

CITY OF ISSAQUAH
Joint Meeting of
Planning Policy Commission
and
Development Commission (Special Meeting)

6:30 PM
October 28, 2021

Virtual Meeting

MINUTES

COMMISSION AND ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL PRESENT

Alternate Meeting Format: On March 6, 2020 the Mayor declared a civil emergency due to the outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19). On March 24, 2020 the Governor issued Proclamation 20-28 relating to the COVID-19 emergency and open public meetings. The proclamation has been extended. Due to these factors, the meeting was held using a remote meeting platform.

PPC Commissioners Present:

Jason Voiss, Vice Chair

Joy Lewis

Matt Monahan

Nina Milligan

Sara Bader

Richard Zaragoza, Alternate

PPC Commissioners Not Present:

Ron Faul (Excused)

Development Commissioners Present:

Michael Brennan, Chair

Kevin Price, Vice Chair

Richard Sanford

Richard Sowa

Patty Dillon

Brooke Shore

Arthur Schulte

Jon Ikeda, Alternate

Mel Morgan, Alternate

Administration/Staff:

Christen Leeson, Senior Planner

Lucy Sloman, Land Dev. Manager

Minnie Dhaliwal, Director, CP&D

CALL TO ORDER

VOISS, PPC Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM. He explained the purpose of tonight's joint meeting, specifically to provide information to the Commissions on zoning, land uses, and form and intensity. A better understanding will enable both commissions to provide policy direction on these topics. He also gave some guidelines for participating in tonight's virtual meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Connie Marsh, resident, referred to emails she sent to commissioners prior to the meeting. She said she was surprised that what was presented in the agenda packet did not explain how it would solve the problems of making the code easier to use by the community, developers, and the City. She said what was presented seemed more of a conversation governed by the Comprehensive Plan. She also said she didn't understand how the table presented in the agenda could be created without understanding the implications and intent of the changes in the table.

REGULAR BUSINESS

a) **Education: Title 18 Zoning and Uses, (D)**

- **Zoning, Land Uses, Form & Intensity**

Presented by:

Minnie Dhaliwal, Director, Community Planning & Development

Dhaliwal made staff's presentation. She noted that staff is working on a more robust process for questions 3 and 4 in the agenda packet, and will schedule a discussion of them at a later date. She explained that the scope of the Title 18 update is not to alter policies that are already in the City's adopted plans, including changes in zoning. That can be added to a future work plan, she continued, but at this point, the focus of the Title 18 update is to streamline and consolidate the code to make it easier to use and understand, as well as identify where topics are missing.

Leeson continued staff's presentation, including information about zoning and how it fits into the development process. She also explained Figure 3 (page 9 of 25), a proposed permitted uses table, and gave information about how other jurisdictions approach how to categorize and list permitted uses.

MILLIGAN asked clarifying questions about whether the intent is to address reducing the number of types of zones, or just reorganizing the document into different zoning categories. Does staff have a recommendation on that, she asked. Leeson replied reducing the number of zones is being discussed but is not on the table tonight, nor is it part of the Title 18 update. Slooman said staff hasn't done that kind of evaluation yet. Part of the value in combining all the residential zones into one table, all the commercial zones into another, and so on, is that it will make it easier to see where zones are highly similar, and to consider the impacts of combining or otherwise changing them.

BRENNAN asked what is the breadth of tonight's discussion. Question 1 seems to be about substance, but staff's presentation emphasized that the intent is to make the code easier to use, more understandable, and so on. Leeson replied we are not able to change what is in the Comp Plan in the process of updating the code. However, we are asking for feedback on what you expect to see, what you don't want to see, and so on, so what we are asking of the commissions is really a mix of both.

- *Question 1. In your experience, are there locations where the uses allowed or the form/intensity standards that control size, height, bulk, etc., are a concern for the community?*

MONAHAN noted there is a kind of "dead area" in the Highlands in front of the self-storage facility at the north end. He said he doesn't think the neighborhood is well served by having two storage facilities within a half-mile of each other in a walkable, mixed-use neighborhood. MILLIGAN agreed, and said reducing the number of zones where self-storage is allowed has been an issue for some time. She said she would like to revisit that issue. She gave her thoughts about how self-storage does not create a vibrant, livable streetscape.

MILLIGAN said concern is widespread about our car-dependent neighborhoods, such as Squak Mountain and South Cove. She spoke in favor of exploring how close-by small-scale suppliers of daily needs, such as food and coffee, could reach into those neighborhoods without imposing on our single-family neighborhoods with large-scale commercial development. BRENNAN agreed that those small-scale businesses are important, as well as "third place" businesses where people can gather together, such as a pub, restaurant, and so on. The benefit is to both reduce car trips and also to promote community.

SANFORD referred to a permit in an Intensive Commercial zone reviewed by the Development Commission that included critical areas, including a stream, flood hazard area, and so on. The Intensive Commercial zoning allowed for the use, but it was challenging to come up with conditions that would balance environmental protection with what was allowed by code. He asked whether intensive commercial uses should be permitted where there are critical area overlays, and whether the protection provided by overlays is sufficient.

MORGAN agreed with MONAHAN and MILLIGAN about the advisability of limiting self-storage facilities, and said he would agree to only allow them in intensive commercial zones.

LEWIS referred to SANFORD's comments and concerns and said she agrees with not having heavy industrial uses where there are critical areas. She also said it is unacceptable for the City to allow food deserts, and referred to the loss of the Front Street Market's negative impact on the surrounding neighborhood. The City needs to allow ways to address the actual needs of the community, such as food availability.

SCHULTE spoke in favor of supporting and encouraging growing zones that offer multifamily and mixed use. He noted that housing is expensive and multifamily and mixed-use developments are among the best ways to offer at least somewhat affordable housing. Leeson noted PPC will be discussing affordable housing at its meeting next week.

MORGAN questioned the necessity of having a suburban estates designation in the City, given the urban growth boundaries and scarcity of land, and noted that the suburban estates designation is 1.24 units per acre. The City should have more intensive zoning throughout the City than that, he added.

BRENNAN described his impressions from a walking tour the Development Commission recently undertook with staff to view development projects in multiple locations. He used Atlas Apartments as an example of a project that doesn't engage at the street level with the pedestrian environment, and said he would like to ensure that high-density areas are also enjoyable places for people. VOISS agreed, and asked whether the park at Atlas is open to the public. Sloman replied there are both private and public areas at Atlas, and described how they can be accessed. VOISS noted the space gives the impression of being a completely private property.

LEWIS said a good place to start thinking about reordering uses would be the conservancy designation. It has a lot of layers, she continued, and could be a good example of how we are aligning our values with the code. Leeson asked LEWIS whether she is addressing conservancy or community facilities (CF). LEWIS replied she is thinking that in a simplification effort, conservancy and CF would be rolled into one category.

MILLIGAN said she agrees with earlier comments about having activity at the ground floor of new buildings; otherwise, we aren't getting the results we were hoping for. She said she would also like the City to think about how to encourage ground-floor spaces at the Highlands to be used in a dynamic, lively way that creates a vibrant community. VOISS agreed, and said there are ways to create density but also engagement, and gave examples.

LEWIS asked what is staff hearing from the public about zoning issues, specifically where the City might be falling short in not allowing certain uses in the central area. Dhaliwal replied staff receives phone calls regularly from people who want to know where in the City they can locate businesses such as towing companies, boat repair shops, marijuana stores, grocery stores, entertainment, and so on. She described some of the concerns those potential business owners have expressed, such as parking. Sloman said staff has received feedback from the four Title 18 affinity groups, which haven't been as targeted as LEWIS is asking about, but is another avenue for hearing what is working and what isn't working. She said we are collecting topics that are coming out of the Title 18 update but which are too expansive to be part of this effort. One of those is likely to be neighborhood conversations about services, amenities, and other features that neighborhoods would like to see added.

SCHULTE said he supports earlier comments about creating more community-based interaction at the ground level of developments. Many seem to be more of a pass-through rather than a destination, especially toward Maple Valley and the south, he said, and he'd like to see the City work on developing communities that promote that kind of activity. BRENNAN referred to the Olde Town residential design standards update, which was a concentrated effort to preserve the character of that neighborhood. He

continued the City needs to be really thoughtful about where density goes for housing, specifically how it impacts the character of a neighborhood and where additional density should occur.

ZARAGOZA said big-box stores like QFC and Safeway take up very large spaces, and building residential units above them would be great. He referred to examples such as residences above Uwajimaya in Seattle and supermarkets on Capitol Hill that are lively, bustling places. Creating that could be a great target as properties are redeveloped or built in Issaquah. SCHULTE agreed. He noted as a result of the pandemic, retailers are looking for ways to reduce their footprint as well as increase rentable square footage and address sustainability concerns. He used Sears as an example of a big-box retailer whose buildings are being demolished or converted. With that comes additional space, and more opportunities for residential housing. VOISS added the success of home delivery services, and probably drone deliveries in the near future, will likely further reduce the footprint of bigger retailers.

Public Comment

Connie Marsh gave her perceptions of planning efforts for the Highlands, central Issaquah and Talus. She said the City has the zoning and rules in place now to achieve what you have said we want, but we aren't there yet. She gave examples from the Highlands and Olde Town. So rather than adding uses to more neighborhoods, she said, we need to ask why it's not happening where we already have the rules and regulations that would create new places. The problem is our inability to implement the rules and regulations we have. She said she agrees with the vision but not what the solution is. She also said consolidating the columns in the use table and then creating overlays would make it even harder to use the table. She said she would like to hear how combining the tables and compressing the lists will make it easier for users of the code.

Susan Neville, resident, described her experience looking up at the new Costco building with its lights on in the evening. She said we as a community have a vision, and the sight of that building doesn't quite fit that vision. She asked how are we going to encourage our corporate partners going forward to share that vision. She added that a comment was made earlier that discussions among commissioners could continue by email, but doing so leaves the public out.

Ann Fletcher, resident and People for Climate Action, addressed zoning as a way to reduce carbon emissions with mixed use. She noted that is in the draft Climate Action Plan but there are no specifics about how to do that. She said a lot more discussion is needed. We have mixed-use areas that we need to study and make them better, and be careful about studying, selecting, and prioritizing areas for mixed-use development. She said given that the Title 18 update doesn't include changing the Comprehensive Plan, she would like to see overall planning discussions that are thorough and methodical in making a transition to the future.

Mary Lynch said when the Central Issaquah Plan was created, properties along East Lake Sammamish were identified as areas that could be used for storage. Those of us working on the plan also identified different areas to house needed services, like auto repair, in locations that were not in the central area or single-family neighborhoods. It's disappointing that you haven't gone out and talked to people who want to develop in Issaquah about what our vision is, and that's why we are getting only housing developments and no mixed use. When these projects that contain housing only went to the Development Commission, they were already "done deals." As a City, we're not selling what our vision is. We need to concentrate on getting others to see our vision and then to live up to it.

- Question 2. Are there uses that the community desires to create a more livable community, but are missing from certain zones/areas of the City? Note: some missing uses are the result of market forces, while others may be a direct result of zoning.

MILLIGAN addressed how to get daily services like food and gathering spaces to residential areas that lack them. She said perhaps one solution is to allow “light” commercial and retail uses in large single-family or multifamily neighborhoods. She continued it wouldn’t be appropriate in all single-family neighborhoods, but could be a way to make services more readily available and reduce dependency on cars and transit that isn’t serving them.

LEWIS said there is a chance here for true community investment, specifically having the City control more of its land use. She said she would like to see City support for incubators as a way for people to start businesses in the City and not get just big chain stores. She spoke in favor of promoting entrepreneurship in the City.

DILLON asked are there any avenues where the City restricts uses, that is, where strictly residential use isn’t allowed but mixed use is. Leeson replied yes; the “vertical mixed-use zone” was created in 2016. It requires mixed use, with offices or commercial on the ground floor and residences above. There are other avenues as well, she added.

SANFORD spoke about the importance of a neighborhood grocery, such as the Front Street Market, to a neighborhood. At the time of Front Street Market’s closing, the City Council indicated that the City did not have any incentives to offer the owner to keep the market open in that location. He said the idea of incentivizing owners through reduced fees or taxes is an idea that could be explored.

SOWA said it seems the City has opportunities in its code to create whatever it wants. Have there been occasions when people have applied for permits from the City and they have been told no zoning would allow that kind of development. Sloman said food trucks are an interim use for which the City has received multiple requests, especially during the pandemic. The City’s code on food trucks is confusing and staff hopes to clear it up during the update process. Staff also gets requests from research, development, small business manufacturing, processing of products like coffee, beer, and wine, and so on. The City doesn’t have much commercial/intensive land available, so the places for that kind of business are limited.

SCHULTE noted due to the lack of land availability, geographical challenges, the presence of wetlands, and so on, it will be hard for the City to satisfy all the needs and wants of the community. One approach is to be a good neighbor to the communities near us. If a specific use isn’t available in the City, but is located in one of the cities near us, that’s okay. We shouldn’t spend too much effort trying to fit everything into the City; we do have great neighbors around us and it wouldn’t be possible anyway.

MILLIGAN spoke about the limitations of uses we allow only in intensive commercial zones, such as clothing fabrication. We do make use of square footage limitations in some of our zones, she continued, and it sounds from our discussion that we might like to do more of that. Would that encourage more small businesses, she asked. Sloman replied our code is very specific about some uses, but sometimes what we need are more performance standards, and gave examples. She said the intent is to have a land use code that gets us what we want but also allows us to be agile when someone proposes something new that meets the intent. VOISS agreed we need specificity but also flexibility. Dhaliwal said we will definitely be looking at these very specific and unique uses—the code has something like 250 specific uses--and look at collapsing them where it makes sense. She said a lot goes into why a business is successful or not, not just a city’s code. A square-foot limitation does keep big box retail out of the picture, but whether it also brings in smaller businesses is an unanswered question.

ZARAGOZA spoke in favor of temporary spaces, such as pop-up shops and local art displays. He said during the pandemic, some restaurants had outdoor seating and nearby streets were closed. The result was people getting out and enjoying the community as well as helping those businesses.

SCHULTE added from a developers' point of view, sometimes development doesn't happen because of the challenge of getting people to an area, what else is nearby, the tenants or customers they are targeting, or due to competition. He gave examples. He said food trucks are a great idea. MORGAN noted as a counterpoint, food trucks operating in prime time will kill ground-floor restaurant business. We can probably have one or the other, but not both.

Public Comment

Connie Marsh spoke about the difficulty the public faces being able to obtain special event permits from City Administration, which is not addressed in Title 18. She gave examples, and said special events need to be more easily permitted. She also said the Title 18 update doesn't have any direction about parks, just exemptions for parks and roads as well, which leads to confusion for the public and staff.

Mary Lynch agreed with Marsh's comments about parks. In talking with City Parks about possible locations for pop-ups, readings, and so on, Parks staff say they "don't know how to use a park that way." She gave examples of spaces that could be used for pop-ups, art fairs, theater, music, and so on, and said we need to be sure the code allows for that on public as well as private land. She noted that some restaurants already use food trucks, and could go to remote areas and advertise themselves. She also spoke about using City-owned houses for incubation, and working with Rowley to have a building in the new Rowley development that incubates new businesses.

REPORTS

a) **Council Update**

Presented by:

Christen Leeson, Senior Planner

Dhaliwal noted Council is engaged in annual budget discussions now, with anticipated adoption on November 15. She added the Council's Ad Hoc Committee on Title 18 is tentatively scheduled to discuss process for the Title 18 update on November 1. Leeson noted the Council is tentatively scheduled to approve the Comp Plan amendments PPC recently reviewed on December 16.

b) **Title 18 Code Update: Public Comments Received**

Presented by:

Minnie Dhaliwal, Director, Community Planning & Development

In agenda packet.

OTHER BUSINESS / ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a) Upcoming Schedule. Leeson noted that PPC's next few meetings (November 4, November 18, and December 4) do not follow its regular meeting schedule. She noted the City recently applied for and received a grant for implementing some of the City's housing strategy work plan, which will be coming to PPC for review.

ADJOURNMENT

With no additional business to conduct, VOISS adjourned the meeting at 8:31 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Lowe
Recording Secretary