neighborhood Council Chair. Ms. Bowen-Bennett noted that she had been on the South Tacoma Neighborhood Council since January 2016. Commissioners introduced themselves noting which positions they represent and what part of Tacoma they are from. The role and purpose of the Planning Commission was reviewed.

Ms. Smith noted that while they represent all of South Tacoma, they worked on the side of neighborhoods. She reported that they were concerned that construction was happening even though it seemed that space was short in the Tacoma Mall subarea. She asked how building proposals were approved, what constituted a private alley, and how a specific property became accessible only through an easement. Vice-Chair Wamback reported that current development proposals were handled by a separate group of staff and that permit decisions do not come before the Commission.

Ms. Bowen-Bennett commented that she was concerned about how much building was going on, though no one has started building anything in Lincoln Heights. She noted that she lived in the Madison Neighborhood, expressing support for having the former elementary school become a park, community center, or school again. She added that the only park in the 600 acre area was the Lincoln Heights park, noting that they had held an event in that park and were planning another. Ms. Bowen-Bennett asked if there had been any consideration for Lincoln Heights as a historic area. Elliott Barnett, Planning Services Division, responded that he hadn't heard anyone suggested that Lincoln Heights should become formally historic. He noted that in the subarea plan they were proposing keeping the area residential while having it zoned for higher density.

Ms. Bowen-Bennett commented that she wished they could have a moratorium on building until they have the Tacoma Mall Subarea Plan approved, because it seemed like every week ground was being broken

for a structure that would not be considered appropriate in the plan. She noted that one of the neighborhood council's concerns was that they didn't hear about anything until it has already happened.

Ms. Bowen-Bennett asked how citizens can impact the decisions made by the Planning Commission. Vice-Chair Wamback responded that by attending stakeholder meetings they were already involved in the process. He noted that they also had a public comment item at each meeting and could discuss any item from the meeting agenda that it had not already gone through the public hearing process.

Commissioner Santhuff commented that the south Tacoma business district was important to the neighborhood council, expressing interest in their feedback on how the current regulations were structured and if it meets the vision of the neighbors of that business district. Ms. Bowen-Bennett responded that a member of the board had reported that the South Tacoma Business District did not have communication with the businesses involved in the subarea plan.

Commissioner Santhuff commented it was important to be aware of the current zoning and development rights compared to what was there currently. He added that the area had many historic buildings which are not protected and that it would be a good area for a neighborhood council to be engaged with their vision for future development.

Vice-Chair Wamback noted the challenges associated with accommodating growth in the City, reviewing that it had been important to them to protect and preserve the existing lower density single family areas. He commented that they needed input from the public on how they can preserve those single family neighborhoods while still finding a place to accommodate growth. He added that there was also the challenge of how they plan higher density so it fits into the existing character and provides quality places for people to live. Ms. Bowen-Bennett commented that she shared the concern that the new high density construction was not quality. She asked that if they could put one thing on the plan it would be that homes can't be constructed with the front door on the alley.

2. Urban Design Studio

Brian Boudet, Planning Services Division Manager, reviewed that they were continuing a process that had started in 2007 with community and stakeholder conversations about what an urban design program might look like. He commented that they wanted there to be a new community conversation, but also to capture the outreach that had already occurred. Stephen Atkinson, Planning Services Division, noted that they had contracted with Makers Architecture and Urban Design in part because they think about the programmatic element, how to administer design review programs, and the value that it can add.

Bob Bengford, Makers Architecture and Urban Design, reviewed that in 2006 and 2008 they had done a lot of outreach and spoken with many other cities. When they were asked to reengage on the project they had looked at their previous report and found that many of the recommendations still apply, but they also took the opportunity to go back and document the issues with design review in other communities. Mr. Bengford reviewed that currently in many jurisdictions design standards are codified, while in other jurisdictions half of the standards are in code and half are adopted by reference outside of the code. He added that there are unique opportunities or constraints based on whether design provisions are codified or freestanding. He noted examples from Boise, Ellensburg, and the City of Redmond.

Mr. Bengford discussed whether to focus on specificity or flexibility in design standards, noting that Tacoma's current design standards were very prescriptive while other cities were typically more flexible. Commissioner Winship asked if there was a preference among the developers. Mr. Bengford responded that the developers want both predictability and flexibility, but the best approach was to have clear minimum standards with integrated opportunities for flexibility. This could be done through a toolbox approach or by having departure provisions. He noted that in Redmond one could essentially do departure on anything, then they allowed administrative design flexibility if it would create a better project.

Mr. Bengford noted a typical example of how the design provisions were organized. He added that on their projects they usually prioritize the frontages and then get into the site design elements, service elements, and the building design later. He commented that as they updated design provision they would need to look at the gaps concerning areas, zones and types of development; individual site and building design issues; and issues specific to Tacoma. They would also need to find the balance of specificity and

flexibility right for Tacoma. Mr. Bengford discussed the importance of graphics, which could also illustrate many types of development as well as examples of what they don't want to see. The last step to updating the design provisions would be to update the standards and guidelines to meet design objectives.

Mr. Bengford reviewed that at the stakeholder meetings from 2008 they had heard that the time was right for design review; that clear intent statements were important; the need to focus on critical design issues; that context is important; that options for developers and stakeholders shouldn't be too onerous, but also meet the vision; the need for a balance of prescription and flexibility; and that the process be workable and predictable.

Design review was discussed. Mr. Bengford reviewed that they currently have administrative review but another option would be having a citywide design review board. He suggested that if they were going to have a design review board they would want to make sure they have the appropriate staffing and that the review would be timely. Mr. Bengford suggested options to be considered for applicability including design review for all commercial and multifamily development; requiring it only for projects that do a departure; requiring it for projects receiving a height bonus; requiring it for specific areas or zones; or looking at bigger projects only. He recommended looking at the permit history to determine feasibility. Mr. Bengford noted that design review can provide an extra opportunity for public comment, even if the review is handled administratively.

Mr. Atkinson discussed costs and fees. He reviewed that they had requested money in the budget for one full time employee, an intern, and the professional services needed for the process, development, and design of the code. He added that the budget was a reasonable starting point that they could build on in the future. Mr. Bengford reported that they had looked into how other cities structure their costs, finding that some of them used fixed costs and others used hours spent.

Mr. Bengford commented that if they end up with a good set of design standards and guidelines it can have a number of effects including setting a clear expectation for design for the applicants and community members; providing a balance of predictability and flexibility; facilitating better public involvement in the development process; and facilitating better communication between the reviewer and the applicant.

Mr. Atkinson commented that it would be helpful to start with some basic concepts. He noted that there is administrative design review being done currently through their code and permit processes and that there would need to be updates to standards and codes regardless of whether or not they had a design review board. He commented that they did not have the staff resources to open the design review board up to everything. He added that it made sense to think about improving existing processes and to strengthen and expand staff expertise in house whether or not there is a design review board.

Lauren Flemister, Planning Services Division, commented that if they received budget approval they would need to take a number of steps to get the program up and running. Public outreach, including outreach to the Master Builders Association, the American Institute of Architects, and the Neighborhood Councils, would be important for understanding how the market would play to the concept and what they would need to do to encourage positive departure. During the code audit phase they would consider the gaps and errors in the code, how to make it more usable for public and staff, and whether it would be embedded in the code or freestanding. Scoping would happen once they had feedback from the public. It would also be important to consider how it would impact existing staff in permitting.

Commissioners provided the following questions and comments:

- Commissioner Neal asked what scale of multifamily other jurisdictions were considering, noting that many fourplexes in an area can change the character. Mr. Bengford responded that they could have different standards for different housing types or specific to those types. Ms. Flemister commented that they could expand to different housing types or areas over time.
- Commissioner Neal asked if it would be only for large developments or if it would also be for single family and duplexes. Mr. Atkinson noted that there were design standards in place for single family and duplexes in some cases and they would need to evaluate whether those standards were working.

- Commissioner Petersen commented that they should have clear guidelines on what goes through the staff review as opposed to what goes to the design review board. She suggested they allow for smaller flexibilities without moving projects up to the design review board level.
- Commissioner Petersen commented that having a staff member with planning and design expertise would not be necessary and that any planner could be able to do it. Ms. Flemister responded that having an architecture background would be necessary for some of the discussions to get the best outcome.
- Commissioner Petersen reported that she had worked in jurisdictions that had a set fee and jurisdictions that billed hourly. She had observed that it requires extra time from more than just planning staff, noting that plans examiners and engineering staff would have to spend extra time on design issues especially if the applicant hadn't submitted a fully thought out project.
- Commissioner Winship suggested that the process include an assessment of how it is working to ensure that the objectives are being met.
- Commissioner Santhuff asked if the infill housing pilot program, which had included design guidelines and a review board, would influence this project. Mr. Boudet confirmed that it would.
- Commissioner Santhuff asked if any jurisdictions structured their design review boards by scale or type of project, with different compositions of membership for different kinds of development. Mr. Atkinson responded that he wasn't aware of any jurisdictions that structure their design review boards in that manner but it was something that they could investigate.
- Vice-Chair Wamback suggested that they ask the City Council to authorize the Planning Commission to form an advisory committee with outside members that would work with staff and report to the Commission periodically during the public process. The committee could be there for the development of the program and then for the next 18 months to review how it's going.
- Vice-Chair Wamback commented that he had seen design review boards that work, but also some boards that are very anti-development and focused on preserving character.

E. COMMUNICATION ITEMS & OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioners provided the following suggestions for future meetings with Neighborhood Council representatives:

- Vice-Chair Wamback suggested that it would be helpful to invite Neighborhood Council members to discuss their area and provide a map showing the district boundaries.
- Vice-Chair Wamback suggested having them discuss 3 things they like and 3 things they dislike about the urban design of their neighborhood.
- Commissioner Neal suggested including a question on where they see the center of their neighborhood.
- Commissioner Neal suggested providing a one page summary on what the Planning Commission does and another on how to get involved in the planning process.

Mr. Boudet provided the following updates:

- Invites had been sent to Commissioners to schedule lunch meetings over the next few months, providing an opportunity for a one on one discussion with Planning staff.
- The third presentation of Conversations Regarding Tacoma would be on November 10.
- Billboards were a possible item for the agenda of the next meeting. The discussion would likely focus on the status of the standstill agreement and discussions with Lamar Advertising.

Commissioner Woolley noted that there would be a Historic Tacoma meeting on November 10 with topics including historic preservation and adaptive reuse.

F. ADJOURNMENT

At 6:17 p.m., the meeting of the Planning Commission was concluded.