

Development Commission  
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**CITY OF ISSAQUAH**  
**Development Commission**  
**MINUTES**  
**August 2, 2017**

City Hall South  
Council Chambers

135 E. Sunset Way  
Issaquah, WA 98027

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT**

Richard Sowa, Chair  
Mel Morgan, Jr., Vice Chair  
Michael Brennan  
Randy Harrison  
Raymond Leong  
Kevin Price

**STAFF PRESENT**

Keith Niven, Econ. Dev. and Dev. Serv. Director  
Lucy Sloman, Land Development Manager

**CALL TO ORDER**

SOWA, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

**DRAFT DESIGN MANUAL: Test Run**

Sloman made staff's presentation. She said after the last meeting, staff asked the consultants, Crandall/Arambula, to use the Vale-Issaquah Apartments to test the proposed design manual checklist that the consultants developed. She gave some general background on the Vale-Issaquah Apartments and displayed the results of the checklist, both architecture and urban design, on the screen. She described areas of concern that were revealed when the consultant used the checklist on the Vale-Issaquah Apartments project, including where the project fit and did not fit their proposed architectural standards for "Arts and Crafts" style architecture. She highlighted where staff will be seeking additional clarification of the consultant's comments, such as what constitutes "natural" materials.

SOWA said he found that information very helpful. MORGAN asked has the "step-back after four or five floors," as discussed at the last meeting, been clarified. MORGAN noted whether it was four or five stories was unclear after the last time we looked at their draft guidelines. Sloman said it appears that the step-back requirement is after the fourth story from the street side, with an additional step-back required from the natural area side. The Arts and Crafts Style specifies two to five stories, MORGAN noted, which is also unclear. Sloman agreed it needs clarification. Another question is how to do a step-back with a pitched roof building, she added. BRENNAN said another question is how what they are requiring under the Arts and Crafts Style fits with what is allowed under the zoning regulations, which may preclude anything but Northwest Lodge. Sloman said staff will be working on that with the consultant as well.

LEONG asked for clarification about what is being required to be "set back." Sloman said we are working with them on the vertical mixed-use issue as part of the moratorium, and staff will follow up on whether the set-back is required on three sides and not the "natural" side. LEONG said he agrees that there is not much frontage presence on the Vale building, and it is not very distinct. Sloman showed the primary and secondary entrances on a diagram, as well as doors for individual units. LEONG said perhaps there should have been a step-back on the eastside and northside corner if it is the main entryway, but to require it all around the building seems excessive. Sloman explained the intent of requiring the first setback, which would be the perception of the building height from the street.

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PRICE asked did the consultant say the building “failed” the checklist. Sloman replied they have identified some key issues that would need to be fixed to comply with the proposed design manual. Their assessment was, “*Not too bad, not an ‘F’*”.

PRICE asked in reviewing a building for compliance with these guidelines, will there be a tipping point or is it at the discretion of the Commission to determine whether to recommend approval of a proposed building. Sloman replied if an application had this many issues, staff would not send it forward without conditions; staff would be having conversations with the applicant in that case. She described staff’s general review process before an application comes to the Development Commission. PRICE said so the process with the manual seems similar to what we have been doing. Niven said there isn’t a metric about how many checkmarks would trigger a denial. He said it’s the Development Commission’s choice about how to use this tool. He said the question is whether the results of using this checklist would cause you to think about the project differently than going through the process without it. Sloman added sometimes staff brings forward a project to the Commission that has one or two unresolved issues on which we are seeking your input because staff may disagree about how to resolve it, or are seeking your thoughts.

MORGAN asked if the Commission uses the checklist to evaluate a project and agrees to check the box “does not comply,” is a condition then required. Niven replied we would probably leave it up to the applicant to describe to the Commission during their presentation why they think they don’t need to comply with that standard. HARRISON asked if the Commission continues to think it is not compliant after hearing from the applicant, then what happens. Sloman gave several examples where a condition would be appropriate rather than denying the project. Niven provided other examples when staff might bring an application forward and the Commission might require the applicant to select a different architectural style. MORGAN asked using the manual, then, would that be considered a “compatibility” issue. Niven said that would be an interesting conversation to have.

HARRISON asked were the Vale Apartment owners part of this evaluation. Sloman replied no. Niven said this is more of an evaluation of how this project would have fared had this checklist and guidelines been in place when it was reviewed and approved.

BRENNAN spoke to the level of information the Commission gets on proposals, and said some applications have been very detailed and others not as much. He said this will help to find the “sweet spot” of having required enough information from the applicant without having a design so firmly in place that it can’t be altered. The other question is the timing of their interaction with the Commission, and noted the standard should be a level of engagement between staff and the applicant before the project comes to the Commission. He said he is a little worried about the “tight box” the manual could create that could force projects into small boxes and might not result in the best project. Sloman gave some background on the level of information that applicants have historically provided to the Commission, and said we are trying to strike a balance between understanding what they are proposing without having forced them to go too far down the road in their design, which can be expensive for the applicant.

Sloman continued how staff has used the central Issaquah standards checklist in the past, and how it indicates how staff sees compliance on the part of the applicant. That is especially important if an applicant chooses to make changes during the project, she added. HARRISON said he likes this checklist because it is a logical next step, and thinks that having specific types of architecture described, as well as appropriate and inappropriate images, will provide clarity for applicants that has been missing. The noncompliance issues are likely to be more important

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than the compliance issues by the time a project comes to the Commission if an applicant has used these guidelines, he added. Sloman agreed those issues will definitely be where staff will be putting its focus.

MORGAN asked does the stream, viewable from Vale, go dry at some times of the year. He continued it doesn't seem like that much of a natural area. Sloman said we agree with the consultant that natural areas are valuable public amenities, but whether all natural areas are of equal value is an important issue on which the Commission could provide some feedback to staff. HARRISON used the Gateway Apartments as an example of a project with a Class 4 stream and wetlands on three sides. He said he recalls that the Gateway developer planned to include significant restoration and improvement of what is now, essentially, a blackberry-covered ditch. Sloman said she is not certain, but the stream there may be classified higher than Class 4.

BRENNAN said the question is the relationship between a project and what is going on around it, and gave examples. The question of context includes not just what is there now, but what might be there in the future. How do we anticipate that, he asked. MORGAN said an architect may be just seeing that a stream exists on a site plan, and under these new guidelines they may feel that a building on the site "must be oriented to the natural area," which may be an overreach. Niven said the guidelines specify "recognize," not "orient." He said the consultants are saying that the building has to recognize a public space or natural area, not necessarily make it the highlight or jewel of the project. He said he agrees that some latitude is required when considering the degree of orientation, depending on what the natural area is.

LEONG said it seems that the applicant needs to recognize a natural asset in their proposal, and come up with a way to address that asset in the proposal. Then it is up to staff and the Commission to see whether the approach the applicant is taking fits the City's needs. We may not all agree, but we can proceed from that discussion. Sloman noted streams and creeks are rated, so maybe the extent of the response should be based on the rating, and gave examples. HARRISON asked for more information about how the creeks are rated, and Sloman said although the basis for ratings vary from city to city, essentially they are based on an established set of standards, usually provided to the applicant by the State.

MORGAN said similarly, does a building have to be setback where it faces, say, an open space that is not seen or used. Niven said that question raises an important philosophical point: Do we require an applicant to always recognize an adjacent open space and reflect that in the building design. He gave examples. He continued one approach would be to give the applicant the ability to address it in more than one way. He made a note that staff will ask the consultant to consider not only mandatory step-backs but other choices as well. Sloman said staff is looking for direction from the Commission on whether all creeks or natural assets should be treated equally. MORGAN said it seems to make sense to include "scale adjusted" so that the Issaquah Creek is not treated the same as the creek behind the Vale Apartments.

HARRISON said in thinking about the City's Green Necklace, and plans to link up green spaces, some natural areas will come into play as part of the Green Necklace in the future. Sloman agreed. She gave more information on the City's critical area and buffer requirements, using the Gateway Apartments as an example.

MORGAN said he is questioning whether just four styles in Issaquah Traditional Style might preclude development of some of the buildings we have indicated tonight that we like. HARRISON asked MORGAN are you suggesting that the design manual needs more style

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options. He continued he thought that the general consensus was that the City Council and others were dissatisfied with the breadth of what was being developed, and so an effort was undertaken to better define what would be acceptable styles. MORGAN said he is on the fence about the need for more styles, and used one of the favorably rated buildings as an example that may not have been possible under the design manual guidelines. Niven said the manual is a response to the often-expressed comment that the Atlas Apartments, for example, typify architecture that could be located anywhere. The thought was to come up with standards that would be more Issaquah-centric, and this manual is the consultant's recommendations for styles and colors that would do that. He continued this tool probably won't work perfectly right away; it will be a place to start, and will inform us whether we need to add another style, or make modifications to the guidelines. Sloman added there is a certain level of historicism in the proposed styles, and gave her perception of the kinds of buildings the Commission has tended to react favorably to in the past.

BRENNAN said he agrees that in trying to preserve or advance certain architectural styles for the City, he agrees we probably won't get it right from the very start. As we move ahead to refining the images that will serve as acceptable examples, the process will generate more feedback from Commissioners, and possibly result in a hybrid of Northwest Contemporary style and something more traditional.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Connie Marsh, Squak Mountain resident, said what is missing from this discussion is when staff brings the Commission an application, staff usually has a position on it, and that becomes part of staff's review and presentation. It isn't easy to get things changed because staff understandably doesn't want to go backwards. She used her recollection of the Commission's review of the Vale Apartments and how it was presented by staff as an example. She gave other hypothetical examples of how staff might present projects to the Commission and how the Commission might respond. She said it is important that staff present the Commission with the full context for a project. Using the Vale Apartments as an example, she said that the open space next to the creek on that property is an important part of the pedestrian corridor, and that perspective is not reflected in a flat diagram and/or in staff's presentation to the Commission. So the presentation style of both staff and the applicant needs to change to be sure the Commission is getting the whole picture of situational-contextual information on projects. She continued she would like to see the Commissioners go through the checklist themselves before the meeting on an application for the first few times to see how it works for them as a tool. She said she thinks the checklist and manual represent progress in the right direction, and agrees they probably won't work perfectly right away.

HARRISON asked whether it is appropriate for Commissioners to visit sites that are being proposed for redevelopment or development as part of Commissioners' review process. Sloman said her understanding is that Commissioners are not allowed to visit sites of pending projects because they should be basing their decisions only on information presented at meetings and that is available to everyone. HARRISON said from recent training sessions for Commissioners, it is his understanding that Commissioners are restricted from visiting potential project sites, but he does not agree and thinks it is a valuable exercise. LEONG agreed, and said we live here and draw on our past experiences and exposure to sites, including signage of pending projects. Niven said staff will double-check with the City Attorney and share information with the Commission if it differs from what staff has said tonight.

#### **DRAFT DESIGN MANUAL: Issaquah Images**

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Sloman explained how the building images are organized for discussion tonight, as listed in the staff memo dated July 28, 2017. She discussed how the buildings were selected, and displayed how they were ranked by Commissioners in advance of tonight's meeting, including universally liked; really highly liked; highly liked; liked; and "so-so." The Commissioners reacted to the images and shared their reasons for their rankings.

PRICE said he is somewhat concerned about the Northwest Contemporary Style because it doesn't really reflect a distinct style, the way the other styles do.

HARRISON said he would like to see a distinctive look that says "this is the Northwest" and "this is Issaquah" while also being compatible with the guidelines. Other Commissioners agreed.

Sloman displayed photos of four additional buildings: St. George's Square, 485 Rainier, Proliance, and the Issaquah Highlands park-and-ride. Commissioners gave their reactions to each of those examples.

BRENNAN cautioned that the regulations shouldn't be overly rigid. Sloman agreed, and said the challenge is to not be too rigid while providing the predictability and certainty that will benefit all parties. The Commission can't just rely on their gut reactions to the project, she continued. Staff is struggling to develop a useful tool that will help the City be successful but also not miss good opportunities.

HARRISON noted that the appearance of the buildings differs depending on the perspective of the viewer. Sloman agreed.

The Commission discussed the Highlands park-and-ride, with general agreement that it is a good example of how to treat a parking garage, particularly the vines that cover blank walls and change color with the seasons. HARRISON noted the treatment of parking garages will become more important as the City gets closer to having light rail.

The Commission also discussed their reactions to Costco Building #3.

SOWA asked will these images be used in the Design Manual. Sloman said staff is having a discussion with the Council on the draft manual tomorrow. From that conversation and this discussion, we will be discussing all the ratings, reactions, and comments to these images with the consultant. MORGAN said he would like to see a lot of images in the manual, as they are very helpful. PRICE agreed, and said the manual will provide a strong frame of reference for all of us, create common ground, and promote strong, effective communication. He asked for staff's assessment of how this effort is unfolding. Sloman said generally speaking staff is happy that the City was able to bring a consulting firm on board with real expertise in this area. Niven added the result will be better buildings for the City.

HARRISON said he thinks the hotels in the Rowley development, particularly the original building, are a good approach to taller buildings. MORGAN said he likes the original building better; the newer one doesn't have balconies or sloped roofs and is fairly boxy-looking. He added he does like the brownstone building displayed by staff tonight, and asked which architectural style would apply. PRICE said it would likely be in the Arts and Crafts Style category.

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Connie Marsh, Squak Mountain resident, said she also visited buildings around the City and took photos. She noted that the manual speaks primarily to the component parts of the buildings, such as windows, doorways, and colors, but the photos proposed for the manual don't get the viewer close enough to those details. She continued it's also important to look at the buildings in context, including the backdrop of hillsides, adjacent buildings, and so on. A 360-degree view of these buildings is needed, she said, and gave examples. We have to pay attention to the rhythm and fit of the buildings; otherwise we get these one-off buildings that don't seem to make much sense. She said that isn't really addressed in the draft manual. She also spoke of the Issaquah Library as a well-regarded building that is a modern, industrial style overlaid with wood and natural materials. She said that building seems like a good architectural fit for the City but it doesn't have a category, and suggested Northwest Industrial Style as a category.

HARRISON said he wishes more residents would come to these meetings and give their thoughts as Ms. Marsh has done; it is very helpful for the Commission to hear observations from the public. Other Commissioners agreed. MORGAN asked what would be the public's next opportunity to give comment on the design manual. Sloman replied the Council will be discussing it at their Land and Shore Board meeting tomorrow night, and the next Development Commission discussion will be a joint meeting with the Planning Policy Commission on August 31, 2017.

With no additional business to discuss, SOWA adjourned the meeting at 9:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Lowe  
Recording Secretary