

Planning Policy Commission
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**CITY OF ISSAQUAH
PLANNING POLICY COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING—MINUTES**

February 15, 2018

Eagle Room
City Hall

130 Sunset Way
Issaquah, WA 98027

PPC MEMBERS PRESENT	STAFF PRESENT
Joan Probala, Chair	Keith Niven, Econ Dev & Planning Director
Ron Faul, Vice Chair	Christen Leeson, Senior Planner
A.J. McGauley, Alt.	
Troy Rahmig	
Jon Stob	OTHERS PRESENT
Lindsey Walsh	Kari Rowley Magill
Carl Swedberg	Connie Marsh
PPC MEMBERS ABSENT (EXCUSED)	Mel Morgan, Jr.
Joy Lewis	Steve Pereira

CALL TO ORDER

PROBALA called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED BY FAUL, SECONDED BY WALSH that minutes of the PPC meeting on January 25, 2018 be approved as presented. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

MOVED BY FAUL, SECONDED BY WALSH that minutes of the PPC meeting on February 1, 2018 be approved as presented. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

DISCUSSION: CENTRAL ISSAQUAH DISTRICT VISIONS AND GREEN NECKLACE (I)

PROBALA reminded PPC of the direction that Council gave PPC in reviewing the district visions. She noted that developing code, or making assumptions about whether or not code will be required, is not in PPC's purview. She continued the Central Area Task Force put a lot of work into a vision for the central area several years ago, and at the suggestion of WALSH, a link to that information has been sent to PPC since our last discussion. She said she thinks some of the ideas in the Task Force's work may be valuable to us now.

Niven introduced information e-mailed earlier to PPC members on the Gateway district, now renamed West Newport. He described the information in the handout, including what exists in West Newport now; what we expect to evolve in the future; a map; and a matrix using the livable/distinctive/connected/sustainable matrix that PPC has been using.

WALSH expressed her concerns about the format being used for the district visions, specifically the matrix of "livable/distinctive/connected/sustainable." She said particularly after reviewing neighborhood visions developed by other jurisdictions, she feels that the information we are using doesn't provide a clear picture of the individual neighborhoods and is perhaps not as user-friendly as it could be.

RAHMIG said he likes the organizational format PPC has been considering, but agrees we are perhaps missing the opportunity to be more neighborhood-specific. He said he likes the measures of success but isn't as committed to some of the other categories.

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FAUL said he has read the document several times and would like it to have more story-telling appeal and be more aspirational. He said he finds it too wordy and difficult to read.

WALSH said she did a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) exercise for each neighborhood, and was able to identify a few unique characteristics for each. She suggested a SWOT approach might be a useful technique for PPC to consider. PROBALA said that information could be fairly easily added to what we now have. She said she agrees the draft document is hard to read, largely because of the way it is written. She asked whether the Commission wants to continue with the format we have been using.

RAHMIG confirmed his earlier comment that he thinks the format is acceptable, but suggested that the “actions” to be taken by the City and developers be combined into one category. He said the wording could be combined and improved in places, but in general he likes the structure.

WALSH said the developer obligations were included because the original plan didn't get us what we wanted, and this attempt was intended as “pseudo-code” for developers in order to get what we envisioned. Does it meet that need, she asked. She continued with her perception that the original Central Issaquah Plan didn't have the code to back up what was intended, and the question is whether this resolves that problem. McGAULEY asked are these enforceable as written. Niven replied yes, and gave examples. McGAULEY asked whether a permit could be denied on the basis of the vision in the example used by Niven. Niven replied that's unlikely, but it does give the City leverage to have a conversation with a developer on a different level of specificity than in the past. McGAULEY asked can we recommend that this still needs code when it is presented to Council. PROBALA replied yes.

Connie Marsh commented that the paragraphs are pretty specific to each neighborhood; they could be more aspirational, but that would require noting what is missing from each neighborhood in particular. She continued the rest of the document would be used by staff and the developers to get everyone on the same page, and then also used by the Development Commission as a tool for each neighborhood. She spoke of the need for a balance of flexibility and regulations in code, and this moves us in a better direction than we have now. She said she is more interested in hearing about descriptive language for each neighborhood, and generally feels the structure should not be changed at this point.

Mel Morgan, Jr. said he also thinks the format is good, and will work well for the Development Commission when it reviews projects. He continued he likes keeping the City's and the developers' requirements separate.

PROBALA said it sounds as though the Commission is generally agreed to move forward with the format. FAUL said he is frustrated with how the document reads, not necessarily the way it is set up. He questioned why portions of the text have been included, and suggested where text could be eliminated.

Niven continued his presentation of information in the handout for West Newport. The Commissioners discussed the language used. FAUL noted the language doesn't “sell” the neighborhood; we aren't treating this as enough of a sales document. WALSH said in her view, it is more of a planning document. The Commissioners and participants discussed the purpose of the document. PROBALA suggested that wording changes can be made offline. Niven gave his perception of how wording under City obligations and developer obligations should tie into any

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aspirational wording in the “future” section. McGAULEY said if everything is delivered that is laid out here as a measure of success, the neighborhood will be awesome.

Steve Pereira spoke in favor of a community-as-a-whole approach as well as just parcel by parcel. He also noted that some developers have a better track record of commitment to development than others, and questioned whether that could be considered.

PROBALA suggested looking at the individual items in the matrix of “livable/distinctive/connected/sustainable” items, beginning with “livable.” WALSH suggested using bullet points. Niven explained why the numbered format is preferred for clarity and ease of reference in staff’s and the Development Commission’s review. He also explained why more words provide more clarity in this instance. Staff made suggestions to improve readability.

FAUL suggested adding “look and feel” to Livable 1.4.

SWEDBERG said his concern is that the wordsmithing process can continue indefinitely, and none of it will matter if the code isn’t there to enforce it. He said he thinks the document is pretty good as it exists. He gave examples of how the Development Commission would use this document, and said it is becoming frustrating for him because we need to move ahead and not debate language ad nauseum. Niven said he is happy to incorporate wordsmithing suggestions via e-mail, and suggested focusing tonight on the content for the future descriptions for each of these neighborhoods.

McGAULEY asked what is the public park being referenced here as a measure of success (“Create a public park within this neighborhood”). Niven gave some background on potential parks in the West Newport neighborhood, specifically the one in the Anthology development.

PROBALA asked for other suggested changes. RAHMIG, WALSH, and McGAULEY suggested minor changes in both what is listed under “livable” and in the “future” section. Marsh spoke to the need for qualitative language and made suggestions for language to be added to ensure that we get what we are envisioning, and gave examples. She and WALSH discussed whether mixed-use is adequately addressed in this document. Niven replied mixed-use would be covered by zoning, and gave examples. WALSH said her draft vision for West Newport would include something about sporadic retail that would meet residential needs. Others agreed. McGAULEY made additional language suggestions about regional access and transit connectivity. WALSH suggested including a reference to Sound Transit both here and in the future section. Staff made a note of all suggestions made and invited participants to e-mail staff with any other suggestions.

Niven continued with his presentation of information on the Regional Growth Center (RGC) district, which includes both the Gilman and Pickering neighborhoods. He explained why staff combined the descriptions of Gilman and Pickering. McGAULEY initiated a discussion of whether the RGC should be addressed as a single district or separately as Gilman and Pickering. After some discussion, the Commission generally agreed to include a single statement about the RGC, followed by sections on “today,” “future,” and a matrix of livable/distinctive/connectivity/sustainable for Gilman and Pickering as separate neighborhoods. The Commission generally agreed to have an opening statement for RGC that addresses how I-90 separates the two neighborhoods.

Magill asked about the provision in Livable 1.4, “Preserve the amount of non-residential square footage and jobs as redevelopment occurs.” Niven said that’s a huge question, and gave examples of how that might be implemented in the Gilman and Pickering neighborhoods only. He said not having this in code but only in the vision offers some advantages here, and gave additional

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examples and how recently adopted code for mandatory mixed-use in Gilman would apply to redevelopment there. He continued the concern is that the City could lose a significant number of jobs in our jobs hub, which is the Pickering and Gilman area. In response to a question from Magill, he used a hypothetical example of Costco expanding and taking out retail space but replacing it with commercial space, which would meet this provision. The concern is if a residential builder wanted to redevelop in that same area, they would have to replace retail or commercial with first-floor retail to meet the requirements of the provision.

Morgan said he disagrees. He said he thinks that the City has developed over several decades using a suburban model, and this says that the development on any lot that exists now has to be locked in forever. That's not a vision for going forward, and it may not even be feasible, he continued. He spoke to the work the consultants Crandall/Arambula did on developing central Issaquah design standards. Niven said an argument can be made that the retail being redeveloped was marketable before it was redeveloped, so why wouldn't it continue to be marketable with six or so floors of residential space above it. He said he agrees that nonresidential can't be pushed where there is no market, but as we densify and put residential above commercial space, that ground-floor retail should still be viable. Morgan gave examples of how that kind of space may not be successful as retail space, particularly if the same amount of space is required for commercial or retail space as before the residential use when in. He said to codify it this way does not seem like good policy. FAUL gave an example of a small business owner he knows who is finding it difficult to find affordable retail space in Issaquah, and said we don't want to make available space too costly for small businesses and retailers to afford.

McGAULEY said we are not looking to preserve retail but rather to preserve non-residential, so a medical office or office space might work where a coffee shop might not. He added the requirement may mean it takes longer to redevelop, but that's fine because prices will continue to rise and eventually we will get a better fit for what we are envisioning for 20 or 30 years from now. Niven said the problem with providing flexibility is that we may not get the redevelopment we want. He said his concern is that as soon as there is an escape door, developers tend to take it. We could choose flexibility and see what happens with the next few projects, he said. It only applies to these two neighborhoods, he added, although he understands the concerns expressed by Magill, Morgan, FAUL, and McGAULEY.

STOB said he has a problem with "1.4 Redevelopment will not reduce the amount of jobs or non-residential square footage," and would favor getting rid of it in favor of just requiring ground-level retail. McGAULEY said he disagrees because ground-floor retail doesn't make sense everywhere. STOB suggested "ground-floor non-residential." McGAULEY suggested adding a bullet that the City will work to be sure that "Livable 1.4" is implemented in a flexible manner so it is not overly prescriptive.

Niven asked what is the purpose of "Livable 1.4;" is it a vibrancy issue or a jobs issue. FAUL replied both, and explained his answer. He said he would rather see too much retail space rather than not enough in terms of creating a healthy neighborhood. Magill said she would favor keeping some flexibility in the language, and referred to how the City of Bellevue has addressed this issue. She explained that buildings change as neighborhoods change, and gave examples of how the arrival of light rail or other changes in surroundings can impact how buildings are used.

Niven referred to projects for live-work developments in the Highlands which accommodate home-based businesses. FAUL said if the area of Gilman and Pickering is our jobs hub, why are we talking about allowing residential to be built there. We have to insist on commercial and retail be built there, he continued, and clarified with staff the residential capacity for the RGC is 7,100.

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Having that area be all residential would change the vibrancy of the neighborhood, he continued; more energy is created by having both residential and commercial usage there.

McGAULEY said it is easier to be too prescriptive and then ease up than the reverse. PROBALA agreed we can always change, but we need commercial and retail to create a cohesive neighborhood. Niven used Cascade Business Park as an example of how redevelopment might occur. Morgan said his objection is that Cascade Business Park has 96,000 square feet of retail/commercial space, and it just isn't possible to redevelop it as residential with 96,000 square feet of ground-level retail/commercial space. That's where we would want high-density residential to go, and to force 96,000 square feet of commercial onto that site would codify what is there already. McGAULEY said the City would ask the developer in that case to find equivalent space on another parcel in order to meet the requirement. The markets for retail and residential operate differently, he continued, and gave hypothetical examples of how redevelopment could occur. Morgan said he still disagrees and thinks a parcel-by-parcel approach, as this is written, is problematic. Niven presented several scenarios of how this provision would apply in hypothetical situations, including looking at this from a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis rather than a parcel-by-parcel basis.

FAUL suggested we should be looking at the spirit of the neighborhood rather than taking this granular approach. He gave examples of how developers could create a mixed-use development in the Pickering area without limiting them to replacing commercial/retail space on a parcel-by-parcel basis.

McGAULEY referred to the development taking place in Redmond's Overlake neighborhood as the kind of development that Issaquah wants to attract to its RGC.

PROBALA noted one problem is that developers don't work in concert with each other, so development takes place piecemeal. That's why we need neighborhood visions, she added. FAUL noted when ST-3 comes, the adjacent real estate will become valuable and we will eventually get what we are envisioning. PROBALA said she has trouble envisioning how an apartment building next to a commercial building next to another apartment building creates a neighborhood. She said she would rather see walking spaces, parks, and so on that create a neighborhood. McGAULEY described what a mixed-use neighborhood means to him; it is a more urban neighborhood, and having commercial buildings and retail spaces right where people live is an appropriate use. Niven referred to the City's 24,000-square-foot offices in the Pickering area and how that space could be redeveloped as a five-story apartment with ground-floor office space. He noted that the presence of Costco brings with it a certain number of vendors who want space close to Costco.

PROBALA asked Morgan how he would address "Livable 1.4" from the perspective of a Development Commission member. Morgan said he would recommend eliminating it. FAUL gave his perspective on the importance of not losing the amount of commercial/retail space that exists in Pickering today. RAHMIG said the jobs aspect is more important to him, and a jobs metric here rather than a square footage metric would be valuable information. A big box store, for example, doesn't necessarily have a large employer footprint. The emphasis is on not losing jobs in a given neighborhood without regulating it at the parcel level, he concluded. PROBALA asked so would it be acceptable to remove "Livable 1.4" and add a reference to preserving jobs or encouraging commercial usage. Commissioners generally agreed.

FAUL suggested deferring more conversation on this item until the next meeting. WALSH suggested looking at how other cities have approached this issue. Niven said we could substitute

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“jobs” for “retail/commercial space” in the requirement. The zoning for this area allows almost everything, he noted, so we are trying to provide some level of control over zoning that is very broad. He said he’s not aware of any other city that has tried this approach; the right tool would be to rezone, but there are benefits to having the broad zoning we now have in this area.

McGAULEY suggested changing the language to “Livable 1.4 Redevelopment will not reduce the amount of jobs or non-residential square footage.” STOB suggested adding, “We have more housing and more jobs” to the “measures of success” section.

FAUL asked how is “vibrancy” measured in this context. STOB referred to the existing language in the Vibrancy column, “Work for day and night activities.” The Commission discussed what “vibrant neighborhood” means. Niven asked whether seeking day and night activities is appropriate for the Pickering neighborhood. Participants said yes. Staff indicated they will work on appropriate language to reflect that direction. McGAULEY referred to a “Night Mayor” program used elsewhere to ensure a city’s vibrancy’s efforts are effective outside of regular business hours. Participants discussed their ideas for ensuring vibrancy in the City’s urban core. Niven suggested moving that item to “measures of success.”

McGAULEY suggested ensuring language is included about connectivity of Pickering with the Eastlake neighborhood.

Niven said staff will try to quickly turn these around in anticipation of another discussion of visions at PPC’s February 22 meeting. Participants agreed to submit wording suggestions for the next two neighborhoods (Confluence and Eastlake) to staff in advance of the February 22 meeting.

McGAULEY made additional suggestions: (1) the Sound Transit facility itself is a way to bridge the two neighborhoods and could be articulated here as another way to make I-90 more permeable; and (2) is there anything here that would preclude the opportunity for Mall Street to be a pedestrian-only corridor in the future. He said he would like to ensure that making Mall Street pedestrian-only is a possibility for future consideration. Niven replied nothing here would preclude that possibility.

Magill asked about a new crossing referenced in 3.1. Niven referred to a new crossing on Gateway Anthology’s landing in the West Newport neighborhood across I-90 to property occupied by the Greenwood Trust.

Magill asked for clarification of mobility improvements referenced in 4.3. Staff agreed to move that item to the “City Obligations” column.

Morgan suggested referring to the I-90 crossing in the RGC paragraph (“As the RGC is divided by I-90, it will evolve into two neighborhoods...”).

WALSH referred to her earlier comments on including specific references to connectivity and mobility in the “future” descriptions. She made other suggestions intended to make the document easier to read. FAUL agreed the document seems to be perceived differently by those who favor a more analytical approach and those who favor a more qualitative approach. Participants discussed the different audiences that are likely to use the document. WALSH agreed to send PPC members the work she did on the SWOT analysis and her research on other jurisdictions, as discussed earlier.

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PROBALA said the narrative needs a bit more substance in order to accomplish a bit more, but not necessarily a lot more words.

McGAULEY asked whether improvements to the intersection of SR-900 and I-90 can be addressed as part of these neighborhood visions. Niven said that interchange is owned by WSDOT. We have been focused on the visions for neighborhoods, he continued, but the language here refers to removing barriers that impede moving between neighborhoods, so staff can take another look at it from that viewpoint.

Morgan said he appreciates the opportunity to be part of this discussion. PROBALA thanked him for his participation and also thanked the Task Force for the hard work they did several years ago developing a vision for central Issaquah. She said she would like the Commission to spend 10 minutes or so at the next meeting reviewing a final draft of suggestions to the West Newport and RGC (Pickering and Gilman) narratives, then move on to the two remaining neighborhoods, Eastlake and Confluence.

AUDIENCE COMMENTS

None.

OTHER/ADJOURNMENT

PROBALA encouraged interested residents to apply for membership on the City's boards and commissions, including PPC. More information about applying is available on the City's website. With no additional business to conduct, PROBALA adjourned the meeting at 9:10 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.)