

TUMWATER PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES OF HYBRID MEETING
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CONVENE: 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Chair Elizabeth Robbins and Commissioners Grace Edwards, Terry Kirkpatrick, Brian Schumacher, Meghan Sullivan, Michael Tobias, and Anthony Varela.

Excused: Commissioner Kelly Von Holtz.

Staff: Planning Manager Brad Medrud.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: There were no changes to the agenda.

**APPROVAL OF
MINUTES: JOINT
TUMWATER CITY
COUNCIL PLANNING
COMMISSION
DECEMBER 13, 2022:**

MOTION: Commissioner Schumacher moved, seconded by Commissioner Sullivan, to approve the joint meeting minutes of December 13, 2022 as published. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORTS: There were no reports.

MANAGER'S REPORT: Manager Medrud reported the City recently hired a planner for the Community Development Department. Erika Smith-Erickson is currently employed by Thurston County as an Associate Planner. Ms. Smith-Erickson is scheduled to join the City on February 16, 2023.

PUBLIC COMMENT: There were no public comments.

PRELIMINARY DOCKET FOR 2023 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS: Manager Medrud reported the request is to forward a recommendation to the City Council for adoption of the Preliminary Docket for 2023 Comprehensive Plan Amendments following the Commission's review of the docket.

This amendment cycle is limited to only public projects based on the City Council's approval of a resolution to defer all private applications until the larger Comprehensive Plan Update is completed. However, the City has some amendments to consider prior to completion of the major update of the Comprehensive Plan.

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The 2023 preliminary docket includes two City-sponsored Comprehensive Plan text amendments:

1. Adoption of the 2024 – 2029 Six-Year Capital Facilities Plan Update
2. Adoption of the Old Highway 99 Corridor Plan (plan focuses only on transportation elements and not land use elements)

Commissioner Schumacher asked whether any of the areas along the Old Highway 99 corridor are served by transit. Manager Medrud said the area is currently not served by transit, but the issue would be addressed during the Comprehensive Plan Update process. Staff and Intercity Transit staff met last fall and discussed some triggers necessary to add transit service along the Old Highway 99 corridor and the Littlerock Road corridor. Both the City and Intercity Transit are interested in pursuing next steps, such as documenting the existence of necessary transit ridership to support an extension of bus service.

Commissioner Tobias asked about the possibility of extending public transit from Tenino to Tumwater. Manager Medrud explained that when Intercity Transit was established, the service boundary included all of Thurston County; however, a subsequent action reduced the service boundary to the four largest cities in the county. Intercity Transit could not provide service to the City of Tenino without adjustments to its service boundary.

Chair Robbins suggested documenting within the Old Highway 99 Corridor Study projected growth along the corridor in relationship to the entire City and how that growth might affect the City's investment choices compared to other locations in the City. She suggested exploring the total value or cost of any recommended improvements and how the improvements are funded. While the plan may not directly address land use, the plan supports land use.

Manager Medrud responded that the corridor is a major growth area for the City with new single-family housing developments constructed and/or planned along Old Highway 99. Commercial and industrial areas are also experiencing development along the corridor, as well as increased traffic from residents living in the county traveling to the City. The corridor is recognized as a priority development area. The Commission is scheduled to receive a briefing on the Old Highway 99 Corridor Study results from Transportation Manager Mary Heather Ames.

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MOTION:

Commissioner Schumacher moved, seconded by Commissioner Tobias, to recommend the City Council consider the proposed Preliminary Docket for 2023 Comprehensive Plan Amendments as presented. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.

**TREE AND
VEGETATION
PRESERVATION
REGULATION
UPDATE:**

Manager Medrud referred to the Commission's joint meetings with the Tree Board on the Tree Vegetation Preservation ordinance and the Street Tree Plan. He invited Commissioners to provide feedback or additional questions on the materials presented during the joint meetings.

Commissioner Tobias inquired about the definition of an old growth tree and whether the City has any existing old growth trees in the City. Manager Medrud advised that no old growth forests or trees exist in the City. Many trees and urban forests consist primarily of second growth trees from the 1850s. Most of the City's urban forests are third and fourth growth trees.

Commissioner Varela asked about any accounting for the removal of trees for installation of solar panels or green renewable energy systems. Manager Medrud said staff is currently reviewing the issue. The current code includes language addressing some situations, such as conflicts between solar panels and vegetation. It is likely the issue will need further examination as part of the ordinance update.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick commented on the lack of participation by local nursery representatives on any of the advisory panels. Expending time and efforts on updating the ordinance without consulting nursery purveyors may create some future problems. Manager Medrud agreed that it is a valid concern. The issue surrounds the potential of requiring larger trees as replacement trees as it speaks to the cost and availability. Current regulations call for smaller replacement trees. A larger replacement tree would be substantially higher in cost.

Manager Medrud reported on the planned presentation to the General Government Committee scheduled in February to review the stakeholder process of three meetings with residents, property owners, local businesses, one internal meeting with City staff, the survey, and the gap analysis and associated feedback. The committee has indicated an interest in the status of the update process.

Another joint meeting of the Commission and the Tree Board is scheduled prior to receiving the draft ordinance. Staff will share information on the provisions and the direction of the ordinance based on specific circumstances unique to the City. Some adjustments in language will be necessary as the City still has undeveloped land that could be

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subdivided. One example is the City of Burien's ordinance which can accommodate more trees on lots as residential lots are typically larger. While it is important to include trees on new residential lots, the objective is not overplanting trees because over time, too many trees could impact and damage infrastructure.

Chair Robbins asked whether the Tree Board would be more involved in developing draft language. Manager Medrud explained that the review and update is intended as a joint process with the Commission and the Tree Board; however, the Board's focus is adding more trees while the Commission's focus is consideration of all other development factors, zoning, and considering whether any changes can be applied through regulations. The Planning Commission is also responsible for conducting the public hearing on the ordinance.

Commissioner Tobias asked about any carbon impacts the City considers when comparing the impact of light industrial development versus multifamily residential development. One area is the Littlerock Road Subarea with many forested areas in the southern end of the Littlerock Road corridor. Manager Medrud said the Littlerock Road Subarea Plan applies to the area from the Trosper Road/Littlerock Road interchange south to Tumwater Boulevard. In terms of carbon impacts caused by different types of development, land coverage of buildings and other infrastructure on a site are the main factors considered. Multifamily and light industrial uses are similar in terms of site impacts. However, when comparing to single family versus light industrial, single family is less intensive but might appear to be the same when first developed because residential sites are often cleared of existing vegetation and then replanted. Open space requirements are similar in all zoning districts.

Manager Medrud responded to comments on scheduling more joint meetings with the Council to review issues. Staff explores opportunities to schedule joint meetings by reviewing space availability on the meeting calendar, which can be challenging. The General Government Committee also serves to represent the Council. Staff plans to discuss the option of increasing joint meetings during a meeting with the General Government Committee.

STREET TREE PLAN UPDATE:

Manager Medrud referred to a joint worksession with the Tree Board on February 8, 2023 to discuss the gap analysis completed on street trees and to introduce some proposed code changes. He encouraged Commissioners to submit any questions after reviewing the material on the gap analysis or any other issues that should be reviewed during the joint worksession.

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Commissioner Kirkpatrick said an issue that was discussed and deferred for an in-depth discussion was the responsibility of street trees after the trees are planted because the initial planting of trees and follow-up care often contribute to whether a tree survives. Manager Medrud advised that based on discussions with the City Attorney, maintenance and care of street trees are the responsibility of the adjacent property owner. Whenever possible the City can provide assistance dependent upon the situation. The current ordinance applies the responsibility to the adjacent property owner to care for street trees. Within new subdivisions in the City with a homeowners association (HOA), HOAs are typically responsible for maintenance of stormwater facilities, open space, and street trees within the subdivision. Within commercial properties, similar to an HOA, commercial uses likely have maintenance and upkeep agreements to maintain vegetation as part of the development. In terms of support by the City, some options include considering language as to what the City could provide in terms of education and support to ensure maintenance and upkeep is completed.

Commissioner Tobias inquired about any existing incentives or regulations that encourage property owners and developers to plant native species or restore populations of Northwest native vegetation. Manager Medrud explained that all urban forestry updates will incorporate climate change within the processes to account for hotter summers and longer and wetter winters. The City's water usage increases substantially during summer months. The issue is the City's ongoing ability to accommodate high usage because it will be limited in the future. Xeriscaping is likely a consideration to explore or eliminating the need for irrigation. The issue of native trees in terms of the changing climate is more difficult because many Northwest tree species are experiencing stress because of changing weather patterns. The update process is exploring opportunities to expand the palette of options by expanding the list of species rather than narrowing the list.

Chair Robbins commented on the importance of the functions of the forest versus single street trees because forested areas provide habitat for wildlife, sequester carbon, provide shading, and shield hazard trees. Manager Medrud responded that the conversations will likely be difficult in terms of what the City is capable or not capable of to protect trees within an urban environment. He supports more opportunities for preserving tree tracts in larger areas that can expand the forest and provide habitat value rather than preserving individual trees.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick questioned whether the City has ever considered affording a residential developer the option of preserving a grove of trees in lieu of planting street trees. Manager Medrud cited some

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similar examples in the City Burien and City of Lakewood's recently updated tree codes. He offered to send copies to the Commission.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick questioned code restrictions on the caliper size of replacement trees. He suggested the language should include a minimum but not a maximum because it constricts the size of replacement trees. Manager Medrud pointed out that most developers would plant minimum-sized trees rather than larger trees.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick suggested the Tree Fund should not be limited to purchasing replacement trees for public properties. The account should be available, when appropriate, for replacement trees on private properties. Manager Medrud advised that the Tree Fund would be another topic of review in addition to other issues surrounding the Tree Fund. For example, the Climate Mitigation Plan emphasizes preservation of forests. In support of the plan and in addition to considering other opportunities within the City to plant trees using the Tree Fund, other opportunities could be explored for preservation or adding to forested lands in the county that serve important purposes and are much more likely to survive providing habitat and climate mitigation benefits. The Legislature is considering a bill for the formation of tree banks. The primary driver of a tree bank is to offer an alternative to developers to pay the bank to meet tree retention requirements for the provision of building affordable housing. However, the proposal would not benefit climate or urban forestry when a site is allowed to be cleared for development by enabling the developer to pay into a tree bank. Staff is currently tracking the bill and offering proposed changes.

Chair Robbins said she is supportive of measures or options where the City could consider innovative approaches to solve issues. Her concern is the destruction of tree groves. She emphasized the importance of considering alternatives to accommodate new development to increase overall tree and vegetation cover.

Discussion ensued on the difficulty of competing interests and ways to accommodate all interests. If sufficient provisions are offered or opportunities are inherent in the code, the City would likely achieve its goals. The same situation applies to tree preservation by considering an assortment of options.

Commissioner Varela asked whether the code enables developers to propose incentives in exchange for a benefit that is reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Manager Medrud said the City has been fortunate, as part of the stakeholder process is the involvement of the Master Builders Association and other environmental groups and development interests. Input from Master Builders has focused on ways for incentivizing and

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helping to achieve a positive outcome through the development process by affording some flexibility throughout the process.

**NEXT MEETING
DATE:**

A joint meeting is scheduled with the Tree Board on February 14, 2023 at 7 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT:

Commissioner Tobias moved, seconded by Commissioner Schumacher, to adjourn the meeting at 7:56 p.m. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.

Prepared by Puget Sound Meeting Services, psmsoly@earthlink.net