

ASTORIA PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

Astoria City Hall
February 5, 2019

CALL TO ORDER:

Vice President Moore called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present: Vice President Daryl Moore, Jennifer Cameron-Lattek, Patrick Corcoran, Cindy Price, Chris Womack, and Brookley Henri.

Commissioners Excused: President Sean Fitzpatrick

Staff Present: City Manager Brett Estes, Planner Nancy Ferber, and Consultant Matt Hastie of Angelo Planning Group. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Vice President Moore called for approval of the January 8, 2019 minutes.

Commissioner Price moved that the Astoria Planning Commission approve the January 8, 2019 minutes as presented; seconded by Commissioner Cameron-Lattek. Motion passed unanimously.

WORK SESSION:

Riverfront Vision – Urban Core/”Urban Core Code Amendments: Summary of Draft Recommendations (Task 4)” “Continued from January 29, 2019 meeting”

Vice President Moore confirmed for Staff and the audience that the work session would be conducted in the same format as the last work session, when comments from the public and the Commission were taken after each section of the recommended amendments was presented.

Matt Hastie, Angelo Planning Group, gave a PowerPoint presentation on the recommended Code amendments related to standards for on land development, allowed uses, and recommended zone changes. During the presentation, he and Staff answered clarifying questions by Commissioners, and posed questions and requested feedback from the public and the Commission as follows:

Public Comments on Heights, Set Backs, and Step Backs:

Glen Boring, 1 3rd Street #203, Astoria, confirmed with Staff that the setbacks and step backs would only apply to on land development, but on both sides of the Riverwalk. He was confident the pressure would always be for development. It would be interesting to take a poll to find out what the Commission remembered former Governor Tom McCall for. He doubted Mr. McCall would be remembered for development. He is remembered for the role he played in keeping the Oregon coast with views that are accessible to the public and not over developed. We tend not to remember the people who preserve those kinds of things. He encouraged the Commission to think seriously about the unintended consequences of decisions that are made early on. He heard a comment at one meeting that we want to have learned from the hotel project. He was curious as to what was really learned from the hotel project. He had only been a resident for one year and, as he looked at what was taking place, he found the developer did not have to convince the Design Review Committee or Historic Landmarks Commission. All the developer needed to do what get three out of five City Councilors and part of that had to do with the parsing of words. He encouraged the Commission to be very careful about the language put in and the things left out of the codes. He has heard people say no one would develop out over the river because it costs too much money. If that is the case, it would be wonderful. But someone will come along and find the money to do it. If steps have not been taken, this early in the game, anyone could come in. He hoped the Commission would think about what development would do to the river trail and the ambiance of the area if all the development takes place. He understood the need to do this in chunks, but asked the Commission to put this in the perspective of the whole picture.

Elizabeth Menetrey, 3849 Grand Ave. Astoria, said she hated to see a height limit of 45 feet and requested a 35 feet height limit. She did not understand why 45 feet was still being considered and asked why it was necessary.

The Commission was looking at a lot of details but needed to consider what they would mean to the city overall. She heard there might be a huge Hilton on the south slope and that Marriott/Hollander wanted to build another hotel. If 45 feet is allowed, condominiums will be built. In 10 or 20 years, people will look at what was built and wonder how it happened. The Commission has the chance now and the power to shape what the citizens will be looking at in 10 years. She wants what is best for the city and appreciated the Commission being conservative because projects are being considered for the East Mooring Basin even though the Civic Greenway is supposed to have less development. And the Bridge Vista was not supposed to have huge 45-foot hotels.

John Orr, 175 South Place, Astoria, said he was late to get involved and do research on this. This is a visioning process and Astoria is a small town that is going through growing pains. Looking at resources and challenges from a visionary perspective, it was difficult for him to understand how Astoria can realistically grow. The amount of developable land for housing and the availability of good family wage jobs are in short supply. An influx of hotels will exacerbate the affordable housing problem for workers, just as it has all over the country. There are big underlying infrastructure issues related to resources. Astoria has tried in the past to have a resource to take traffic out of the downtown area. If 45-foot structures are built, Astoria will need more parking, there will be more people on the road, and the need for water and sewer will increase. The resources for upgrading the water, sewer, and road systems do not exist. The tax base is low and is not growing. Astoria does not have big tax-based projects or business developments. If things are built without a clear vision of the effects they will have on the quality of life here, a great disservice will be done to the people who live here and who will come here. He understood the infrastructure was already strained. When the Commission approves a 45-foot height limit, the Commission is assuming there will be a lot more people here. In the news, he had heard about two or three new hotels and there might be more to come. If the City has not properly provided for infrastructure in the planning process, the marginal costs of capital investments when infrastructure capacities are exceeded are great and cannot be made up by the businesses that come in. Then, the City budget will have a problem. The City can try to pass a levy. The Department of Transportation (ODOT) can try to finance a bypass or road improvements. However, that is extremely grim. The City needs to proceed very cautiously here. If there is no strong case made that Astoria will have the infrastructure and resources to support new growth, then the plan allowing structures with intense development cannot go forward. He heard there were not enough parking spaces for one of the hotels. That is unfathomable. If Astoria did not have infrastructure problems, his last point would not be so concerning, but he believed it was indicative of the problem.

Pamela Alegria, 1264 Grand Avenue, Astoria, said she did not want the Commission to think there were only a handful of people who wanted a 35-foot height limit instead of 45 feet. Oftentimes, the City discusses scale as it pertains to one street, but the entire city should be considered. The river is the biggest resource. People are not building hotels to look at a warehouse. The hotels are looking at the river. If the river is obscured, the City has lost why people come to Astoria and then no more hotels will be necessary. The river will be obscured for tourists walking along the Riverwalk and for locals. Astoria is losing its local community rapidly. She was okay with 35 feet.

Commission Discussion on Heights, Set Backs, and Step Backs

All of the Commissioners except Vice President Moore supported a 35-foot height limit and the option to require setbacks and step backs along the river trail and on the north/south streets. Vice President Moore believed 45 feet was appropriate for the Urban Core where dense development was expected. An extra story could incentivize multifamily development downtown. He recommended hotels be prohibited instead of reducing height to try to prevent a particular use. He also believed the step backs were unnecessary but was fine with the setbacks.

Public Comments on Overwater Uses in Aquatic Zones

Lori Hendrickson, 3514 Harrison, Astoria, said there were already so many medical professionals over the water. She asked if they were the ones being discussed.

City Manager Estes explained the Commission was discussing whether medical and professional offices should be allowed if a building was redeveloped or a new building was developed. He confirmed existing uses would be grandfathered in. One provision in the Vision Plan will ensure zoning included uses that supported but did not compete with downtown. Some downtown merchants and the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association (ADHDA) have said they do not feel it is necessary to prohibit medical and professional offices.

Pamela Alegria, 1264 Grand Avenue, Astoria, said when locating medical facilities along the river, parking will be an issue. People are not healthy when they go to a dentist or a doctor, so they need transportation. The view for the staff rather than convenience for locals is important. Affordable housing over the river sounds nice, but in reality housing built as affordable becomes luxury apartments. She has seen this in various communities. Something would need to be in place that keeps rents affordable.

Sara Meyer, 555 Rivington, Astoria, asked if Commissioner Corcoran had done any processing of what kind of substructures have to be put into the river to support anything when a tsunami or an earthquake hits. She also asked if the City had looked at the future as Astoria sinks.

Elizabeth Menetrey, 3849 Grand Avenue, Astoria, said she strongly supported prohibiting residential overwater development. She could not imagine anyone spending the money for affordable housing. It is very expensive to build over the water. She could see residential development becoming condominiums, so she did not believe it should be allowed even conditionally.

John Orr, 175 South Place, Astoria, said he was concerned about the concept of relevance that Vice President Moore expressed to his previous comment. This is a Planning Commission. The operative word is planning. Planning anticipates problems. One problem with approval of development is what will happen if there is a 50-year projected tsunami. There are videos showing the debris washing up. That seems relevant when allowing development. Height development, density, and infrastructure will crumble if a predicted catastrophic event happens. There is a train of logic involved in order to see the relevance, but he hoped the Commission saw the relevance. He believed his comments were relevant. He had grave concerns about building over the water. In order to have a beautiful city, people should be able to see the water, but he understood this was the urban zone.

Commission Discussion on Overwater Uses in Aquatic Zones

The Commission generally agreed with the recommendations for permitted and prohibited uses. Commissioner Price clarified she did not support any new development over the water. Vice President Moore, Commissioners Cameron-Lattek, Womack, and Price supported allowing medical and professional offices. Commissioner Henri only supported medical and professional offices, the redevelopment of existing buildings into hotels and motels, and indoor family entertainment as conditional uses. Commissioners discussed how the recommendations could impact economic development and the housing shortage. Commissioners Price and Cameron-Lattek believed affordable housing should be allowed, but only for local residents. Vice President Moore was not opposed to hotels and motels but was opposed to residential uses.

Staff explained the difficulties involved in trying to limit housing to residents. The current transient lodging ordinance only applies to residential zones and the Urban Core did not include any residential zones. The City cannot prohibit second homes, but could prohibit short-term rentals in residential uses.

All Commissioners agreed that if the existing condominium building needed to be renovated or rebuilt, it should be allowed to remain housing. They also agreed that navigation aids should be added to the list of permitted uses.

Public Comments on Proposed Rezoning

Elizabeth Menetrey, 3849 Grand Avenue, Astoria, said parks should be allowed.

Commission Discussion on Proposed Rezoning

All of the Commissioners confirmed they agreed with the proposed rezoning as recommended by Staff.

Public Comments on Uses in Commercial Zones

Lori Hendrickson, 3514 Harrison, Astoria, said it sounded like there was an enormous loop hole for new condominiums.

Vice President Moore clarified that the Commission was discussing the condominium building currently on the water and whether it would be allowed to be reconstructed if damaged.

Ms. Hendrickson said it sounded like no one could prohibit condominiums.

Mr. Hastie explained that a condominium is a type of residential ownership, not a type of building or a type of business. Residential uses can be prohibited, but types of ownership cannot be regulated.

City Manager Estes added that condominiums and apartments are defined as types of multifamily housing. Apartments are rented and condominiums are owned, but they are both multifamily structures. The City cannot require that buildings be rentals only. Any building with three or more units is multifamily housing. There is no differentiation between renter occupied and owner occupied units.

Ms. Hendrickson said the word condominium has luxury connotations.

City Manager Estes noted that luxury apartments exist as well. Many times, construction costs dictate the rent or purchase price. He confirmed for Ms. Hendrickson that there was no special Oregon law protecting condominiums.

John Orr, 175 South Place, Astoria, said one of the prohibited uses was shoreline stabilization. He wanted to know who was against shoreline stabilization and why.

Mr. Hastie explained that one effect of rezoning would be that some uses would need to be added back to the new zone. Staff and the Commissioners all agreed that shoreline stabilization should be allowed in the rezoned area.

Chris Farrar, 3023 Harrison, Astoria, asked when parking would be considered. It is one thing to have a commercial operation along the waterfront but allowing multifamily housing above should be required to have a certain amount of parking for each residential unit. The way the streets come to an end at the waterfront makes parking especially challenging.

Vice President Moore explained that when a use is conditional, the Planning Commission can use parking as criteria for approval.

Elizabeth Menetrey, 3849 Grand Avenue, Astoria, asked if medical buildings over the water would have to reuse established buildings.

Vice President Moore explained that the Commission recommended medical uses be allowed in existing buildings and in new development only in non-limitation areas over the water.

Commission Discussion on Uses in Commercial Zones

The Commissioners agreed with Staff recommendations for allowed and prohibited uses in the Commercial Zones, the only exception being that small boat building and repair should be allowed as a condition use. Vice President Moore and Commissioner Henri believed boat and marine equipment sales should also be allowed as a conditional use. Commissioner Henri added that transportation services should be allowed as well. Commissioner Cameron-Lattek suggested the language about parking requirements for hotels be clarified.

Vice President Moore called for a recess at 7:55 pm. The meeting reconvened at 8:01 pm.

Public Comments on Architectural and Landscaping Design Standards and Guidelines

Pamela Alegria, 1264 Grand Avenue, Astoria, understood why the City had guidelines and standards, but she did not believe guidelines worked. She believed many developers choose not to follow the City's guidelines, so guidelines were not an effective way to accomplish what the City wanted. She was not sure if the City's definitions were legal and did not believe they should be tested in court. She recommended the City provide standards with options instead of designating guidelines. She did not like the word encourage. Developers want to cut costs. The standards should reflect how the Commission wants the town to look.

Mr. Hastie explained that standards exist in all cases. The Code provides a combination of standards and guidelines and the guidelines are on top of the standards. Developers do not get to choose one or the other.

Ms. Alegria said she did not understand how the design review process worked.

City Manager Estes explained that the Design Review Committee holds public hearings.

Unidentified Speaker [2:17:45] said the riparian areas were not real riparian areas because salamanders and frogs would not be protected. She also wanted information about using chemicals in landscaping.

City Manager Estes clarified that the riparian areas were the areas along the waterfront. Standards for that area require native plants and plants that are appropriate along the waterfront. He added that the City does not regulate the use of chemicals on private property.

Commission Discussion on Architectural and Landscaping Design Standards and Guidelines

All of the Commissioners agreed with Staff's recommended architecture and landscaping design standards and guidelines. However, Commissioner Henri was concerned about the feasibility of the street tree requirements and suggested the City update its street tree list with species that would accommodate this Code language. Commissioner Cameron-Latteck also recommended the word "discourage" be replaced with "prohibit".

Staff reviewed next steps and noted the City Council hearing had not yet been scheduled.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS/COMMISSIONERS:

There were none.

STAFF UPDATES/STATUS REPORTS:

Meeting Schedule

- February 6, 2019 – 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm TGM Uniontown Reborn Public Meeting at the Holiday Inn Express
- February 26, 2019 – 6:30 pm APC Meeting

City Manager Estes noted that at the Uniontown Reborn meeting, interactive stations would open at 4:30 pm and the presentation with an open question and answer session would begin at 5:00 pm. Topics would include transportation issues, pedestrian crossing enhancements, connectivity through the area, land use issues, design review provisions, and rezoning.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

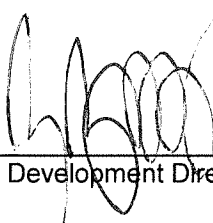
There were none.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:33 pm.

APPROVED:

[at the 3/26/2019 APC meeting with no changes]



Community Development Director