

Planning Policy Commission
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**CITY OF ISSAQUAH
PLANNING POLICY COMMISSION
MINUTES**

November 9, 2017

City Hall South
Council Chambers

135 E. Sunset Way
Issaquah, WA 98027

PPC MEMBERS PRESENT

Joan Probala, Chair
Ron Faul, Vice Chair
AJ McGauley, Alt.
Althea Saldanha, Alt.
Jon Stob
Carl Swedberg
Lindsey Walsh

STAFF PRESENT

Trish Heinonen, Policy Planning Manager
Keith Niven, Economic Dev. and Dev. Services Director
Jennifer R. Woods, Associate Planner

CENTRAL ISSQ. TASK FORCE MEMBERS PRESENT

Joe Forkner
Ken Konigsmark
Mary Lynch
Mel Morgan, Jr.

CALL TO ORDER

PROBALA, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM. She welcomed members of the Central Issaquah Task Force to PPC's discussion tonight. Members of both groups introduced themselves.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED BY FAUL, SECONDED BY SWEDBERG, that minutes of the PPC meeting on October 26, 2017, be approved as presented. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

PUBLIC HEARING: PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO CENTRAL ISSAQUAH PLAN DISTRICT VISIONS

Heinonen made staff's presentation. She explained the purpose of tonight's meeting is to thoroughly understand why a vision for each neighborhood is important, what has changed since the neighborhood visions in the Central Issaquah Plan were developed, and then to look closely at the vision for each neighborhood. She explained why looking at neighborhood visions was identified as a moratorium item by the Council when the moratorium was enacted in September 2016; the purpose of having neighborhood visions and their role in the planning process; changes since the 2013 visions were adopted; and major influences in the next 10-20 years. McGAULEY asked whether staff can identify which of the "major influences" are expected to actually happen. Heinonen said staff expects that all of them will happen.

Heinonen continued her presentation by displaying a diagram of the ten neighborhoods. FAUL asked what are the blue lines on the map. Heinonen said they are water, including creeks and tributaries.

McGAULEY asked what is the "Lake Sammamish State Park Development Agreement." Niven said the City recently received a request from Washington State Parks to work on a development agreement and EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) for improvements to Lake Sammamish State Park. Council will soon be considering an agenda bill that would provide money for the EIS in the 2018 budget. He gave more details about the work that would be

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included in the development agreement with the state. He added there will be plenty of opportunities for public involvement in the scoping and details of the improvements.

McGAULEY questioned the boundaries of the proposed Western Gateway neighborhood. Niven said staff is hoping to have a conversation tonight about boundaries, and said staff has a short list of boundary issues. For example, Lake Sammamish State Park is currently not included in Central Issaquah, he said, and PPC might want to consider whether it should be. Another issue is whether the southeast corner of Gilman should be included in Central Issaquah or Olde Town. McGAULEY agreed to Niven's suggestion that participants hold their questions on boundaries for now.

Heinonen continued with a short presentation on what success would look like for the neighborhood visions.

SALDANHA spoke about the need for the individual neighborhood visions to tie back into the overall vision for the City as a whole. Konigsmark agreed. He said an overall vision is missing here; what is the picture that these puzzle pieces are creating. Then within that vision, he continued, the City has to have the code, regulations, and policies that will make the vision happen. Lynch agreed, and said as an example, the Task Force didn't envision that development in the Gateway neighborhood would have zero lot lines, but when the development standards were created, that is what was allowed. So we need to make sure that the visions get implemented in the codes and policies, she added.

WALSH said staff's earlier presentation stated that a vision is not the same as standards or code. So it is important to understand who the "someone" is in the vision's purpose that "someone can read a vision and visualize the intended outcome." Is that "someone" the Council, or one of its boards or committees, or a developer, she asked. Heinonen replied all of the above. WALSH said we need to keep all users in mind when thinking about the vision.

SALDANHA said it is concerning to start discussing boundaries for these neighborhoods because we don't know how each of these subsets work into the whole. In other words, we should be starting with the whole, which is a vision for the City, and then break it down into pieces, which are the neighborhood visions. Heinonen gave some background about how and why the Central Issaquah Plan was developed, including how it was intended to guide the City in meeting the state's growth targets for jobs and housing.

Forkner said in his view as Chair of the Task Force, the Task Force came to the conclusion that becoming an urban rather than a suburban city was the best way to absorb growth without having to develop on the hillsides around the City. At that time, he continued, Bellevue, Redmond, and Kirkland were all developing, but Issaquah was stagnant. So this was seen as a 30-year plan. It caught us all off-guard when the development we expected to take 30 years happened in less than ten, he said. A lot of the work of the Task Force was lost during its transition to the implementation phase, he added.

PROBALA asked did the Task Force come up with a larger vision. Heinonen said yes; they did come up with a plan that also included standards, but that is not what the Council eventually adopted. Konigsmark located the Task Force's original vision and read it aloud. He said a key point in the vision was that 90 percent of the valley floor was impervious surface, and that had to be improved. Another key point was the concept of the green necklace. Heinonen displayed the guiding principles from the Central Plan. MORGAN noted that the vision changed from the Task Force's version to the version that appears in the final Central Plan.

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The participants asked staff to clarify the proposed vision document that was given to Council and that the Council has asked be reworked. WALSH asked whether the document given to Council was the same document that the Task Force created. Heinonen replied no, and explained the evolution of outreach and staff work that led to the version of the document that was given to Council. WALSH said a big question is whether the City Council is having a problem with the way the information was conveyed, or with the content. Niven gave some perspective on the Land and Shore Committee meeting at which the three Councilmembers who are members of Land and Shore asked that PPC review the vision for Central Issaquah districts. He said there are several ways to approach this, and said staff's thought tonight was to start with a clean slate for PPC to discuss, but there are other ways we can address this.

PROBALA noted that one of the reasons for the moratorium was because of some discontent with what was happening regarding new development in Central Issaquah and the desire for more clarity about what the community wants. Forkner said speaking personally, the Atlas development is not completely against what the Task Force foresaw for Central Issaquah in the Central Plan. However, some in the community are not ready for that urban building on Gilman Blvd, he added. The Central Plan says that the City is ready to make downtown Issaquah more like a small scale downtown Bellevue, and the trade-off for doing so is to conserve the hillsides and natural surroundings. That's a larger decision that the whole City needs to address, he stated; are we really ready for development like Atlas and for the other growth that is coming.

Konigsmark said it seems prudent to try to find out what went wrong and where there are gaps that led to Atlas and Gateway. How can we do better, and what went wrong that allowed those developments to happen. PROBALA said in her view, the main reason is because codes and regulations were not written so that the City could say "no" to projects. She said it's also important to help residents understand what the City is planning, so they don't just wake up and see a multi-story building has been built where none existed before, and wonder why.

WALSH suggested that each neighborhood description should have a wish list, a success checklist, and an implementation checklist.

SALDANHA spoke in favor of long-range and short-range goals; a thorough discussion of what we want the City to look like; and possible brainstorming sessions to develop visions for each neighborhood.

FAUL noted that growth could actually be much larger in 20 years than we are anticipating now, and the City needs to make sure it has the infrastructure to support a much larger population.

Konigsmark spoke of how the City's experience with the Highlands and Talus developments has shown how desirable Issaquah is as a good place to live. The City should be dictating what we want developers to do here, not the other way around.

McGAULEY said it is possible for the City to be committed to accommodating growth, but also make it clear that we are not interested in having that growth immediately. Having the infrastructure in place would help the City accommodate growth in 10 or 20 years, not in five years. Konigsmark noted that light rail is not planned to reach Issaquah until 2042.

PROBALA spoke in favor of building wisely, while looking long-range. We can't expect 30,000 more residents over the next 30 years to all live in the Pickering neighborhood, she added. She gave some feedback from participants of the neighborhood tour yesterday.

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MORGAN said perhaps we should look at whether ten is the right number for the neighborhoods.

STOB suggested looking first at the overall City vision; then the Central Issaquah vision; then the boundary for Central Issaquah; then the neighborhoods and visions; then establishing or agreeing to neighborhood boundaries, features, and descriptions; and then address implementation.

Lynch noted the City has almost met its state-mandated growth targets, and so we need to be concentrating on infrastructure, parks, the green necklace, and so on.

Heinonen clarified that Council has asked PPC to review only the vision for the Central Issaquah districts. She referred to the “new vision elements” and “implementation strategies” in the presentation made to the Committee of the Whole Council on October 24, 2017.

McGAULEY said the plan needs to be explicit that the City is looking to create a more urban form, if that is indeed the vision. FAUL agreed, and said staff should not soft-pedal the language by avoiding words like “urban.” The City needs to be more upfront and transparent with the public about the direction that the City is going so that the right expectations are created, he stated.

Lynch said her understanding was that the Gateway area would be somewhat self-sustaining, but the end result of what has been developed there is just apartments. Niven said we have to be realistic about what the appropriate land use will be in each of these neighborhoods, including Gateway. Konigsmark said Gateway was envisioned as a signature gateway to Issaquah, and read the Task Force’s vision for Gateway aloud. Niven explained some factors that have influenced what has happened in the Gateway area.

FAUL asked what failed, and what allowed it to take place. Niven said we need to define what “it” is, and described how the Gateway development meets the regulations. FAUL said but it does not reflect any of the attributes that Konigsmark just read as the vision for Gateway. Forkner said in his view, the City did not put the time and energy into creating regulations required for the Central Plan to succeed. Konigsmark said the vision got watered down from the Task Force’s version, and the question now is how can we do better.

WALSH suggested including a statement in PPC’s response to Council that answers why the previous visions did not achieve the intended goals and how we can do better.

FAUL asked for clarification of the intended outcome for tonight’s meeting. Heinonen stated staff is hoping that PPC will revisit the vision for Central Issaquah, and make suggestions both in photos and/or descriptions, that will get us closer to a vision of what we collectively want for Central Issaquah. Niven gave some background on the work done so far on neighborhood visions, beginning in early 2017, and displayed the vision that was presented to Committee of the Whole Council. He suggested that PPC revisit the structure of how the vision is presented in this document, and then proceed to talk about the “meat on the bones” in terms of unpacking the details within each neighborhood’s vision.

FAUL questioned whether this work can be done in just two meetings; it almost needs a task force or committee to really spend some time on it. WALSH said it is possible for us to do something that takes it forward; instead of going into the individual neighborhood visions, for

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example, we could start by looking at the types of information that are in the vision and see if something is missing. FAUL said he doesn't think we understand it well enough to say what's missing. Konigsmark said he thinks we need to tell the Council that the vision is basically still good, and that our biggest message to Council is the need for code, regulations, policies, and enforcement that will back up the vision and make it happen, plus staff training so that developers give us projects the way our City wants them done.

PROBALA said her concern is the moratorium will be over at the end of December. Do we want to have something in place by then, or do we want to spend another 15 meetings talking about the vision while builders come in and do whatever they want, she said.

SALDANHA said the vision has to be big enough so that the code can be adjusted, and said we seem to be confusing vision and code. Niven said we have 11 visions; one for the Central subarea, plus ten for each of the neighborhoods. We have been asked to look at the Central subarea vision and see if something should be changed, then look at each neighborhood vision and ask whether those visions have changed. He added it is likely that Western Gateway is the neighborhood that has changed the most.

WALSH suggested creating two columns for each neighborhood, with narrative about the current vision ("...is") and what is projected for the future ("... will be").

The participants agreed that the vision should reflect the concept that the City needs to invest now in anticipation of growth, rather than reflect a commitment to actively pursue growth; a recognition that codes, regulations and policies that back up the vision are essential; and that the vision should include a commitment to the green necklace, at the parcel and route level, possibly including an aspirational sketch. WALSH suggested putting a reference to the green necklace in the requirements checklist for each neighborhood.

Participants discussed how the expectation that light rail will extend to Issaquah as a result of ST3 will impact central Issaquah. McGAULEY spoke in favor of merging Tibbetts Valley and Pickering into one urban neighborhood, possibly locating the City's light rail station in the I-90 right of way. The participants discussed their individual views on where the City's light rail terminus might be located. WALSH said we can't really have a vision for Central Issaquah without addressing the light rail question. Konigsmark said the City should be telling State Department of Transportation and Sound Transit where we want the station to be, not the other way around.

Niven gave his perspective on the steps in the station location process, and how the thoughts tonight about station location could be expressed in the vision. Participants gave some reactions to how light rail might change and shape Central Issaquah.

Niven asked the participants whether they prefer that staff continue to work with ten as the right number of neighborhoods, or change it, such as the merging of Pickering and Tibbetts Valley as was suggested earlier. McGAULEY spoke in favor of creating an "urban core within the urban core," and suggested identifying two tiers of neighborhoods in Central Issaquah. STOB said he is concerned that reducing the number of neighborhoods could mean that some smaller ones might not get a fair share of attention.

Public Comment

PROBALA opened the meeting for public comment at 8:55 PM.

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John Mabbott, General Manager of the Grange, Issaquah, gave some brief comments on the Grange, its role in Issaquah's history, and its status today. He said looking forward, he hopes that the Grange can eventually become an electronic vehicle charging hub, and that he would be open to seeing how the green necklace could run through Grange property.

PROBALA asked what would be helpful to the Grange as a business. Mabbott replied better lighting and sidewalks would be helpful. He also said the surrounding neighborhood is an odd mix of building types and purposes. As the Grange considers a remodel, we are looking at building a barn to store hay and that could also be used for concerts and community events, he added.

David Kappler, 255 SE Andrews Street, shared some thoughts from Connie Marsh, who was unable to attend the meeting, about boundary changes to the neighborhoods and the Central Issaquah districts. He spoke about the importance of wildlife corridors and referred to comments on wildlife previously submitted by Lynch. He said his primary concern is that without codes, regulations, and policies in place, the City will get more of what it has been getting from developers, and with the moratorium almost over, that is a huge concern for him. He said Issaquah is an attractive place to live that is getting a lot of attention and that will undoubtedly see more growth. We want to be sure we get the best of the best doing our development projects, not the worst doing their worst.

Hearing no additional requests to speak, PROBALA closed the public hearing at 9:07 PM. She noted that this public hearing will be continued to PPC's next meeting on November 30, 2017.

Commission Deliberation

MORGAN spoke in favor of reducing the ten neighborhoods to four: urban core, which would include what is now Tibbetts Valley, Pickering, and Hyla; Gateway, where not much more development is likely; mixed-use, which is shown in purple on the zoning map we have been using tonight; and residential. He continued that would mean moving the Old Route 10 area into Olde Town, and taking out the service district completely.

Konigsmark said another option is to take out Gateway as well. Lynch gave her reasons why it should be retained.

The Commission discussed whether the possible neighborhood boundaries should follow existing zoning, or whether zoning should be changed according to the neighborhood boundaries. FAUL said concentrating density into the urban core area described by MORGAN would allow Gilman and Olde Town to "breathe." McGAULEY asked about the area shown on the map in red checks. Niven said that is a mixed-use residential area. He continued if there is general agreement with the approach MORGAN has outlined, staff can repackage the neighborhoods for more discussion at the next meeting. Participants concurred with that approach.

Konigsmark suggested that the City have policies that require developers who want to develop high-density buildings to buy rights to some of the units where we don't want growth and transfer them to where we do. The City should not be handing out free zoning, he added.

PROBALA said realistically, it is probably not possible to limit all the growth we are planning to the combined Pickering-Tibbetts Valley neighborhood; it will have to be spread out a bit more than that. She said her concern is that the City ensure realistic zoning is in place so that builders are clear about what we want built in our City.

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OTHER/ADJOURN

PROBALA said we have given staff some direction for our conversation at our next meeting, which will be November 30, 2017. After some discussion, the participants agreed that arranging another meeting between now and November 30 is not realistic. Heinonen suggested that participants take a look at the Central Issaquah Plan (available on the City's website) as a good refresher for the next meeting.

PROBALA noted the Task Force did a tremendous amount of work on developing the Central Issaquah Plan, and thanked the Task Force members present tonight for their continued commitment. With no additional business to conduct, PROBALA adjourned the meeting at 9:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Lowe
Recording Secretary

(Note: Alternate Members did not vote at tonight's meeting as there was a quorum of Regular Members present.)