

Planning Policy Commission
3-9-17

**CITY OF ISSAQUAH
PLANNING POLICY COMMISSION
MINUTES**

March 9, 2017

City Hall South
Council Chambers

135 E. Sunset Way
Issaquah, WA 98027

PPC MEMBERS PRESENT

Joan Probala, Chair
Carl Swedberg, Vice Chair
Ron Faul
Troy Rahmig
Jon Stob

STAFF PRESENT

Trish Heinonen, Long-Range Planning Manager
Christen Leeson, Senior Planner
Keith Niven, Dev Services/Economic Dev Director
Jennifer Fink, Park Planner
Kurt Seemann, Transportation Manager

CALL TO ORDER

PROBALA, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:34 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED BY FAUL, SECONDED BY SWEDBERG that minutes of the PPC meeting on February 9, 2017 be approved. MOTION CARRIED BY THE UNANIMOUS VOTE OF ALL PPC MEMBERS PRESENT.

DEVELOPMENT MORATORIUM ITEM: Central Issaquah Neighborhood Visions

Heinonen explained the goals for tonight's meeting, and noted this meeting is one of many opportunities for the public to offer their comments and thoughts on the visions for neighborhoods in Central Issaquah. She gave some background on the information that will be shared tonight, and the process that will be followed to get comments from the audience members and Commissioners on the neighborhood visions. She also gave some background on the moratorium the Council enacted in late 2016, and the progress made thus far on getting the information requested by the Council as part of the moratorium process.

Development Services: Heinonen noted the during the outreach to businesses and property owners within the neighborhoods, they asked staff to specifically seek public input on describing the neighborhoods in "ten words or less," as a "branding" exercise, as described on page 10 of 24, and also to attempt to get as much public participation and comment as possible. She said tonight's meeting is the first in that effort. She continued with the changes the Council asked be made to the Vision in the original Central Issaquah Plan, namely two additions (Green Necklace and boundary adjustments).

Parks and Recreation: Fink gave an update on the Parks Plan, noting that public outreach to gather information for the plan is nearly ready to get underway. She gave some background on the parks strategic planning effort, and noted staff is getting ready to launch a "listen and learn" process soon. She explained what staff is hoping to achieve as a result of that outreach, and how residents can access the questionnaire that will be used to get public feedback. She explained that sometime in the fall, staff will have packaged that feedback and will come back to the public and eventually to the Council with a plan that reflects what was learned and heard.

Public Works Engineering: Seemann gave an update on the City's current and future activities on transportation improvements in the City. He focused his comments on two areas: the Gilman

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corridor and the State Interchange Justification Report (IJR). He noted that Gilman is one of the City's few east-west corridors, serves a large number of businesses and an increasing number of residents, and will become even more important in the future. He said staff is getting initial input from the public about how Gilman should evolve, and is hearing that people want to keep all that is good about Gilman while planning for a future that is likely to be quite different from the present. He continued, vehicles are and will continue to be important to Gilman, but looking forward, perhaps taking a more multi-modal approach would be prudent. He noted that the Council just approved a \$175,000, two-year study of Gilman, which will begin soon with a listening effort to determine what residents think about the right character for Gilman in the future.

He continued his remarks about the IJR, which will be a state effort to look at the Front Street/I-90 interchange and focus on improvements. That could mean additional crossings of I-90, he noted, which is an exciting opportunity for adding a north-south crossing of I-90 that is currently lacking. He noted this is also another opportunity for a more multi-modal approach. He said another consideration is that Sound Transit has indicated it plans to serve Issaquah, which is still years away but it is not too soon to start planning.

PPC Questions: SWEDBERG asked what is the status of other transportation improvements that were not approved in the last bond issue, such as at Sunset Way and the Providence Point interchange. Seemann replied there were four projects on the ballot last fall; the only one of those projects not currently moving forward is the east Sunset improvements project. All the others are making progress, he continued. He said staff plans to come to Council with an agenda bill for the Providence Point interchange design work very soon. We have hired a consultant and begun the scoping process for improvements on Newport from SR-900 to 54th, and public outreach on that project will begin soon. The City has been notified that it will receive grant monies for design work on Newport from Maple to Sunset, but the money will not be available until 2018.

PROBALA said staff has mentioned three projects that will go into design soon, and asked does the City have the funds to finish them. Seemann said the City is continually looking for grants and other funding opportunities. One of the main reasons for the ballot issue last fall was to be sure that money would be available for both design and construction. We have the money now to get started on these projects as just described, he continued, and we will be looking for grants and other funding sources as part of the next phase of the work. PROBALA said she is aware of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) list developed by the City of about 30 transportation projects that need to be done, and asked how did these three get to the top of that list. Seemann said he is not sure exactly how the projects were prioritized, but the four that were on the ballot issue were selected following an extensive public process. SWEDBERG asked whether it would be possible to have another bond initiative to secure additional funding. Seemann said he has not heard any conversation about that.

PROBALA asked whether any projects are in the works that do not require major construction but that could have a large impact on traffic. Seemann referred to the Complete Streets program and gave examples of smaller projects that will make important differences in the City's overall transportation system. He also said staff continues to work on ways to better prioritize the list of projects PROBALA referred to earlier.

Public Interaction: PROBALA invited the Commissioners and audience members to review the information about each neighborhood posted on display boards around the Chambers, make comments on the vision for each neighborhood on the pieces of paper provided, and post them directly on each board. Heinonen gave the following general directions to participants: Describe the "future" neighborhood in 10 words or less; and explain what placemaking options would work best for this neighborhood.

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PPC Discussion: Heinonen invited audience members and anyone watching the televised meeting to sign up so they can be contacted about future opportunities to provide public comment on the neighborhood vision effort. She also invited people to send any comments directly to staff.

PROBALA noted some of the original Central Issaquah Plan Task Force members are here tonight, and asked them if they had any specific comments to add.

Joe Forkner, Chair of the original Central Issaquah Plan Task Force, said in his view, the biggest problem has been public participation in the original Central Issaquah Plan. He said the Plan was reviewed for over 3 years, the Task Force worked on the plan for over 1,000 hours, then the Council studied it for four months, made changes to the districts, and took public testimony on the new changes just a few weeks later. He said it was nearly impossible to spend the time required to track what was changed by Council before it was taken out to the public. He continued what has been developed so far as a result of the plan and codes is not necessarily contrary to what is in the Central Plan, but it has surprised a lot of people because they could not visualize what all the changes would mean. He said he would encourage the City to continue its public outreach, and encourage residents to become part of the process. He said he knows that there are people who have comments and complaints about what has taken place so far, and said it would be helpful if they would come forward and provide their input.

PROBALA thanked the Task Force members for the time they spent on the Central Plan, and said she thinks the concept they launched in the Plan was essentially correct. Now we are seeing the details all come together and helping the community understand what the Plan means, she said. The result might not be all that different from the original Task Force's work, she continued, and gave examples of how difficult it is to perceive what was conceptually in the plan until something is built.

Mel Morgan, Task Force member, said he also serves on the Development Commission, and so is seeing projects under the Central Plan come up for approval. He said he sees some things he wished would have been done differently, such as having outdoor decks required on residential units that would promote connectivity, but no plan is perfect. He said the best part of the plan so far has been getting more people living in residential units downtown. He said he thinks it is great that the City is stepping back momentarily to make some tweaks in the plan, and spoke in favor of the trend toward having more residents living downtown.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lindsey Walsh, Highlands resident, spoke in favor of the process to get as much public comment as possible, including reaching out to different parts of the City to bring in as many members of the public as possible from each of the neighborhoods, not just those who are able to attend an evening meeting such as the one tonight. She said she would like to see as broad a range of opinions as possible.

Mary Lynch, 2690 Oakcrest Drive, Issaquah, said she also served on the Task Force. The Task Force tried to carry forth the vision of what we heard over and over from the public, she continued, but it was disappointing to see that the code that was eventually developed to implement the plan did not reflect that vision. It isn't enough to just have the right words in a plan, she added, because the code is what determines what gets built. She spoke in favor of having citizens involved all the way through the process, and thinks the Plan and code process fell short because the vision wasn't adequately carried over to the code. She also added that she doesn't think the City needs to grow as fast as it is because the necessary infrastructure is not there.

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David Kappler, 255 SE Andrews Street, Issaquah, spoke about future plans for Sound Transit to bring light rail to Issaquah, and about how that could encourage more people to drive to Issaquah and park their cars while they leave all day to work in Bellevue, Redmond, or Seattle. We have to have a lot more residential units here in the City, he continued. He said he is less worried about development because the City gets money from development, and development mitigates quite a bit of its own impact. What is more worrisome, he said, is all the motorists driving through Issaquah. We could become just a city of parking structures for people driving here to get light rail, he said. We need to be working proactively with Sound Transit, focusing on I-90 and regional bus service.

Steve Pereira, 170 NE Dogwood, Issaquah, said he is impressed with how much Institutional knowledge is being expressed by participants tonight, and said it would be beneficial for all of us to get more of that knowledge into the public process. He said another option to “grow and develop” is to not grow, or at least not grow as much as envisioned by some. He also agreed that there needs to be a stronger connection between what is envisioned in vision statements and the code, because it is the code that determines what gets built. PROBALA said she agrees, and noted that PPC and all the participants in the Central Plan process asked that code be written to make sure that what was envisioned gets done.

Connie Marsh, Issaquah resident, said we all knew the code wasn’t being written to get what we wanted, and we were told it would be easy to change the code if it didn’t work. The overarching idea for a big plan like the Central Issaquah is to try to make a great town; to love to live here and work here, and to love all the component parts of this town. She said she feels what has happened with the Central Plan is that buildings have just been loaded onto land, and we are losing the “soul” of the component parts. She spoke in favor of talking with residents in each of the ten neighborhoods because each neighborhood is different, and the respective residents know what is needed to preserve and create the unique attitude for that neighborhood. She also spoke about the problems with the Central Plan’s vision that a resident should be able to walk and bike within and between neighborhoods in the urban core, and gave Gateway as an example of a neighborhood where a car is a necessity. She said the biggest failure of the Central Plan so far, in her opinion, is to get the right implementation language into the code so that the vision can be realized.

Joanna Buehler, resident at 185th Place SE in the South Cove neighborhood, and co-founder of Save Lake Sammamish, said she was very disappointed that the Central Plan does not seem to take into account all the runoff or the environmental impact that the planned development will have on the Lake. When Rowan Hinds was Mayor, she continued, Issaquah was a small town of several thousand residents, who held a community get-together about the treasures of Issaquah. She continued among the treasures were Issaquah’s small town feel, wooded hillsides, the Issaquah Creek, and Lake Sammamish, plus the sense that Issaquah wasn’t “Bellevue East” or like anywhere else. She said it was an important concern to maintain the views residents had of the mountains. Now it seems like buildings have just been placed on plots of land without much thought about preserving view corridors. She gave comments about her experience with the Talus Development Agreement, which required strict restrictions on impeding views. It seems like now development is nibbling away at those view corridors, she said, and noted that taxpayers end up picking up the tab for problems such as hill slides that developments are creating. She spoke about high-density cities such as Vancouver, B.C. that require stepped buildings with character that don’t take away from view corridors and are at human scale. This City is in desperate need of some architectural standards, she said, and noted the Gateway Apartments and Marriott hotel are examples of ugly buildings that resemble a gulag. She noted that it will be hard to achieve the “vibrant, mixed-use, people-friendly” vision for the 900 acres of Central Issaquah when businesses are putting in mostly big box stores, not small, human-scale businesses. She concluded her remarks by agreeing with earlier comments that light rail in Issaquah will fuel more people driving

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to the City to park while they go elsewhere to work. She said she appreciates the Council enacting a moratorium on development and would like to see appropriate infrastructure put in place before more development commences. She suggested the City consider enacting a toll on Front Street for non-residents who are using it as a connection from I-90 to Issaquah-Hobart Road and Highway 18, something like the state's "Good to Go Pass" program.

John Fisher, 2122 Newport Way, Gateway district of Issaquah, thanked the Development Commission and PPC for their work on the Central Plan. That said, he noted he also feels there are some troubling contradictions in how the Central Plan has unfolded so far. As a resident of the Gateway neighborhood, he continued, a car is necessary to get to any shopping or amenities. That may change, he said, but the problem will be preserving Tibbetts Creek while also providing east-west connectivity. He said in general, the development that has been built in the Gateway neighborhood is parking- and transit-deficient. He agrees with an earlier comment that the Development Commission has done the best it could to implement the vision on these projects, and he looks forward to continuing to participate in the City's efforts to re-examine and revise the code so that it more closely achieves what was intended. He said he also agrees with an earlier commenter that different neighborhoods have different and specific needs.

Richard Johnson, Issaquah resident on Squak Mountain, said he has lived in the area for about 20 years, and when he drove east on I-90 looking for a place to live, he fell in love with looking up at the views of the mountains and hills around Issaquah. He said he feels some of that is being lost with some of the new structures that are going up, and gave examples of buildings in the Darst Park and Hyla neighborhoods that are at odds with the vision language for those neighborhoods. He also said he feels disappointed with the quality of some of the architecture of the newer structures, such as the Atlas Apartments. He said his impression is that people are shocked at the number of stories of that building, right on Gilman, and weren't expecting it. He said models would really help people understand what is being proposed before it gets built. He said he thinks the last example of good architecture in the City was the library building. He noted the architecture of the Commons area was controversial when it was first developed and there was a bad public reaction to it, which hasn't changed much. In general, he said the special quality of Issaquah has been the views and view corridors, and with enough developments like the Atlas Apartments, Issaquah will become like downtown Kirkland. He said he agrees with a previous commenter that the City doesn't have to develop "to the max," and can pull back a little bit.

PPC Discussion: PROBALA thanked all the commenters and participants at tonight's meeting. She said she appreciated the suggestion to get a core group of people from each neighborhood to give input on the vision for that neighborhood, and hopes the City follows through on that. She said she also thinks having meetings in various places around the City is also good. She noted PPC repeatedly asked for scale models when it was reviewing the Central Plan over the last few years so people could better visualize what was being proposed, and said she hopes the City can take the time and find the funds to do that. She also said having clear City codes is good for developers, too, so it is clear to them what they can and can't do. Lastly, she said she would like to see the parks plan incorporate planning that allows for adequate space between the end of a park and any adjacent development.

RAHMIG said he liked the suggestion to hold neighborhood-specific meetings to get the opinions of residents in each neighborhood. He agreed that finding ways such as models that would help us all visualize what would be allowed by code is a good idea. He also said he would like to see conversations begin about planning for Sound Transit coming to Issaquah in the future, including regional bus service.

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FAUL said he likes hearing people's comments. We heard a fair amount of negativity tonight, he continued, which is fine, but we would also like to hear what people like. He said he wants to understand the full story, which means hearing both negative and positive comments. He said we will have multiple opinions within our community, and if people here tonight or watching have comments they haven't heard expressed, he would like to hear them. Sometimes people "on the sidelines" have great comments to offer, he said, and encouraged participants at tonight's meeting to talk to their friends and neighbors in an effort to get as many opinions as possible. He said his intention is to represent the entire community, not just the people who can show up at meetings. He thanked participants tonight for coming and encouraged them to stay involved.

STOB said he also favors community outreach efforts to get as many opinions as possible and agrees with many of his fellow Commissioners' comments. He also said he appreciated Joanna Buehler's comments tonight about the treasures of Issaquah, and said he agrees it is important to hang on to those.

ADJOURN

With no additional business to conduct, PROBALA adjourned the meeting at 8:10 PM.

Susan Lowe
Recording Secretary