



PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday, January 9, 2024, at 6:00 PM

APPROVED MINUTES

- Members Present:** Chair Dan Cary
Vice Chair Jennifer Shoemaker
Commissioner Russ Low
Commissioner David Rosengard
Commissioner Charles Castner
- Members Absent:** Commissioner Ginny Carlson
City Councilor Mark Gunderson
- Staff Present:** City Planner Jacob Graichen
Associate Planner Jenny Dimsho
Community Development Admin Assistant Christina Sullivan
- Others:** Brady Preheim

CALL TO ORDER & FLAG SALUTE

TOPICS FROM THE FLOOR (Not on Public Hearing Agenda): Limited to five minutes per topic

Preheim, Brady. Preheim was called to speak. He expressed objection to Commissioner Rosengard and Commissioner Castner being on the Commission. He said they would have a hard time recruiting new individuals, because of the respect lost for having these commissioners on the board. He said he was pleased to see the vacant storefronts on the agenda.. He also discussed that he would like to see the Planning Commission work on a solution for the plaza.

CONSENT AGENDA

A. **Planning Commission Minutes Dated December 12, 2023**

Motion: Upon Vice Chair Shoemaker's motion and Commissioner Rosengard's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Draft Minutes dated December 12, 2023. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Low, Commissioner Castner; NAYS: None]

B. **Joint Planning Commission / City Council Minutes Dated December 13, 2023**

Motion: Upon Vice Chair Shoemaker's motion and Commissioner Rosengard's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Draft Minutes dated December 13, 2023. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Low, Commissioner Castner; NAYS: None]

DISCUSSION ITEMS

C. **2023 Year End Summary**

City Planner Jacob Graichen mentioned shared some of the differences between the years. He said it seemed from 2018 to 2022 there was a very busy and almost burnout year for the Planning Department and how many applications and decisions they were making. He also said there is a

significant uptick in Architectural Review which means there is activity in the Riverfront District which is good. He also said there was one Columbia County referral this year.

D. **2024 Development Code Amendments**

Graichen started the discussion with the Commission on the amendments with the idea of discussing items they could share at the City Council and Planning Commission Joint meeting.

He shared how he and Associate Planner Jenny Dimsho went to a legal workshop and there was a discussion on validity periods. He said validity periods are when a land use decision is made, and you have so long to act on the decision. If you do nothing, the validity dies. He said it varies depending on the type of decision. He said this discussion was to see if there were any adjustments needed.

Dimsho shared a table that explained the validity periods. She shared that each decision has a default period, a time extension period, and then a total validity period. She said some of the decisions can be phased. She mentioned the validity periods were all over the place in timelines and there was no reason for this. She said it makes it more complicated when trying to track the projects. She shared some different cities validity period timelines that have similar populations as ours.

Commissioner Rosengard suggested that if you were to make all the validity periods one year each and then made the time extensions available an unlimited use, there might be different total values, but at least they would all be the same amount of time from the start.

There was a discussion on making the time extensions the same amount as the original validity period for ease of use for both the Planning Department and applicants.

Graichen turned the discussion to residential development. He shared the definition of a dwelling unit and advised that the current code allows for anywhere that a single-family dwelling is allowed a duplex is allowed. He said some of the regulations associated with this set the stage for cottage clusters. Cottage cluster development is one property with multiple single-family dwellings on it. Currently the multi-family term refers to three or more units on a property, but those units must be within a building that itself has three or more units. He mentioned in the draft code text the suggestion would be to change the language to say that it did not matter if the units were detached or attached. The difference between would just be the number of units on the property. This would allow more flexibility.

Vice Chair Shoemaker asked about the regulations or suggestions on the size of the buildings that would be allowed on the property for cottage clusters. Graichen said the minimum size would be driven by the Building Code. He also mentioned all the parking requirements, yard design, and setbacks would still apply as well. The size of the structures would be based on meeting all those requirements.

The Commission agreed that cottage clusters were a great addition to the code amendments.

Graichen shared a table for the long-term residential uses by zoning district. He shared some different options on the types of units allowed in different zones.

There was a discussion on the proposed changes to the table. Graichen discussed the residential unit allowed on the same level in non-residential zone. He said in some zones it is specified whether it is allowed or not, but some zones are silent about it. He specifically mentioned the Highway Commercial zone. He said the zone currently is silent on how many residential units are allowed, but he suggested that maybe there should be a more formal regulation on this, as to avoid a lot of residence in these commercial areas. The Commission agreed that two residential units is an appropriate cap for the Highway Commercial zone.

Graichen moved the discussion to Single Room Occupancies (SROs), and he said it is now moved into a category of its own (in State law) and so they cannot deny those types of residences. An SRO is

composed of sleeping units with some shared amenity like cooking or sanitation as opposed to a dwelling units which is all inclusive in its living amenities. He said if the zone allows detached single-family dwellings, they will also have to allow an SRO with up to six units in it (by definition an SRO has at least 4 units). He did mention the statute does not require them to treat SROs the same as single family dwellings, so they could create more guidelines around them, especially around parking.

Graichen discussed building conversions that are sometimes allowed by state law for a conversion of a building that is not in an industrial zone to a residence. He said they cannot impose a Conditional Use Permit, a zone change, and there are parking requirement limitations. He said there is not much more they can do with them other than live with it. But he said they adopted a resolution in December to address the system development charge component of the law. He also mentioned there was some code around allowing affordable housing and building conversions in religious buildings. He said it was more restrictive.

There was a small discussion about using historical buildings as a building conversion for housing.

Graichen said there would be more discussion as the text progresses and the Commission would see more on the changes proposed for Code Amendments.

E. Chair and Vice Chair Selection

Vice Chair Shoemaker said she signed on to be in this role to help but did not want to be Chair. She said she travels and did not feel comfortable committing to the role of Chair. She was willing to stay in Vice Chair though if no one else wanted to.

Chair Dan Cary said he was okay with staying in the position of Chair.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Rosengard’s motion and Vice Chair Shoemaker’s second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved that Chair Dan Cary should remain Chair. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Low, Commissioner Castner; NAYS: None]

Motion: Upon Commissioner Rosengard’s motion and Commissioner Low’s second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved that Vice Chair Jennifer Shoemaker should remain Vice Chair. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Low, Commissioner Castner; NAYS: None]

PLANNING DIRECTOR DECISIONS (previously e-mailed to the Commission)

- F. Partition at 535 S Columbia River Hwy – Nikhel Chand
- G. Sign Permit at 58551 Kavanagh Ave – Deer Meadow RV Park
- H. Site Design Review (Minor) at 230/240 Strand Street – SOLARC Architecture
- I. Home Occupation at 335 S 19th Street – Amy Nevitt

There was no discussion on the Planning Director Decisions.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT ACTIVITY REPORT

- J. Planning Department Activity Report – December

There was no discussion on the Planning Department Activity Report.

PROACTIVE ITEMS

- K. Architectural Standards

There was no discussion on Architectural Standards.

- L. Vacant Storefronts

Vice Chair Shoemaker shared that she felt very optimistic about the conversation that took place at the joint meeting with the City Council. She said she was encouraged that the MainStreet Program might get involved. She said she would speak with Erin Salisbury, the president of the St Helens Mainstreet Alliance board. They were interested in helping. She also asked about forming a community committee around creating policy around the subject of vacant storefronts. She said she wanted to move forward with having an ADHOC committee. Dimsho said there would need to be some questions asked of staff and Council before they could move forward with forming it.

Graichen asked if they could discuss it at the March joint meeting, and both Vice Chair Shoemaker and Commissioner Charles Castner said they would like to see it happen as soon as possible. Graichen said if they would like to be on the City Council Agenda to discuss it beforehand, it could get the dialogue moving forward. Vice Chair Shoemaker said she would be willing to do that.

There was a discussion about having Mainstreet come to the next meeting to help do a presentation for the Council.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION ITEMS

Dimsho shared the revised site plan for the Columbia View Park project. She shared that when they went to bid, they came in over budget by \$2 million. They went back and looked at the project and removed items that were not grant funded. She said they were trying to minimize costs by not changing the riverwalk with all the structural calcs, but there may be some areas that shrink or have some flexible space for future improvements when funding is available.

Chair Cary asked about if the funding came about in the future for these other projects if there was still room for them in this revised design. Dimsho said yes, they were careful to leave space for those items without much change to the design.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Planning Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Christina Sullivan
Community Development Administrative Assistant*