



MINUTES

JOINT PLANNING POLICY & ECONOMIC VITALITY COMMISSIONS

5:30 p.m. – Thursday, April 23, 2026

1. Call to Order

The hybrid meeting was called to order at 5:31 p.m. by CHAIR VOISS.

Planning Policy

Commissioners Present: Chair Voiss, Vice-Chair Patterson, Commissioners Adair, Holstrom, Krass, Matthews, Millender-Irwin, Oliner, and Zakharoff

Economic Vitality

Commissioners Present: Chair Richley, Vice-Chair Richardson, Commissioners Kapustein, Larson, Lerch, and Lee

Absent:

Staff Present:

Minnie Dhaliwal, CP&D Director
Christen Leeson, Planning Manager
Amanda Jackson, Meeting Assistant
Kate Kaehny, Principal Planner

2. Public Comments (General)

There were no requests to speak.

3. Agenda Item

- a) **Building 101 (D) (00:10)**
Presented by:
Christen Leeson, Planning Manager

Leeson gave the overview.

COMMISSIONER LEE stated for context that 30% Average Median Income (AMI) housing is permanent, supportive housing that requires a significant amount of services, and asked what the city obligation is. Leeson replied that there is a great deal of city involvement and described how the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) process has involved the city.

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Carl Sorett with AvalonBay Communities began the developer presentations with translating accommodation to delivery, developing new housing in the near future. (00:25)

Questions were asked but without microphones and inaudible.

COMMISSIONER LERCH asked what the current timeline for permitting is in Issaquah compared to other cities. Sorett replied that Washington State is historically complex and every project is different, but typically one to two years to receive entitlements, whereas in the State of Texas a permit can be expected within a month, less complexities.

COMMISSIONER OLINER asked how long the average holding period is for properties. Sorett replied that AvalonBay tends to hold properties for 10 plus years with general internal guidance at 15 to 20 years. Mark Hoyt with Trammel Crow Residential stated that his company attempts to focus on create, build, and sell.

Sorett continued the presentation with developer challenges in Issaquah.

CHAIR RICHLEY asked for clarification regarding peer city rents. Sorett replied that newer, more modern developments run at a slight discount in Issaquah compared to Redmond, but there is not the diversity of housing stock seen in peer cities, more options outside of Issaquah.

Sorett continued the presentation.

COMMISSIONER LERCH asked what the two most important items for the city to focus on are. Sorett replied that Issaquah is very challenged by Critical Area Buffers such as the Hobby Lobby site, and inclusionary zoning.

VICE-CHAIR RICHARDSON asked if the same factors affect commercial space. Sorett replied yes, redevelopment of infill sites need to be addressed in both residential and commercial development.

Hoyt continued the presentation.

COMMISSIONER KRASS asked for clarification regarding yield on a development presented. Hoyt replied not having an exact answer, but that a yield on \$68.5 million was 5½% while yield on \$87 million was approximately 5%; yield requirements in 2019 were 5½% and in 2026 are approximately 6½% and rents would need to be 30% higher to work. Further challenges were described.

COMMISSIONER ADAIR asked how many units are in Heartwood and Hoyt replied 135 units.

Hoyt continued the presentation.

CHAIR VOISS asked what has made Redmond attractive to developers. Hoyt replied that it was not necessarily more attractive but more achievable in regard to receiving approvals. Exploring ways to incentivize affordable housing is also important, such as Bellevue with a 12 year Multi-

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Family Tax Exemption (MFTE). CHAIR VOISS asked for clarification that the issues are not only city processes, but also inclusionary programs and Hoyt replied yes.

COMMISSIONER LEE stated that housing and employment go hand in hand, employers and employees within the same community, citing Microsoft and Costco. Hoyt added transit infrastructure.

COMMISSIONER KRASS asked for clarification regarding the water table in Central Issaquah. Sorett replied that the water table at the Trailhead site is two feet below ground level. Hoyt added examples.

VICE-CHAIR RICHARDSON asked for clarification regarding whether pilings in areas with water table issues add more construction costs and Hoyt replied yes, millions of dollars and foundations must be thicker, the cost to do business.

VICE-CHAIR RICHARDSON asked how other Commissions can be educated so that work can be done holistically. Hoyt replied not having an answer, and that affordable housing overall is affordable to middle and not low incomes.

Michael Chen with MacKenzie continued the presentation.

COMMISSIONER KRASS asked if a market of more land available in Critical Areas would be created if Bellevue policy is matched, lots being put on the market, and if the action would catalyze development. Chen replied that as soon as policies are in place that allow development to occur, by default the land value will increase, incentivizing landowners to consider selling; the value increasing because of what can be built on it. COMMISSIONER KRASS asked if direct feedback has been given by landowners and Chen gave an example of the Hobby Lobby property. COMMISSIONER KRASS asked for clarification regarding how the Sears in Redmond changed to Multi-Use or Multi-Family, and Chen replied Land Use policy changed and transit infrastructure was developed. COMMISSIONER KRASS asked if residential has a higher value than offices and Hoyt replied that office buildings are sometimes being purchased, torn down, and replaced with residential, the office asset being lower than the land value, but if the policy is not in place to allow construction to occur, the land value remains low.

COMMISSIONER LEE stated that there is no single solution in the face of many policies, and that the Commissions need to calibrate policy changes for effective housing outcomes; Hoyt replied that policy needs to be positioned for the next upcycle. Sorett replied that the situation is economic at a macro level but there is a lot of policy work to be done at a local level.

Chen stated that City Public Works Department building a regional stormwater facility in Central Issaquah would be helpful in addition to policy change and gave the example of Redmond building a Stormwater Regional Facility to allow the Overlake project to proceed. Sorett stated that public and private partnership can eliminate uncertainty and time constraints through the process.

CHAIR VOISS thanked the developers, staff, and the Economic Vitality Commission and stated agreement with COMMISSIONER LEE that conversations should continue.

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4. Announcements

There were no announcements.

5. Adjournment

CHAIR VOISS adjourned the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Garza, LLC
Recording Secretary



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PLANNING POLICY COMMISSION 7:00 p.m. – Thursday, April 23, 2026

1. Call to Order

The hybrid meeting was called to order at 7:13 p.m. by CHAIR VOISS.

Commissioners Present: Chair Voiss, Vice-Chair Patterson, Commissioners Adair, Holstrom, Krass, Matthews, Millender-Irwin, Oliner, and Zakharoff

Absent:

Staff Present: Minnie Dhaliwal, CP&D Director
Amanda Jackson, Meeting Assistant
Kate Kaehny, Principal Planner
Christen Leeson, Planning Manager

CHAIR VOISS introduced new Commissioner Brett Holstrom.

2. Approval of Minutes

a) Minutes of April 9, 2026

CHAIR VOISS stated that nuance of a comment regarding a push for development on page three was not reflected.

With no changes or other comments, the Minutes were approved.

3. Public Comments (General)

- **Carl Sorett**, Avalon Bay Communities (ABC), stated that ABC recommends that there be an evaluation of the minimum private outdoor amenity space. An additional common outdoor 48 square feet for any units without private open space is the same amount that would have existed if a variance had been requested, not helping to incentivize development at this stage as well as adding cost, and that a public park across the street will be used by residents in addition to common amenity space provided.

4. Regular Business

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a) **Promoting Building Investment Code Amendments: Building Stepback and Multi-family Amenity Space Requirements in Issaquah Central (D) (00:05)**

Presented by:

Christen Leeson, Planning Manager

Leeson began the presentation with stepbacks.

VICE-CHAIR PATTERSON asked how six stories was decided on. Leeson replied the decision was based on a study which researched other cities. VICE-CHAIR PATTERSON asked if the Commissioners were okay with six stories considering canyon effects.

COMMISSIONER OLINER stated that there is nothing to prevent a developer from cantilevering two top floors, adding square footage. Leeson replied that verbiage “*all floors above*” could be included.

COMMISSIONER MATTHEWS asked how tall Atlas and Vail buildings are considering the six floor minimum and Leeson replied five-stories.

COMMISSIONER KRASS described a scenario of building materials and floors upward.

COMMISSIONER ADAIR stated that six-stories feels very tall, that four-stories may be more appropriate, and that the verbiage “*all floors above*” per the comment of COMMISSIONER OLINER should be used as a cantilevered building would not prevent a canyon effect.

CHAIR VOISS asked for an informal vote on a four story maximum before a stepback and there was consensus.

CHAIR VOISS asked if cantilevers should not be permitted.

VICE-CHAIR PATTERSON stated that the design aesthetic would be retained if within the original footprint of the lower floors.

COMMISSIONER KRASS asked for clarification regarding a minimum and Leeson replied that there is no minimum. COMMISSIONER KRASS stated that there should be a minimum.

COMMISSIONER OLINER stated that without a minimum, a stepback could be achieved by changing materials, agreed that a minimum is necessary, and that coming back out to the lower floor footprint defeats the purpose of not creating canyons; a tiered appearance is more aesthetic.

COMMISSIONER ADAIR stated that if the goal is to avoid a canyon effect a cantilever would nullify the goal, and that a minimum of five or six feet was suggested.

COMMISSIONER ZAKHAROFF stated that further hurdles should not be created regarding development.

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CHAIR VOISS asked for an informal vote on eliminating a cantilever option and the Commission agreed.

CHAIR VOISS asked for an informal vote on whether the minimum should be five feet and the Commission agreed.

COMMISSIONER HOLSTROM stated that not only aesthetics but incentivizing a building to be built should be considered.

COMMISSIONER KRASS stated agreement with COMMISSIONER HOLSTROM, that only certain portions of buildings will be affected, that buildings may be present for decades, and that some allowances counting toward other options such as outdoor space may balance out.

CHAIR VOISS stated that developers had been heard from during the joint Planning Policy Commission and Economic Vitality Commission meeting prior, and that designs and aesthetics need to balance.

COMMISSIONER MATTHEWS stated that livable space is being created and not only spaces for developers to make money.

Leeson asked if a stepback would stop at the bottom or top of the fourth floor. Dhaliwal explained different scenarios.

COMMISSIONER MATTHEWS stated having believed that the situation would be for when materials were not being changed, but that if there is a material change a stepback could occur. Leeson replied that the intent is for stepbacks regardless of construction type. Dhaliwal replied that flexibility is desired.

COMMISSIONER ADAIR asked if an option could be a stepback where material changes or alternatively for the top floor depending on height. Leeson replied that buildings six stories or higher begin by the bottom of the sixth floor and may begin as low as the bottom of floor two.

COMMISSIONER KRASS asked for clarification that stepbacks would not be required at a podium change, and Leeson replied not required but an option. COMMISSIONER KRASS stated that there will still be canyons. Dhaliwal replied that leasable space was lost for the Transit-Oriented Development project (TOD) because of stepbacks, but would be less expensive to build; the language before the Commission is to provide options and not mandates. COMMISSIONER KRASS stated that the expectation of reducing canyon effect should be set to meet the objective. Dhaliwal replied that there are multiple objectives, not only reducing canyon effect. COMMISSIONER KRASS stated that objectives and trade-offs should be identified in order of priority.

Leeson asked for clarification that objectives will need to be re-visited and CHAIR VOISS replied yes, and that there will not be many six-story buildings built.

COMMISSIONER OLINER stated that the podium design question should not be dwelled on because construction methods change constantly, and that mass timber is emerging as a cost-

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effective solution with no material changes; a six-story building stepback at the sixth floor does not address the canyon effect.

CHAIR VOISS spoke but the microphone was not on.

COMMISSIONER HOLSTROM asked if there should be a minimum stepback of two floors to avoid a top floor stepback.

COMMISSIONER MILLENDER-IRWIN stated that a concern is that creating minimums will limit developer ability.

COMMISSIONER ADAIR stated that the concerns are important but do not have the same financial impact of, for example, waterway buffers, and code is being streamlined significantly, a balance needed.

COMMISSIONER ZAKHAROFF suggested one stepback of five feet on one side, and either on the level of material change or fourth floor.

COMMISSIONER KRASS stated that the Commission needs to agree on what is being solved.

Leeson stated that the intent of code is to create a pedestrian friendly environment and to prevent a canyon effect.

CHAIR VOISS stated that developer input for Title 18 was for clarity and consistency and not specific design; developer points of view as well as from current and future residents is needed, and feedback had also been received from the community.

VICE-CHAIR PATTERSON stated that design aesthetic versus the need to make code developer friendly by reducing restrictions is a challenge.

CHAIR VOISS stated that stepbacks are probably not what may cause developers not to build.

Dhaliwal gave the example of the TOD project and stated that the canyon effect should be categorized; that since cost is going to be incurred a developer should be able to choose where the stepback will occur.

CHAIR VOISS asked if current code should be kept. Dhaliwal replied that current code does not mandate above five stories and that visuals can be included in the next packet.

COMMISSIONER OLINER stated that building in dense urban areas causes concern regarding both access to daylight and wind affecting pedestrians.

Leeson stated that the Commission has agreed to a minimum stepback, that a cantilever should not come back over, and stated that examples will be brought back for further clarification.

Leeson continued with Private and Common Amenity Space.

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COMMISSIONER MATTHEWS asked for clarification that common space is indoor or outdoor, and Leeson replied each unit must have 100 square feet of common outdoor space and the site must have 400 square feet indoor/outdoor space.

COMMISSIONER KRASS asked for clarification regarding balcony requirements for five to 20 unit buildings. Leeson replied that currently, five units are required to have 48 square feet of individual outdoor space, and the proposal is for 30% of the units only. Dhaliwal replied that flexibility is the addition. COMMISSIONER KRASS asked if the feasibility of building would change if parking needs to be included.

COMMISSIONER ZAKHAROFF stated that developers have indicated that 48 square feet is a problem and that Issaquah is still not making development easier.

COMMISSIONER ADAIR shared a spreadsheet with square feet comparisons between cities and stated that Issaquah is in the middle.

COMMISSIONER OLINER stated that the economics of building a five-unit complex is different than a larger complex, developers are dissuaded from building on small lots due to open space requirements constrained by driveways and parking, and that there are other macro-economic factors that are more important than private outdoor space; there should be a difference in how small and large projects are treated.

COMMISSIONER KRASS stated that there is an opportunity to have more housing built, not from large projects but on smaller lots, and why small projects are not being built needs to be understood. CHAIR VOISS stated that there is small development occurring, but not in Central Issaquah. Dhaliwal read from code.

COMMISSIONER MATTHEWS asked if the minimum common outdoor amenity space for residential five-plus should be reduced to 50 square feet per unit instead of 100 square feet. COMMISSIONER ZAKHAROFF stated agreement if limiting to five to 21 units.

COMMISSIONER KRASS asked if there is feasibility when not examined in isolation and that a case study of a specific project would be helpful. Leeson replied that no two properties are alike.

COMMISSIONER ADAIR asked if a percentage of building square footage should be examined instead. Leeson replied that Redmond uses 20% of the site.

COMMISSIONER OLINER stated that if the common outdoor amenity space of a six-unit development is reduced to 50%, the space will be smaller than one parking space for six units. COMMISSIONER ZAKHAROFF replied that the total would be 98 square feet, with the addition of the 48 square feet.

COMMISSIONER KAKHAROFF suggested 100 square feet outdoor amenity space per unit but either community space, a balcony, or combination. COMMISSIONER ADAIR replied that a minimum would be needed to ensure that there is some level of community space.

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COMMISSIONER HOLSTROM stated that the goal should be to streamline code and asked if the lot coverage after restraints such as impervious surface maximums of each site reveals remaining open space available. Leeson replied that in Central Issaquah the impervious surface maximum is 95%.

COMMISSIONER MATTHEWS asked that examples be brought back by staff. Dhaliwal replied hearing that more flexibility or no requirements for less than a specific unit size, and a split between common and private open space. CHAIR VOISS stated that headway is being made. Consensus was to change five plus units to nine plus units and a 30% requirement.

Leeson stated that if all requirements are complied with in 18.500, a deviation can be requested from 148 square feet, but option C would be affected; next steps, May 14, 2026 is the Public Hearing to include other clarifying amendments, Planning, Development & Environment Committee on June 2, 2026, and Council June 29, 2026.

5. Reports

a) Council Update (01:14)

Leeson stated that the city has a contract to purchase a building on Northwest Maple Street and 12th Avenue Northwest.

6. Other Business/Announcements

a) Upcoming Schedule

Leeson stated that a tour requested previously is not feasible at this time, but examples will be brought to the Commission in lieu. COMMISSIONER ADAIR suggested that maps could be emailed for self-tours.

Leeson stated that the upcoming Planning Policy Commission schedule is still being filled.

7. Adjournment

CHAIR VOISS adjourned the meeting at 8:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Garza, LLC
Recording Secretary