

## **ASTORIA PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING**

Astoria City Hall  
October 22, 2013

### CALL TO ORDER:

President Innes called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m.

### ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present: President McLaren Innes, Vice-President Mark Cary, David Pearson, Al Tollefson, Kera Huber, and Zetty Nemowill

Commissioners Excused: Thor Norgaard

Staff Present: Community Development Director / Assistant City Manager Brett Estes, Planner Rosemary Johnson, and City Attorney Blair Henningsgaard. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Item 3(a): September 24, 2013

President Innes asked for approval of the minutes of the September 24, 2013 meeting. Commissioner Nemlowill moved to approve the minutes as noted; seconded by Commissioner Cary. Motion passed unanimously.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS/COMMISSIONERS: No reports.

### NEW BUSINESS

Director Estes stated that from 2007 through 2009, the City of Astoria completed the Riverfront Vision Plan, which addresses land use, environmental, and transportation issues along the Columbia River waterfront from Smith Point to the Alderbrook neighborhood. The riverfront has been divided into four areas to ease references and implementation and also because planning each area requires a unique approach. The Riverfront Vision Plan was approved by City Council in 2009 and since then has been used to receive grants that have funded the extension of the River Trail. The Riverfront Vision Plan will be incorporated into the Transportation System Plan (TSP) currently in process. Development Code and Comprehensive Plan language must be developed in order to implement the Riverfront Vision Plan. In 2012, the City applied for a Transportation Growth Management Program (TGM) grant to implement two of the plan areas. City Council established the goal of beginning implementation of the Riverfront Vision Plan through Code and Comprehensive Plan language adoption, and recommended that the Civic Greenway Plan Area be the first plan area to be implemented. The Civic Greenway area extends east from the Maritime Museum to 39<sup>th</sup> Street. This Code review will be conducted as part of an intergovernmental agreement between the State of Oregon and the City of Astoria. The City was awarded the grant, which provides Astoria with an allocation of consultant time, rather than funding. Matt Hastie with Angelo Planning Group has been working with the City on the Riverfront Vision Plan since the plan started to be developed. After Code and Comprehensive Plan language is developed for the Civic Greenway Plan area, language will be developed for the Bridge Vista Plan Area, which extends from Smith Point, through the Port to about 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. Conditions must be met, including special Planning Commission meetings. He briefly explained the process of developing Code and Comprehensive Plan language in Astoria.

Item 5(a): Work Session on Riverfront Vision Plan Implementation – Development of Code and Comprehensive Plan Language for the Civic Greenway Plan Area.

Matt Hastie, Angelo Planning Group, presented his memorandum on the Code Evaluation for the Civic Greenway Area via PowerPoint, noting his presentation would provide the Commission a cursory look at the proposal and that opportunity for a more detailed discussion would be provided in future meetings. He explained that land use and Code related recommendations in the Riverfront Vision Plan were used to identify potential approaches, preliminary recommendations and discussion questions associated with key topics noted on page 2. The memorandum also includes initial feedback received from the State and City Staff about the



recommendations. The Planning Commission was invited to provide feedback to assist Staff and the consultants in drafting some potential amendments to the Development Code which would be reviewed in upcoming meetings.

Key discussion topics were presented with feedback from the Commission and responses from Staff and Mr. Hastie as follows:

- **Preserving Views Over-Water with a “Blueway” Zone** – Protect views from the bank of the river and the far shore by limiting over-water development. Limits uses to primarily water dependent and associated uses. Staff confirmed that building any of the proposed uses is feasible. Property owners in the area have expressed some interest in developing an overwater marina with a small bait and snack shop.
  - Allowing such development makes sense but size limitations could be prohibitive to a good project in the Blueway Zone. How would size limitations come into play?
    - Staff noted that height, mass or scale of the structure or amount of frontage developed over the water could all be important. The Riverfront Vision Plan discussed having such uses, but Staff sought the Commission’s opinion about the appropriate scale.
  - Reading that height would be limited on the bank where the river water meets the Riverwalk was a relief. Comprehending the full interplay of linear exposure, size and height was difficult.
  - Getting feedback from property owners was requested.
  - The Blueway Zone includes a combination of publicly and privately owned lands. The Commission agreed the zone should be applied to the entire area to receive feedback.
- **Access to Water and Open Space** – Preserve visual and physical access to the water both on land and over water through requirements and incentives. What should trigger the requirements?
  - The Riverfront Vision Plan recommended the Blueway Zone primarily for the Civic Greenway Plan Area.
  - The Riverfront Vision Plan could be adopted as an overlay zone to keep it from getting lost in different areas of the Development Code.
  - Incentives should only be provided for existing structures or development, not for new construction.
  - Generalizing for an entire area is difficult, but easier on a case by case basis, so it is too early to make a recommendation.
- **Preservation of Views** – Preserving river views from various locations: walking along the shore, from a street or pathway traveling towards the river, and from the hill where the water can be seen over buildings. The Riverfront Vision Plan only addresses land from the shoreline to the highway. Height, landscaping, setbacks and step backs all affect view corridors.
  - President Innes and Commissioners Tollefson and Nemlowill liked Staff’s height recommendation of a maximum base height of 28 feet with up to 45 feet possible with a variance.
  - After visiting several locations to actually see the view corridors of the river, Staff suggested 50 feet wide was adequate for a good view corridor. There are pros and cons to having zero or minimal setbacks along the right-of-way, so a good mix of development and view corridor requirements should be considered, as well as the benefits and trade-offs to pedestrians, for example.
  - A building right on the property line is fine if a 50 foot right-of-way exists.
  - Any recommendation by the Commission must be defensible; knowing the basis for the requirements is important.
  - The Commission would be provided visual examples of both adequate and inadequate rights-of-way throughout the planning area to help the Commissioners visualize what view corridors may be appropriate for Astoria. Staff would also see how rights-of-way are less than 50 feet as the issue could come up in other areas of the Riverfront Vision Plan.
- **Design Standards or Review** – developing architectural design requirements or review guidelines to ensure compatibility with historical or existing architecture in the area. Planner Johnson briefly described how design requirements are reviewed by the Astoria Design Review Committee.
  - While using the design review requirements from the Gateway Overlay Zone would be the easiest approach, other options could include developing an alternate set of design requirements for commercial and mixed-use buildings and review options for residential uses.
    - While a design review process could be used for residential uses, a set of clear and objective standards for residential development is also needed. These specific standards do not require any discretion to determine if the standards are being met, such as requiring front porches, or a certain percentage of windows on the front façade, etc. Clear and objective standards are required because residential uses must be able to be implemented through an administrative review process, rather than coming before a board or commission.



- The Commission could provide the option of a design review process to allow the applicant more flexibility to do something different in their project. Design review cannot be the only path for the approval of a residential use.
- If the Commission wanted something different than what is in an existing overlay zone, specific design types or design elements could be identified that must be incorporated into the design of future buildings in the area.
- Although not discussed in the Riverfront Vision Plan, having a specific theme can enable the City to be more prescriptive. Not having a specific theme can be challenging when trying to reflect, potentially, a variety of different elements.
- Another route is to identify four or five design types, as far as specific materials, architectural details, etc., that reflect the different types of desired designs/architectural elements for the area.
- A synopsis and examples of the Gateway Overlay Zone design would be presented at the next meeting to familiarize the Commission with its requirements.
- **Residential Zone Change and Development Standards** – Consider rezoning three parcels between Mill Pond and Safeway from commercial to residential to help satisfy the City's shortage of residential land and housing.
  - If the Civic Greenway is developed, the City's shops would be relocated. The former landfill site, where the sports complex is being constructed, is being considered for relocation. The infrastructure is being established for a new shop site, but no plans have been put in place as to when the relocation would occur.
  - Zoning that encourages cluster and lower cost housing should be implemented.
  - The necessity of the rezoning was questioned as lower cost housing may be difficult because housing in the area is expensive. The proposed housing will be too expensive for those who work in Astoria.
    - During the Riverfront Vision Plan process, some community members advocated for small, cluster-type housing in the area. City Council has always believed a higher and better use should be in that area, rather than storing pipes and impounded cars along the riverfront.
    - The Housing Needs Analysis showed the City has a residential housing deficit and though employment lands were tight, there is no deficit.
    - The overall deficit is in R-1 housing; but R-3 housing, smaller single-family attached units, is also needed. R-3 does not require a big area. With the new zone, cluster housing could meet the single family requirement on smaller lots in the area. Not all of the residential deficit will be addressed on the riverfront.
    - The Riverfront Vision Plan is a starting point having recommended that housing be allowed in the area. Now, how housing should be done, what forms of housing make sense, and how Code language can be crafted to allow the housing desired, must be decided.
  - A true civic greenway needs more than just commercial uses within it, so the rezoning is an interesting idea.
  - More details about the types of housing, what it looks like, and comparisons of what the current and new zoning would allow will be presented at the next meeting.
- **Landscaping Requirements** – Restoring the river bank by planting native plants and improving the appearance of both the riverside and landside of the River Trail.
  - Modifying existing standards in Chapter/Article 4, Columbia River Estuary and Shoreline Regional Standards, to address specific plant types, height and density made sense.
  - Landscape standards could potentially be included in a waterfront overlay zone, but the Civic Greenway Area may have different requirements than other areas along the riverfront. Using a hybrid approach, with the standards in the Code chapters as well as referenced in the base zones was possible.
    - The pros and cons of using an overlay zone and how it could be implemented would be discussed at the next meeting.
  - Buffering and enhancing the land side of the trail should be considered, but not along the entire riverfront due to the different character of each section. Including these standards in Chapter/Article 2 made sense because Chapter 4 only addresses land 50 feet from the shoreline.
  - Landscape requirements should be triggered not only by new development, but also by exterior expansions and renovations to existing uses based on percentage thresholds regarding the improvements' value compared to the existing structure's value. Such thresholds are already being utilized in the Code, and will be a better option than using a dollar amount threshold.
- Determining whether some recommendations for the Civic Greenway Area are appropriate for other riverfront areas is difficult to judge at this point, but it is important to consider as Staff begins writing Code methods. The standards may just need to be applied in a different way.



- Having more information about which standards could apply to the entire waterfront and which should specifically apply to the Civic Greenway would be helpful.
- Discussing what could apply to the entire area would help the public better understand what is intended and for Staff to effect compliance. The entire riverfront should be considered so that appropriate recommendations can be more easily implemented in several areas.

Mr. Hastie invited the Commissioners to pass any further comments to Director Estes, adding that preliminary Code recommendations would be drafted and presented to the Planning Commission through a series of upcoming work sessions where more detail and specific issues would be discussed.

Item 5(b):           Receipt of Public Comment on Riverfront Vision Plan Implementation – Development of Code and Comprehensive Plan Language for the Civic Greenway Plan Area.

Sarah Meyer, 555 Rivington, Astoria said she attended a tsunami and earthquake preparedness seminar about a month ago. She was concerned that nothing has been mentioned about the houses or development along the riverfront being inundated with water.

Juanita Price stated she and her family came to Astoria in 1964 and asked how many people knew about the Murase Plan. Astoria had turned its back on the river and Mr. Murase developed a plan to discover the river. His first project was the 6<sup>th</sup> Street river viewing platform, which Ms. Price wrote about in *Oregon Coast Magazine*. The Riverfront Vision Plan, as presented at this meeting, cuts off the vision of the river. The four-mile Riverwalk was developed in increments and took a long time to complete. Many of the City's current projects are cutting off the view of the river.

Carol Scott, 3930 Abbey Lane, Astoria, agreed with Ms. Price, adding she has only owned property in Astoria for 1½ years. The word development scares her to death; it has many negative connotations. With regard to landscaping, she noted that as she was walking along the area near the yoga studio and Safeway, she noticed an area where someone has been caring for feral cats. The area is nicely done and the houses are nice, but the area is not entirely clean, which is okay with her. She does not want the area to be beautified and purified. She likes the rough side and rustic past of Astoria and does not want that character taken away. She did not want Astoria to become another tourist town.

Robert Stricklin, 90603 Highway 101, Warrenton, stated that the idea of a vision to the layperson usually entails some type of imagery. He recalled a meeting at the middle school when a landscaper and architect were involved in the consulting process. The public brought in many pictures of their vision for the riverfront. He was unsure if those photos were thrown away or if Mr. Hastie still had the hundreds of graphics. A vision is not simply a code writing process, it has a graphic element. It would be great if part of Oregon Planning Goal 1, Citizen Involvement, included some of the graphic material that provided a real sense of vision of Astoria's waterfront.

- There are ways of developing housing and design for anyone in the city to live in, with low income residents living two blocks away from the super wealthy. This may be a fresh idea for Clatsop County, but it is not a fresh idea to have people of mixed incomes live together.
- The areas indicated in blue on Figure 9 are owned by the people of the State of Oregon and is administered by the Department of State Lands, according the public policy of the adjoining jurisdiction. If Astoria has a clear policy about the plan, Astoria's policy will be superior to any first right of refusal to lease from the Department of State Lands. It is important for Astoria to figure out what it wants as public policy and have it reviewed by City Attorney Henningsgaard and the Department of State Lands, as they will not approve anything contrary to a clearly created public policy.
- He noted the choice of canopy versus lawn with regard to view corridors is a false choice; more than two design options are possible.
- The City of Astoria has been through a visioning process due to a grant from the Ford Foundation. He is proud of this because St. Paul, Boston Chinatown, and Hollywood have also received grants from the Ford Foundation, which were meant to empower these cities; however empowerment at that level was not really Astoria's style.
- He believed it was important to figure out what the city wants to see happen with housing by being honest and continuing the public discussion. The public process has been tacked on to the tail end of a series of meetings and it is not too late to bring back others who were part of the process early on so the Commission had a real vision of what people would like to see, not just a vision of a code.



Director Estes clarified that the Ford Foundation cancelled the entire program due to the economic downturn in 2008; the City of Astoria did not turn its back on the project. The City wanted to continue to participate.

Vicki Baker, 3015 Harrison, Astoria, believes the City has done a wonderful job preserving access to the river with the Riverwalk. She would like to see the City emphasize the whole view of the river as much as possible in all parts of the Riverfront Vision Plan. She wants limited development on the river side and encouraged development on the land side of the Riverwalk. All citizens benefit from having access to and a view of the river. Tourists love walking on the Riverwalk and looking at the river, which should be a priority for all of the zones in the plan.

Jim Stoffer, 5107 Cedar Street, Astoria, said that lighting has not been discussed. He has noticed a lot of careless lighting along the water, which seems to destroy the beautiful darkness that is available. Contemporary thought suggests that urban areas benefit from lighting that is more sophisticated and he has noticed some in recent development projects in Astoria. He wanted to make sure that night lighting is included in the conversation.

Shel Cantor, 1189 Jerome, Astoria, recalled a Riverfront Visioning meeting at the Maritime Museum that had between 50 and 100 attendees. At the end of the presentation, the overwhelming majority of public comments were negative. Those at the meeting were told that comments written on the comment cards would be taken into consideration as clearly there was a need to make some revisions. At the next meeting, which was an open house, he asked what changes had been made to the plan since the last presentation. He recalled being told that no changes had been made because the plan had not been adequately communicated and that was the problem. Mr. Cantor understood the Riverfront Vision Plan has been approved by City Council but no open election has been held for the city to approve the plan. He asked if any other attempts have been made to determine whether the general public approves of the plan. Director Estes could not recall the situation Mr. Cantor described, but stated that all of the comments received at all of the meetings were sent to the citizen advisory committee, who provided direction on whether or not to make changes to the plan.

Mr. Canter asked if the majority of citizens in Astoria have approved the plan, or is the City moving forward without citizen approval. Director Estes responded that individuals who testified before the Planning Commission and City Council said that while issues and concerns still existed, they supported the plan as they believed the process was fair. He noted that some people who made that public comment were at tonight's meeting and had made those statements. Public hearings were conducted and, upon hearing testimony that the process was fair, the Planning Commission and City Council voted to approve the Riverfront Vision Plan in 2009.

Elizabeth Menetrey, 3849 Grand Avenue, Astoria, stated she was on the Riverfront Vision Committee. Community and Committee input led her to believe that no overwater development other than docks was wanted within the Civic Greenway Zone. The consensus was to prohibit any development that would obscure any view, so she was surprised to hear discussion about overwater development. The only overwater development discussed by the Committee was to take place in the Urban Core Area, which is closer to downtown. She is deeply opposed to any overwater development, but if any should occur, it should be in the Urban Core Area. No overwater development should be allowed in the Civic Greenway Area. Everyone is aware of the world-class spectacular view that Astoria has of the River. People come to see the view and the City needs to do everything in its power to preserve the views. Allowing any overwater development that will block the views would be distressing and would affect future generations. She reiterated that the Committee did not seriously consider overwater development in the Civic Greenway Area, with the exception of low-lying structures like docks.

Director Estes believed the Commission's comments earlier tonight reflected the desire to have a Blueway Zone, which was a term created by the earlier Riverfront Vision citizen advisory committee. Elizabeth recalled that at the last Riverfront Vision Plan meeting, City Manager Benoit mentioned that the City was considering an area with no overwater development. She understood the citizen committee was an advisory committee with no authority to direct Staff, but overwater development was a big issue. Most of the people she spoke with at the open meetings did not want to see any more development of large buildings, like the condominiums on the east end. People were very concerned about building height. It is nice to see the hills and feel the space when walking along the riverfront.

Commissioner Nemlowill cited the proposed uses that would be allowed in the Blueway Zone, which included restaurants secondary in size to the water dependent use. Elizabeth recalled discussion about allowing boat



ramps, bait shops, docks and snack shops, but not restaurants. The area was to be a very nice, view protected area.

Patrick Wingard, 42015 Hagan Drive, Astoria, North Coast Field Representative for the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD), stated he also worked on the Buildable Lands Inventory with Mr. Hastie. He complimented the City for completing the visioning process as well as the implementation process. He is always impressed and proud to be in Astoria because of how much the City cares about the riverfront and city. In his professional judgment and personal opinion, he believed Astoria has a good Vision Plan, capable Staff, and a good consultant. He knew Astoria would find the right balance and complimented and congratulated the City for breaking the plan into four segments. Many communities have gone through similar visioning processes, but did not have such an open and public process during implementation. He encouraged the City to continue moving forward with the plan and utilize Staff. As part of the project advisory team, he has offered to assist, enabling Astoria to have the support of the DLCD and Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). He thanked Astoria for making him feel like a part of the community that he lives and works in.

Director Estes confirmed that the memorandum discussed during the meeting is available online on the Community Development Department page on the City's website. He offered to email the memo to anyone who wanted a copy.

Elizabeth Menetrey added in response to Commissioner Nemlowill's questions about the need for more commercial space, that in the early stages of the Murase Plan with CH2M Hill, Astoria had commercial space for 20,000. To her knowledge, an adequate commercial footprint exists. Commissioner Nemlowill clarified she was referring to the more recent Buildable Lands Inventory. Questions about residential needs led her to ask if there was also a shortage of commercial land.

Item 5(c): Upcoming Planning Commission Meeting Schedule – Special meetings are needed to meet the terms of the State grant for the Riverfront Vision Plan implementation and for other cases. The meeting schedule is:

Tuesday, November 26, 2013  
Tuesday, December 3, 2013  
Tuesday, January 7, 2014  
Tuesday, January 28, 2014

President Innes noted copies of the meeting schedule are available.

Director Estes clarified public hearings are scheduled for the November 26 meeting, so the next work session to discuss the Riverfront Vision Plan would be on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. No regular December meeting will be held because it falls on Christmas Eve. Riverfront Vision Plan work sessions are scheduled for both of the January 2014 meetings, in addition to any regular public hearings.

#### ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:51 p.m.

#### **ATTEST:**

  
Secretary

#### **APPROVED:**

  
Community Development Director /  
Assistant City Manager