

**CITY OF ISSAQUAH**  
**Planning Policy Commission**

6:30 PM  
 August 22, 2019

Council Chambers  
 135 E. Sunset Way

**MINUTES**

**COMMISSION AND ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL PRESENT**

*Commissioners:*

Ron Faul, Vice Chair  
 Janice Carle  
 Randy Harrison  
 Joy Lewis  
 Bill Rinehart  
 Jason Voiss  
 Robin Beukers, Alternate  
 Thomas Haskins, Alternate

*Administration/Staff:*

Trish Heinonen, Policy Planning Manager  
 Stephen Padua, Sr. Transp. Planner  
 Christen Leeson, Senior Planner  
 Christopher Wright, Econ. Dev. Manager

*Commissioners Not Present (Excused):*

Joan Probala, Chair

**CALL TO ORDER**

FAUL, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a) MOVED BY RINEHART, SECONDED BY LEWIS that minutes of the August 8, 2019 PPC meeting be approved as presented. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

**REGULAR BUSINESS**

- a) **Mobility Master Plan, (I)**

*Presented by:*

*Stephen Padua, Sr. Transportation Planner*

**Staff Presentation**

In reply to a question that arose at the last PPC meeting, Padua distributed a handout of the Traffic Task Force's recommended concepts for East Sunset Way, from 1st Ave. SE to 6th Ave. SE. He added no concept has been selected yet; these projects are unfunded and not included in the TIP (Transportation Improvement Plan) for the next six years. RINEHART asked how will the final concept be selected. Padua said that decision also still lies ahead.

Padua gave the participants instructions on how to access a transportation questionnaire using members' cell phones. He explained how the questionnaire is being used; provided a brief history of transportation in the US; and continued his comments about what has changed as a result of growth, advances in technology, environmental health concerns, and regional vehicle congestion. He discussed the concept of multi-modal transportation, including options, and the purpose of the Mobility Master Plan (MMP) for the City. He noted the MMP will replace the Transportation Element in the Comprehensive Plan, and presented the MMP's guiding principles.

Padua continued leading participants through the questionnaire and commented on the participant's resulting responses. Among the comments offered by PPC members during the questionnaire discussion were the following:

- "more transit options" is a broad category that includes electric bicycles;

- another transit option not listed here would be something like a tram or trolley that would help people get around the City, not necessarily bus service that would take them in and out of the City;
- a huge transit-related issue is where the terminus will be located for the light-rail system; people will come from all over East King County to park and use the rail system;
- how is financial integrity part of the thinking about these transportation projects;
- eliminating parking minimums for new development is problematic; although developers may favor eliminating parking minimums in Kirkland and Redmond, residents there complain about the lack of available parking;
- how do we provide a place for people to get out of their cars and interact with the community;
- how do internal City staff who are working on the MMP interact with the staff working on new plans for Olde Town, particularly on parking, and how does “cross-pollination” occur;
- there are issues with bus shelters and other bus-related services that are Metro’s responsibility and not within the purview of the City;
- what does “walkability” mean in this context, particularly for young families in Issaquah, and what is the source of the guidelines on walkability.

Padua concluded his presentation with a summary of where the project now stands and how it will move forward.

### **Commission Questions**

LEWIS asked from your perspective, do you have the resources needed to complete the MMP. Padua replied a budget was set for this effort so the work is funded, and explained how the project team is accomplishing this task.

### **Audience Comments**

J.J. Lin, owner of property at 180 S. Front Street, commented that he wasn’t really satisfied with the answer on how the MMP team staff is coordinating with staff who are working on parking issues.

#### **b) Proposed Olde Town Code Amendments, (I)**

*Presented by:*

*Christen Leeson, Senior Planner*

*Christopher Wright, Economic Development Manager*

### **Staff Presentation**

Wright and Leeson made staff’s presentation. Leeson reviewed the six proposed code amendments discussed at the last meeting (listed on page 21 of 45). She noted questions arose during that discussion and staff is available tonight to provide answers. Wright continued staff’s presentation, as follows.

Do businesses (or the Downtown Issaquah Association) know how much of their business is local (Olde Town) versus how much is regional (outside of Olde Town)? A good estimate is about half is local, and half is regional.

Does the Economic Development Department do “exit interviews” when a business leaves Issaquah? A great question and a great idea. We do some indirect interviews and we do regular Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) visits. The intent of BREs is to keep tabs on businesses and their concerns before they get to the point of exiting.

How do business owners feel about neighborhood-oriented businesses coming into the area?

Businesses want a lot of people moving in and out of storefronts on Front Street, with lots of activity, because it is good for their business, too. A “neighborhood-oriented business” also implies that people can walk or bike there. Business owners are generally very supportive.

What are businesses’ thoughts on required ground floor commercial on Front Street in the CBD zone? Businesses would rather have an active commercial business next to their property than a residential property. Business owners are generally very supportive of the “highest and best use,” which they see as commercial rather than residential.

What is the number of Olde Town parking spaces included in the 2018/2019 parking study? Of these parking spaces, what is the “buffer” of spaces not being used (number, not percentage)? Walk through the parking study. What were the outcomes and what happens from here? The parking study indicated there are 750 public parking stalls within the study area. Olde Town public parking peaks at 62 percent occupancy, and averages 60 percent occupancy during peak times (approximately 285 available public stalls). Typically, 85 percent occupancy is the threshold when parking management becomes warranted. A survey indicated that 70-plus percent of survey respondents indicated it is reasonable to walk three to five minutes to their destination. At any given time, there is plenty of available parking within a three-to-five minute walk of Olde Town. The next steps in a parking management strategy are: (1) to continue to monitor parking availability; (2) put time limits on parking and enforce them; (3) install parking meters and paid parking; and (4) build a parking garage to increase parking capacity. The City is committed to doing a downtown parking survey every two years or so, including developing an inventory, and continue a program of monitoring, education, outreach, and signage to better utilize existing resources.

### **Audience Comments**

J.J. Lin, owner of property at 180 S. Front Street, said the code changes are essentially a downzone for his property. He said he challenges the Commission to answer what they think will happen to property values of properties downtown with these code changes. That hasn’t been addressed, he said, and the Commission needs to be prepared to answer questions about decreasing property values. Property values are comprised of land value and building value; if the City downzones by reducing building heights, it will reduce the land values of existing properties. What is the answer, he asked, to a reasonable question. He continued, he takes exception with requiring ground floor retail on Front Street; property owners should decide the best use of their property, and the City shouldn’t dictate what property owners should do. He said he would like the Commission to reconsider those sections of the proposed code amendments.

### **Commission Discussion**

LEWIS asked staff to respond to the comment about property values. Wright noted every code has implications for property values. When the Hearing Examiner has received appeals by property owners challenging code decisions, it has been difficult to prove that property values have been damaged. Leeson replied in the four open houses, 470 responses, and 12 public meetings that the City held on Olde Town, we kept hearing that what people value about Olde Town is its character. What we heard is that people felt taller buildings that can look down and into residences would reduce property values for residents, she continued. The proposed amendments are an attempt to protect the unique character of Olde Town, which is what residents said they value most, she added.

HARRISON said the proposed ground-floor retail code requirement states “retail,” not commercial. He referred to the list of commercial properties distributed at the last meeting. Wright replied the term “active commercial” has just recently come to our attention. Leeson noted that Kirkland uses “high customer turnover” as part of its criteria. LEWIS suggested that

staff do more finessing of the definition of “active commercial” and bring that information back to PPC. Others agreed.

HARRISON said the policy question is whether the City should, as a matter of policy, require developers to include retail or commercial on Front Street. RINEHART noted PPC’s role is to hear from the public and make a recommendation that will assist the Council in making that decision. Leeson gave more details about the research staff has done so far, including at Redmond and Kirkland, including what has worked for them and what hasn’t.

FAUL said PPC can ask staff to bring us some aspirations or ideas for our next discussion about the benefits of requiring retail only, or requiring commercial and/or active commercial, and how other jurisdictions have handled this. HARRISON said that still leaves the big question of whether to require commercial or retail, or both. Leeson said the more open it is, the more options it provides for property owners. FAUL said he thinks more discussion needs to take place around some options and proposed solutions.

BEUKERS commented from his experience, when municipalities require rather than incentivize a certain kind of development it is problematic, and that developers tend to see mandated requirements as just not penciling out in their favor.

After additional discussion, FAUL said it sounds as though the Commission has questions about the definition of “active commercial,” including how that would be defined and what kinds of businesses it would encompass, and to learn more about what Kirkland and Redmond have experienced in implementing a first-floor retail/commercial requirement. It was the consensus of PPC members present that staff perform this work and present it to PPC at the next Olde Town amendments discussion.

The Commissioners discussed the parking study. LEWIS commented that the study says there is a plethora of spaces available, but realistically speaking, it is hard to think about parking past the Darigold Building on Gilman and walking to the more active parts of Front Street, particularly in the rain. She said when she goes to Seattle she has certain expectations about being in the city that she doesn’t necessarily have about Issaquah, and Seattle has different walking options than Issaquah.

FAUL noted the businesses that supply no parking have an impact on adjacent businesses. Did the study calculate that impact, he asked. Wright replied no, the study only looked at public parking, not at private parking lots.

HARRISON asked staff to send PPC members a copy of the BRE questionnaire. He asked whether the City is still working toward consolidating City Hall services in Olde Town. Wright replied yes. HARRISON noted doing so would result in a significant increase in people doing business in the Olde Town area.

BEUKERS asked what is considered a neighborhood-oriented business, and why is that considered a good thing for Olde Town. Wright said a definition of a neighborhood-oriented business is not now in the City’s code, and has been proposed as part of these amendments: *Neighborhood-oriented businesses have ten or fewer locations throughout the United States and cater to the daily needs of the local community.* So Starbucks would not qualify, he continued. Heinonen said the intent is not to eliminate businesses that are not neighborhood-oriented, but rather to offer a small parking reduction as an incentive to neighborhood-oriented businesses as a way to encourage them to locate in Olde Town. Leeson added the incentive of reduced parking also helps encourage smaller, more local businesses by reducing their start-up expenses. RINEHART noted encouraging neighborhood-oriented businesses would help keep Olde Town from turning into a neighborhood that is no different from any other. FAUL agreed, and said the value of Olde Town is that it is vibrant, and we don’t want to lose that vibrancy.

Wright added encouraging local businesses also keeps revenue local, rather than sending it to business headquarters located elsewhere.

CARLE noted the definition of a neighborhood-oriented business doesn't say anything about local ownership. But the business would cater to surrounding neighbors, which helps facilitate density, better transit options, vibrancy, and so on. Heinonen replied that is correct.

Heinonen asked PPC members for any other issues before the Olde Town public hearing. HARRISON spoke about the need to let people understand that Olde Town is safe and not to fear walking around. Leeson said staff is working on filling in gaps in sidewalks and bikeways, and also better lighting, that will at least partially address people's safety concerns. HARRISON noted the Issaquah Police Department has data about how safe it is to be downtown. FAUL said perhaps that data should be shared with the public.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS/ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- a) Upcoming Schedule: The next meeting is scheduled for September 5, which will be the public hearing on the Olde Town code amendments. An additional meeting has been added to the schedule on December 5 (in lieu of December 26) to review the proposed sign code amendments.

#### **AUDIENCE COMMENTS**

None.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

With no additional business to conduct, FAUL adjourned the meeting at 8:18 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Lowe  
Recording Secretary