

CITY OF ISSAQUAH
Planning Policy Commission

6:30 PM
 June 24, 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.

Commissioners Present:

Jason Voiss, Vice Chair
 Joy Lewis
 Nina Milligan
 Matt Monahan
 Richard Zaragoza, Alternate*

Administration/Staff:

Christen Leeson, Senior Planner
 Minnie Dhaliwal, CP&D Director
 Lucy Sloman, Land Dev. Manager

Commissioners Not Present:

Sara Bader (Excused)
 Ron Faul, Chair (Excused)

CALL TO ORDER

VOISS, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM. He gave some guidelines and directions for participating in tonight's virtual meeting by both Commissioners and the public.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a) VOISS asked for any changes or corrections to minutes of the June 10, 2021 PPC meeting, and there were none. Minutes are approved.

REGULAR BUSINESS

- a) **Title 18 Updates: Goals and Outcomes, Gap Analysis, and Schedule, (D)**

Presented by:

Minnie Dhaliwal, Director, Community Planning & Development

Goals and Outcomes

Dhaliwal made staff's presentation, beginning with the Goals and Outcomes chart (pages 11-14 in the agenda packet). She briefly described the 13 goals developed by Council in Part Two: Specific Goals, and described how Possible Actions and Desired Outcomes were also developed for each goal. VOISS facilitated a discussion on staff's question to PPC tonight: *What (if any) additional items and/or details should be added to the Goals and Outcomes document?* He began by asking for public comment and noted that several emailed comments have already been received by PPC members.

Public Comment

Ann Fletcher, Issaquah resident and People for Climate Action, said the references to climate in the Goals and Outcomes chart need review. She noted the City's Strategic Plan does not address climate, and the City's Climate Action Plan is not scheduled to be complete until December 2021, so a gap analysis based on those documents poses difficulties. She said her concern is that climate will be left out of the update, and suggested creating a placeholder or other mechanism to

ensure that climate is reflected in Attachment A. She also commented on the Code Update Memo and made some suggestions for strengthening the template (know your audience; try out the presentation on family or friends; use concrete examples and graphics where possible; stop mid-way through a presentation to ensure your audience is following; etc.). She also suggested adding climate to #3 and #4 in the Goals and Outcomes.

Connie Marsh, Squak Mountain, said what the public says isn't responded to or written down or forwarded to Council; it just goes into the void. So it's upsetting to hear staff say that the public "gets to speak at every meeting." There isn't a mechanism for acknowledging what is said by the public, she continued. She also addressed the chart in the agenda package, and noted it was developed by an ad hoc committee comprised of three Councilmembers and is not a Council-adopted document. She continued her understanding is that the contents of the chart are a first draft, not set in stone, and that the ad hoc committee expects it to be modified. She said the biggest question is whether what the City has in its guidance documents is correct, particularly as some of them are quite dated (e.g., 2016). The first question to be answered is what do we envision our City to be, and then make sure that is reflected in our guiding documents. She used trees as an example. She suggested the Commission go through the first column in the chart, make adjustments, and identify what is missing. The vision piece comes first, then you can go for the details.

Commissioner Discussion

VOISS opened the meeting for Commissioner discussion. LEWIS expressed appreciation for the opportunity to review the Goals and Outcomes and spoke in favor of allowing space to discuss the visionary aspect of this update. She addressed including education, especially urban schools, and suggested that PPC discuss that as a possible goal. She said "live-work-play" and job creation are not adequately represented in the goals. She also said salmon habitat, wildlife habitat, and wetland protection need to be added to Goal 4, and said massive retrofitting of all public buildings needs to be added to Goal 9, as well as eliminating waste and reaching carbon neutrality. (**ZARAGOZA joined the meeting at this time, 7:00 PM.*) LEWIS continued her comments that Goal 13 needs language about alignment with the Comp Plan. Some goals are missing from the chart, she continued, and some can be amended. She said she has emailed additional comments to staff in advance of tonight's meeting.

MILLIGAN expressed appreciation for the work done on the Goals and Outcomes. She said she doesn't disagree with LEWIS's observations, although she also recognizes that compact schools standards are in development now; we have more standards now than we did in the past. She said she agrees with enhancing job objectives in the chart. On Goal #13 to modernize the code, she said her thought is not to make it easier for developers to build anything, but rather to increase the City's standards and in turn challenge developers to build in a more sustainable manner. She said she would like to see it easier for a developer to get a permit in the process sense, but not necessarily make it easier to meet the City's standards. She also mentioned that a public comment was offered that some of the City's foundational documents are out of date. She continued her understanding was that they are fairly current, and having the dates they were implemented might help us better understand what needs to be in the Goals and Outcomes.

VOISS said he agrees with a lot of the previous comments. He also said he is concerned that the City could be trying to accomplish too many goals that compete with each other. For example, he is in full agreement with the need to "streamline the process" for developers, but the goals also include references to developers "maximizing profit" and "doing more outreach." We want developers to build more affordable housing, he continued, but the City already is known for having some tough regulations. If we ask developers to do more and more, we won't get the affordable

part; the costs will just be passed along to buyers. That said, he concluded there is a lot in the document he likes, and agrees with LEWIS that education needs more emphasis.

LEWIS said she emailed other comments to staff prior to tonight's meeting. She asked staff to speak to the issue of equity, which staff indicated could possibly be included in Sustainability. Dhaliwal replied staff did discuss equity. The umbrella goals, which apply to all the individual goals, speak to that as an overarching goal. We are still trying to figure out what equity means in terms of land use regulations, and what that would mean for Issaquah. She gave examples, such as identifying when residents are subjected to environmental noise or pollution. She said staff and the consultant are open to any ideas from PPC on equity issues.

ZARAGOZA said he would like to have more information about how costs would increase by adopting more green building regulations, including more affordable housing. Staff made a note of the request. Dhaliwal said the City has some land use tools, such as incentives and reduced fees, that it can use to encourage affordable housing. Leeson noted most fees, except pass-through fees, are waived for affordable housing. Sloman used the example of electric vehicle regulations, which PPC recently reviewed, as an example of achieving cost-neutrality to encourage development of affordable housing.

VOISS said it sounds like the City already has some mitigation techniques to encourage affordable housing in its code, and asked where are they located in the code. Leeson will identify the pertinent regulations and email them to the Commission. Sloman noted we are all wrestling with policy trade-offs like this as we look to update Title 18. As the City moves to becoming more urban, requiring well designed and efficient projects could also increase costs. She said staff is trying to figure out how to highlight those policy and trade-off discussions for PPC.

Subdivision Code Update Memo (Gap Analysis)

Dhaliwal continued staff's presentation on the Code Update Memo (page 15-18), noting that the Memo is a tool for both education and seeking policy guidance. She said staff is looking for feedback tonight on both the format of the Memo, including the Gap Analysis, and on the topic of subdivisions. She displayed maps of how the City has evolved over the years, and explained the subdivision process, including the preliminary and final plat approval processes. She referred to the proposed approach staff has taken to update the subdivision code (page 17), and to four broad questions on which staff would like PPC's feedback tonight, as follows:

1. Should the City increase the current minimum of four or fewer lots for short plats to the maximum of 9-lot short plats, as allowed by state law?
2. Should the City change code to make final plat approval an administrative approval, rather than by the Hearing Examiner?
3. Should the City require new subdivisions to provide connections through neighborhoods?
4. Should the focus of the code shift to emphasize tools to facilitate infill development?

Public Comment

Ken Esemann referred to comments he sent in advance of tonight's meeting via email to PPC members. He said he uses City code extensively in his work with the Talus HOA, and so gets to see where the code works well and where it could be better. He said most of his concerns are about flaws in the City's development process that has caused financial burdens, and about how to make things right. He said he appreciates the earlier comments about making sure the code is not adjusted to the point where housing is unaffordable. He closed his comments by stating that it is important for the code to work for residents. It needs to guide the development process so we get the results we all want. The code also needs to work for those who already live here. If it is too onerous or confusing, it doesn't serve the residents well. He also spoke about allowing a safety

valve, such as an appeal to a higher authority, so there is a mechanism to find a way when necessary around the sometimes daunting, confusing, complex tangles in the code.

Connie Marsh, Issaquah resident, said staff asked whether this presentation on subdivisions “works” for Commissioners. It doesn’t work for me, she said. Most people who will hear this know less about code than PPC. The way to learn is to provide interaction, not just give a PowerPoint presentation and expect people to absorb it. For example, start with the question of what is a subdivision. Give action options, not just show a map or a photo. She also spoke about the need to explain how subdivision regulations and development agreements are different. You have to provide that structure so people can understand the code, she continued. She gave more of her perceptions about the difficulties in understanding for the public. She said the presentation also didn’t address the community part of the process, like neighborhood meetings, and what happens to information given at those meetings. She continued the information presented tonight did not give her enough information she would need to give feedback on subdivisions. She said she favors keeping the Hearing Examiner option (Question 2) because the City needs a fresh eye to review applications and be sure something isn’t being overlooked or dropped. She also noted that some of the documents cited in the Goals and Outcomes, such as the Land Use and Housing elements in the Comp Plan, were last updated in 2015 and are considerably out of date.

Commissioner Discussion

MILLIGAN asked if staff is asking the Commission to provide feedback on how information was presented tonight or on the substance of the Code Update Memo on Subdivisions. Dhaliwal replied both. We want to know whether the presentation of information and the format used in the agenda packet works for Commissioners, and we are using Subdivisions as a test case tonight, to include a substantive discussion of content.

LEWIS said the template is missing a section of information that Commissioners need on history and background. She continued she would also like to see pros and cons listed, and a clear explanation of what we are trying to achieve and how we plan to do it.

MILLIGAN said the initial layout and the way information is presented in a tabular format is useful. She suggested that more information go into that tabular format rather than in narrative form. She said she found Dhaliwal’s presentation tonight much more robust and helpful than what was provided in the agenda packet. She said she also likes to see information about what Issaquah’s neighboring cities, like Bellevue and Kirkland, are doing, and suggested that information be included in the chart as well. She concluded by saying she didn’t feel she had enough information to make substantive, definitive comments about subdivisions tonight.

ZARAGOZA said he agrees with previous comments. He continued he liked the presentation; there was a lot of good information presented that would have been better to have had before tonight’s meeting. He suggested adding it to the packet next time. He also spoke in favor of including pros and cons, as well as sections that lay out problems, history, staff recommendations, and so on.

MONAHAN said he agrees that more information is better, but cautioned that we need to bear in mind that these projects take resources, and information is likely not ready for us until just before the meeting. He said information isn’t always going to be available until the meeting, and said staff needs to remind us when what we are asking for is reasonable and when it isn’t, particularly given PPC’s ambitious meeting schedule.

VOISS said he appreciates MONAHAN's point about resources. He said he agrees that it would be useful to provide PPC with some history/background, as well as pros and cons, in advance of the meeting, when possible.

Commissioner Comments

VOISS asked for Commissioners' initial reactions to the policy questions on subdivisions. He said he (1) favors moving from 4 to 9 lots in short plats, like Bellevue and Kirkland; (2) agrees with having the approval be an administrative process rather than by the Hearing Examiner; (3) having different layouts for communities is probably a positive thing; (4) a shift to looking at infill is appropriate, particularly given our dwindling land supply.

MONAHAN said he (1) would like more information about why the City wants to change from 4 to 9 lots for short plats, other than just "because we can;" (2) agrees that moving to an administrative process is probably a good idea; (3) still thinking about it; (4) favors moving in the direction of infill but not losing the hard work that went into development agreements for Talus and the Highlands; look to the future, realizing we may need to make alterations.

LEWIS said (1) the explanation of why the City would want to move from 4 to 9 lots for short plats is missing data and information about why; or maybe pick a neighborhood and use it as an example before doing it citywide; (2) no reasons were provided for why the City would want to move to an administrative process rather than the Hearing Examiner; public hearings are a vital part of the process, and this needs more information and discussion, including feedback from the community; (3) doing this would create little communities, and we need more information about whether that would get the results we want; ask staff to use an example of how this would work; (4) yes.

MILLIGAN said she (1) and (2) agrees we need more background on why these two proposals would be good for the City; (3) thinks when we have an opportunity to enhance connectivity, we should try to do it; she doesn't mind cul-de-sacs but also favors connectivity between neighborhoods; agrees with LEWIS that the City's development agreements are good examples of how it can be done; (4) the City designed the Central Issaquah Plan to take on infill, and favors following the CIP and preserving the City's communities.

ZARAGOZA said (1) a move from 4 to 9 lots for short plats makes sense in terms of streamlining the process, but he would like more information and discussion; (2) would like more information; (3) and (4) connected streets and infill don't have to be thought of as one or the other; we can have flow from neighborhood to neighborhood; larger neighborhoods like the Highlands tend to create strong identities, and he also likes smaller neighborhoods that can feel like a micro-climate but also part of the larger City; it is important to nurture both.

Dhaliwal said she is hearing that Commissioners want more information, and staff will consider how best to do that going forward. In response to a question from LEWIS about how to increase diversity of housing and affordable housing, Dhaliwal said the City has some tools to help increase diversity of housing choices, such as smaller homes. LEWIS said she would like to see a plan laid out that creates more of the "missing middle" of housing choices. VOISS said he sees this as more of a zoning and process question, and from his experience, too much code can make the City less competitive for development than other communities.

Title 18 Update Schedule

Dhaliwal continued staff's presentation on the revised Title 18 meeting schedule (page 19) and said feedback from PPC has been incorporated into the new schedule. She explained the process

will include six broad categories (Natural Environment #1 and #2, Zoning and Uses, Building and Design, Zoning and Development Standards, and Procedures and Administration). She explained how the phases will unfold, from education meetings and discussion to presentation of draft code, public hearings, substantive comments on the draft language, another opportunity for public comment, and deliberation, with the final phase being pulling it all together into one Title 18 package and having a final public hearing. She explained the sub-consultant plans to do public engagement throughout the process; those plans are still in development.

Dhaliwal also said a site visit for PPC members, as discussed at the last meeting, has been scheduled for Thursday, July 15. PPC members will receive more information about the site visit shortly.

REPORTS

a) **Council Updates**

Presented by:

Christen Leeson, Senior Planner

Leeson had no reports. Sloman reported the draft sign code was remanded by Council at a Study Session to an Ad Hoc Committee for some guidance and feedback; we are hoping to bring it back to another Study Session at the end of July.

OTHER BUSINESS / ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a) Upcoming Schedule: PPC's upcoming meeting schedule was discussed earlier in the meeting. Leeson noted a meeting on December 2, 2021 has been added to the schedule.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Connie Marsh said it's still not clear to her what PPC is going to do with the chart presented in the agenda tonight, how information will flow, and how information will feed into PPC's discussions. She said it seems like more structure is needed for joint meetings with other commissions and boards. She encouraged Commissioners to give thought about a format that will educate people and enable good discussions, and said those two functions cannot realistically take place at the same meeting.

Ann Fletcher thanked the Commission for an interesting discussion tonight and expressed appreciation for all the work that is going into this effect by staff and the Commission.

ADJOURNMENT

With no additional business to conduct, VOISS adjourned the meeting at 9:04 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Lowe,
Recording Secretary