

ASTORIA PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

Astoria City Hall
October 23, 2018

CALL TO ORDER:

President Fitzpatrick called the meeting to order at 6:39 pm.

ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present: President Sean Fitzpatrick, Jennifer Cameron-Lattek, Daryl Moore, Jan Mitchell, Joan Herman, and Brookley Henri.

Commissioners Excused: Vice President Kent Easom

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Item 3(a): January 9, 2018

Commissioner Moore noted he could not recall making the comments attributed to him in the first paragraph of Page 2. However, it was almost a year ago and he did not object to having the comments attributed to him.

Commissioner Mitchell noted the following corrections:

- Page 3, second paragraph, third sentence – John Berdes name was misspelled as Burtus.
- Page 4, first and second bullet points – NATO should be corrected to Naito in Portland.

Item 3(b): August 7, 2018

President Fitzpatrick confirmed there were no changes.

Item 3(c): August 28, 2018

President Fitzpatrick confirmed there were no changes.

Commissioner Moore moved that the Astoria Planning Commission approve the minutes of January 9, 2018 as corrected, and approve the minutes of August 7, 2018 and August 28, 2018 as presented; seconded by Commissioner Herman. Motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

President Fitzpatrick explained the procedures governing the conduct of public hearings to the audience and advised that handouts of the substantive review criteria were available from Staff.

ITEM 4(a):

PE18-01 Permit Extension Request (PE18-01) on Conditional Use Permit (CU03-04) by Elisabeth Nelson to locate a school of music as a Temporary Use in an existing building at 1103 Grand Avenue.

President Fitzpatrick asked if anyone objected to the jurisdiction of the Planning Commission to hear this matter at this time. There were no objections. He asked if any member of the Planning Commission had any conflicts of interest or ex parte contacts to declare.

Commissioner Moore declared that his child takes classes at the Conservatory of Music, but that would not affect his ability to remain unbiased.

President Fitzpatrick declared that he was a member of the church where the music Conservatory is located and it is close to his home. However, he believed he could remain impartial.

President Fitzpatrick asked Staff to present the Staff report.

Planner Ferber reviewed the written Staff report. No correspondence had been received and Staff recommended approval of the request.

President Fitzpatrick opened the public hearing and called for a presentation by the Applicant.

Elisabeth Nelson, 596 17th Street, Astoria, said she owned and operated the Conservatory of Music, which has been a tenant of the First Presbyterian Church for quite some time. The Conservatory gets along with all its neighbors.

President Fitzpatrick called for any testimony in favor of the application.

Pastor Bill Van Nostran, 92027 Glasgow Drive, Astoria, said he was in favor of the extension of the conditional use permit. The congregation continues to enjoy the partnership and wonderful music that emanates from the space. The Conservatory provides an excellent opportunity for children and adults.

Kris Haefeker, 687 12th Street, Astoria, said he was a next door neighbor of the church and he loved having the school there.

President Fitzpatrick called for any testimony impartial or opposed to the application. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing and called for Commission discussion and deliberation.

Commissioner Mitchell moved that the Astoria Planning Commission adopt the Findings and Conclusions contained in the Staff report and approve Permit Extension Request PE18-01 on Conditional Use Permit CU03-04 by Elisabeth Nelson; seconded by Commissioner Henri. Motion passed unanimously.

President Fitzpatrick read the rules of appeal into the record.

WORK SESSION:

Item 5(a): Riverfront Vision Urban Core

City Manager Estes provided an overview of the two previous meetings on the Urban Core area of the Riverfront Vision Plan. Staff provided Code amendments necessary to implement the Urban Core based on input received at those two meetings. The Planning Commission needed to provide Staff with direction on further refinements to the Code language.

Matt Hastie, Angelo Planning Group, 921 SW Washington St. Portland, explained the focus of this work session would be on the size and placement of structures over the water and on land, and ways to preserve and maintain views of and access to the river within the Urban Core Area. The next work session would focus on uses and the third work session would focus on architectural design standards.

- He gave a PowerPoint presentation, which included a summary of public comments and concerns, a review of the zoning in the Urban Core Area, guidance in the Riverfront Vision Plan, and recommended options for over-the-water building size standards. During the presentation, he and Planner Johnson answered clarifying questions about existing zoning and proposed Code amendments.

The Planning Commission discussed the Code amendments and Staff and consultants responded with the following key comments:

- Commissioner Mitchell was concerned about the high cost of building parking structures and the lack of available land for expansion. She was also concerned that a parking district was mentioned throughout the plan. Additionally, the condominiums were second homes for a lot of people and the community is struggling to find work force housing. She noted that much had changed in the nine years since the Riverfront Vision Plan was adopted and questioned how the City should go about promoting commercial development while prioritizing affordable housing. The City needs to find out what existing over-water businesses want to do and how the City can help them thrive. This is a small community and she did not want the vitality of the community to change.
 - Staff confirmed that appropriate permitted uses would be discussed at the next meeting.

- The proposed limitation areas received a lot of support from the public at the town hall meeting. However, the Comprehensive Plan did not seem to support the limitation areas in the Urban Core Area. Many of the recent comments indicate that the public does not want any development, but the Urban Core Area was intended to be densely developed, as suggested by the Riverfront Vision Plan. The Commission either needs to implement the Riverfront Vision Plan as adopted or amend the City's policies.
- Commissioner Moore recalled City Manager Estes saying in a previous meeting that the only way to amend the Riverfront Vision Plan was through Comprehensive Plan amendments and that the Commission was tasked with interpreting the Plan as it currently existed. The recommendations in the Plan are general so there was flexibility in interpreting the Plan. The Commission must be careful about using the public discussion to help interpret the Plan, but the public discussion cannot be used to create a new plan.
- Staff explained that although the Riverfront Vision Plan was adopted by City Council to be implemented through the Comprehensive Plan, the Riverfront Vision Plan is not part of the Comprehensive Plan. If the Planning Commission believes the Riverfront Vision Plan should be amended, the Commission would need to forward a recommendation to City Council. The Commission must interpret the plan and decide on appropriate Code language that implements the plan.
- The recommended Code amendments being proposed for the Urban Core were based on the initial interpretation of the Riverfront Vision Plan. The limitation areas were proposed because the Riverfront Vision Plan states the Urban Core should "create intimate open spaces and gathering places, and use setbacks, step backs, and other measures to ensure an open feel and continued visual access to the river." The Commission must consider whether a limitation area achieves that goal to use "other measures" to ensure an open feel.
- Commissioner Moore said the Commission needed to be careful not to create language that conflicted with the Comprehensive Plan when making zoning changes. Planner Johnson confirmed that Staff would have to reference the Comprehensive Plan. Code amendments require Staff reports that show the language does not conflict with the Comprehensive Plan.
- Staff answered questions and provided details about the Code amendment process and the Planning Commission's role in that process. They confirmed that Staff must prepare findings that demonstrate how the Code amendments align with the Comprehensive Plan.
- Commissioner Cameron-Lattek believed the Riverfront Vision Plan provided conflicting guidelines, but also offered opportunities to make compromises. The limitation areas would preserve views downtown that people are very attached to right now. With limitation areas over the water, the on land areas could have more density.

President Fitzpatrick called for a recess at 7:45 pm. The meeting reconvened at 7:52 pm.

Mr. Hastie continued with his PowerPoint presentation, reviewing options for preserving views of and access to the river, recommendations for on-land development standards, and next steps. He and Staff answered clarifying questions about existing zoning and recommended Code changes. During the presentation, Commissioners made the following key comments:

- Commissioners believed Staff's recommended design options for requiring access to the river were appropriate. However, Commissioner Moore preferred that physical access to the river extend beyond the buildings so people could have sweeping views.
- Commissioner Moore did not believe step backs were compatible with Astoria's character. Additionally, if height is restricted to 28 feet, step backs are not necessary.
 - Commissioner Henri believed the step backs fit well with Astoria and that a 70-foot view corridor would be too small and would feel crowded.

President Fitzpatrick called for public comments.

Michael Miller, 1997 SE Front Street, Astoria, said a dock that wrapped around over water buildings would be expensive to build, so the number of new buildings would be limited. He did not understand why making development more expensive was a problem for the city. He believed people would only go out over the water to linger, not to take a run or ride a bike. Requiring a wrap around dock would add a lot of visual value to the city and make it more enjoyable than just allowing people to walk to the end of a pier and walk back.

Sarah Lu Heath, 854 Glasgow Avenue, Astoria, Executive Director, Astoria Downtown Historic District Association (ADHDA), thanked the Planning Commission and Staff for taking on such complicated work. She

confirmed with Staff that the only development allowed in the limitation zones would be a dock. She asked for clarification about the existing requirement for access hours to piers.

Planner Johnson explained that park areas, like the street ends, are limited to certain hours of operation. The City does not implement this requirement but can if there are problems. Private dock areas that are open to the public must be accessible during normal business hours.

Ms. Heath asked if standards for new development could be contingent on existing structures on adjacent properties. She was concerned that a tunnel effect would result from a row of tall buildings next to each other.

Planner Johnson believed the proposed Code amendments would prevent a tunnel effect through step backs, view corridors, and lot coverage limits for over water development. Planner Ferber added that many existing buildings would be considered non-conforming once the Code was amended. Planner Johnson confirmed that Staff would consider the impact of the recommended Code amendments on light sheds.

Ms. Heath asked if the 70-foot view corridor meant that building walls had to be 70 feet wide.

Planner Johnson explained that currently, most of the north/south streets downtown have a 60-foot right of way, measured from property line to property line. Most of the buildings are built up to those property lines, which creates a 60-foot view corridor. Staff has recommended that new buildings be at least five feet back from the property line to create a 70-foot view corridor. Most of the Urban Core area is already built out, but there is room for some new development between 2nd and 7th Streets.

Roger Rocka, 362 Duane Street, Astoria, said the Comprehensive Plan takes primacy, but many people believe zoning is the prime factor. Zoning cannot make things more permissive than the Comprehensive Plan, but it can make things less permissive. That opens opportunities for the Commission to implement the Riverfront Vision Plan over and above what the Comprehensive Plan specifies. He understood major cities across the country have identified parks as a major economic driver and many are spending a great deal of money to develop parks as a way of improving economies. Astoria has a central park, the riverfront. The City should be careful not to give things away too cheaply along the river because doing so would hurt economic development down the road. Development around parks becomes increasingly valuable.

Elisabeth Menetrey, 3849 Grand Avenue, Astoria, said she strongly advocated for limitation zones. The city needs areas where nothing is built over the bank. The Bridge Vista Area is supposed to have sweeping views, but it allows for 45-foot and taller buildings on the shore and 35-foot and taller buildings over the water. The Urban Core was supposed to be the big developed area, but the Bridge Vista allows for a huge amount of development and height. Therefore, the Urban Core needs to be more conservative.

Jim Alegria, 1264 Grand Avenue, Astoria, thanked the Commission for allowing public comments. He asked what the deadline was for submitting comments.

City Manager Estes explained there was no deadline yet. Once the public hearing is scheduled, a deadline would be set. During this iterative process, all comments received would be submitted to the Planning Commission.

Jim Alegria asked if the presentation would be available to the public online.

City Manager Estes stated the presentation was published on the Community Development page of the City's website.

Will Johnson, 509 Kensington Avenue, Astoria, said his perspective was from the water. He is a boat captain and is out on the water every week. He asked Staff and the Planning Commission to consider those who work and travel on the water. People want to enjoy the view from the water as well. The Bridge Vista allows for big buildings. Astoria is a beautiful town and he wanted to keep it that way. The further north a building is, the narrower the view. That should be considered along with building heights. Everyone needs an opportunity to see the river as much as possible without restrictions.

Sara Jane Bardy, 1661 Irving Avenue, Astoria, said she was in favor of limiting buildings over the water to bank height because there is still plenty of opportunity in the Urban Core to develop on land. There are a lot of empty lots and underused buildings. She believed much of the community felt the same way. People who are worried about building heights and view obstructions do not want progress or development. However, there is plenty of room for development. A single-story building between Pier 11 and Pier 10 would fill the open space and that is

one of the nicest views in town. The view corridors sound really sad. She believed development should be focused further into town where a 45-foot building would not cost any views.

Lisa, 509 Kensington Avenue, Astoria, said she liked the limits for over water development. Astoria could be unique instead of going with the status quo of giant motels along the water. She wanted Astoria to be kept quaint and small. She also wanted buildings limited to 28-feet high and open areas. People do not come to Astoria to see the back of a hotel. The City would be hurting itself if it allowed big buildings.

Commissioner Henri noted that no one advocated for big buildings with narrow view corridors.

Mr. Hastie confirmed he had received good direction from the Commission about how to move forward. However, there was no consensus on the proposed limitation areas. The next meeting would focus on uses and zoning and any of the topics discussed during this work session can be revisited at that time.

City Manager Estes introduced Lisa Phipps, who was present in the audience. He noted that Ms. Phipps was Astoria's new Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) representative. When Astoria developed the Riverfront Vision Plan, DLCD provided grant funds. DLCD also granted funds to implement some areas of the Riverfront Vision Plan. While the City is paying for the implantation of the Urban Core Area, DLCD is still involved to ensure Astoria's Code language complies with State planning goals. Staff will notify DLCD of the public hearing on the Urban Core Area.

Commissioner Herman stated she was in favor of the limitation areas.

Commissioner Mitchell said this work session was encouraging. This task is not easy, but the Commission was achieving some consensus. She agreed there was value in having limitations on some of the over water structures.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS/COMMISSIONERS:

President Fitzpatrick asked for an update on training for Commissioners.

City Manager Estes said Staff was working with Ms. Phipps on Commissioner training. Other planning commissions in the county are also interested in training, so they were considering a joint training session conducted by DLCD. He would provide more details when they are available.

Ms. Phipps confirmed she would prefer to have the training within the next six weeks. She was also working on ongoing refresher courses.

STAFF UPDATES/STATUS REPORTS:

Item 7(a): Save the Date – Next APC meeting scheduled for Tuesday, November 27, 2018

Planner Ferber displayed a list of upcoming meetings on the screen. The meetings would also be available on the City's website.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

There were none.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:49 pm.

APPROVED:

at the APC 11/27/2018 meeting / no changes

Community Development Director