

ASTORIA PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

Astoria City Hall

December 17, 2014

CALL TO ORDER:

President Nemlowill called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present: President Zetty Nemlowill, Kent Easom, Peter Gimre, David Pearson, and Sean Fitzpatrick

Commissioners Excused: McLaren Innes, One Vacancy

Staff and Others Present: City Manager Brett Estes, Planner Rosemary Johnson, and Consultant Matt Hastie, Angelo Planning Group. The meeting is recorded and transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

ITEM 3(a): November 25, 2014 Work Session

President Nemlowill asked for approval of the minutes of the November 25, 2014 work session. Commissioner Gimre moved that the Astoria Planning Commission approve the minutes as presented; seconded by Commissioner Easom. Motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

President Nemlowill 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):

CU03-04 Permit Extension for Conditional Use CU03-04 by Elisabeth Nelson to request a one-year extension for a temporary use, to August 26, 2015, to operate the Astoria Conservatory of Music in the existing church structure at 1103 Grand Avenue in the R-3, High Density Residential zone.

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

Commissioner Fitzpatrick declared that he and Ms. Nelson were friends; he is a member of the First Presbyterian Church, and is a past member of the session. He said City Attorney Henningsgaard had determined that he should recuse himself. He consulted on a real estate transaction that involved Presbytery of the Cascades, which resulted in him being appointed as an elder of Presbytery of the Cascades. This is considered a conflict of interest. He stepped down from the dais.

President Nemlowill declared that her daughter took music classes with Ms. Nelson. However, she has no conflict of interest and would still be voting.

Commissioner Gimre declared that he was a member of First Presbyterian Church and a past session member. However, he has not been actively involved with the church for several years. He believed he could make an objective decision.

President Nemlowill asked Staff to present the Staff report.

Planner Johnson reviewed the written Staff report. No correspondence had been received and Staff recommended approval of the request with the conditions listed in the Staff report.

Commissioner Easom asked why this use was still temporary after so many years. Planner Johnson explained that a temporary use permits uses not allowed within a zone for one year, only if the use is deemed appropriate for the location and makes use of an underutilized building. The Planning Commission can deny the permit any time if the use does not meet criteria. City Code allows temporary use permits to be renewed annually, pending compliance with all codes. This use would not otherwise be allowed, and you cannot get a variance from a use.

President Nemlowill said each year, very few people renew temporary use permits. She believed it made sense to give Staff the ability to approve these permits administratively. The Planning Commission could still review renewals for which complaints had been received or a change in use or ownership had been requested. She suggested the City create a process for administrative approval of temporary use permits.

City Manager Estes explained he had asked Planner Johnson to find codes that need to be updated with minor housekeeping type changes. A code amendment could implement President Nemlowill's suggestion and Planner Johnson would add it to the updates.

President Nemlowill opened the public hearing and called for a presentation by the Applicant. There was none. She called for any testimony in favor of, impartial to, or opposed to the application. Hearing none, she called for closing comments of Staff. There were none. She closed the public hearing and confirmed there was no Commission discussion or deliberation.

Commissioner Easom moved that the Astoria Planning Commission adopt the Findings and Conclusions contained in the Staff report and approve Permit Extension for Conditional Use CU03-04 by Elisabeth Nelson, with conditions; seconded by Commissioner Pearson. Motion passed unanimously.

President Nemlowill read the rules of appeal into the record.

Commissioner Fitzpatrick returned to the dais.

ITEM 4(b):

CU14-14 Conditional Use CU14-14 by Michelle Green to continue use of the existing drive-through coffee shop as a temporary use for one year at 230 37th Street in the S-1, Marine Industrial Shorelands zone.

President Nemlowill asked if anyone objected to the jurisdiction of the Planning Commission to hear this matter at this time. There were no objections. She asked if any member of the Planning Commission had any conflicts of interest or ex parte contacts to declare. Hearing none, she asked Staff to present the Staff report.

Planner Johnson reviewed the written Staff report. No correspondence had been received and Staff recommended approval of the request with the conditions listed in the Staff report.

President Nemlowill opened the public hearing and called for a presentation by the Applicant. There was none. She called for any testimony in favor of, impartial to, or opposed to the application. Hearing none, she closed the public hearing and called for Commission discussion and deliberation.

Commissioner Gimre said the Applicant was the fifth owner of the business since 2003 and he hoped she could do something different from the previous owners.

Commissioner Gimre moved that the Astoria Planning Commission adopt the Findings and Conclusions contained in the Staff report and approve Conditional Use CU14-14 by Michelle Green, with conditions; seconded by Commissioner Easom. Motion passed unanimously.

President Nemlowill read the rules of appeal into the record.

ADJOURNMENT TO WORK SESSION:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:45 pm to convene the Work Session.

ITEM 6(a): Riverfront Vision Plan – Bridge Vista Area

Matt Hastie, Angelo Planning Group, gave a presentation on recommended code amendments necessary to implement design guidelines within the Bridge Vista Area, as noted in the memorandum included in the agenda packet. During the presentation, he and Staff responded to questions and comments from the Planning Commission as follows:

- The Commission and Staff discussed the possibility of a facade improvement loan or grant program for the Astor-West Urban Renewal District, which would require the implementation of design guidelines. Staff noted that they have already developed suggested code language for the program but have not approved or implemented the guidelines yet. Past, current, and future projects within the district were discussed. The facade improvement program would require a property owner to complete certain steps in order to qualify and would include a cap on the maximum funding a property owner could receive. While this type of program is common throughout the State, it would be new to Astoria. It would be up to the Development Commission to decide if the program would offer loans, grants, or both.
 - President Nemlowill believed including both loans and grants in a facade improvement program would be best. Design guidelines for the Urban Renewal District are unprecedented. She asked if design guidelines would need to be discussed for the Astor-East Urban Renewal District as well. Staff said cash flow in the Astor-East District would be a challenge because the majority of the properties are owned by non-profit and public entities that are not taxable. The Astor-East District has existed longer and has already utilized available funds. However, design guidelines for the Astor-East District could be considered by the Development Commission.
- Building Style and Form: Mid-century slipcovers, which have been recommended for removal, could be considered historic depending on the period of the structure and the date of installation. This would be reviewed and decided on a case-by-case basis. Staff explained how the Design Review Committee (DRC) and the Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) were appointed by the Mayor and explained their authority and jurisdiction as they apply to design guidelines.
 - President Nemlowill preferred alternative opportunities for incentives for existing structures to come into compliance with the design guidelines, rather than a trigger of investment, which she believed could be a deterrent to new construction or redevelopment. Staff said incentives have not been discussed beyond the Urban Renewal Program. Most communities do not usually implement such incentives when adopting design guidelines. However, incentives could be discussed. A parking reduction incentive has been discussed and included in the recommendations. Parking requirements can make building expansions more difficult or impossible when the site is too small to accommodate off-street parking requirements. Height and density incentives could be considered, but Mr. Hastie said he would not recommend those incentives for this area.
- Roof Forms and Materials: Staff believed false mansard should be discouraged as a flat roof form on commercial buildings because it was not used in Astoria until the 1960s or 1970s and would not protect the original historic integrity of a building.
 - Commissioners Easom, Fitzpatrick, and Gimre preferred tighter restrictions on roofing materials and colors on commercial buildings.
- Doors and Windows: Commissioner Easom and President Nemlowill believed doors on commercial and industrial buildings should be compatible with the type of business. Commissioner Easom was concerned that recommended window guidelines for industrial buildings could create construction hardships that would discourage industrial uses in the area. He did not mind solid walls, but suggested requiring a mural to add interest. Allowing flexibility in the industrial zone is important.
 - President Nemlowill agreed with Commissioner Easom that flexibility should be allowed and the windows should be compatible with the business. While some existing buildings without windows have historic ties and create value to the community, the architecture does not fit in with the rest of the area. There are some nice murals in Astoria, but too many could take away from the authentic feel of the City.
 - Commissioner Fitzpatrick supported clerestory in industrial buildings because natural light would be allowed inside and the building would have a better aesthetic exterior.
 - The Commission and Staff discussed design features of buildings in Astoria and agreed it would be appropriate to implement different standards for industrial and commercial buildings.

- Signs: Staff explained that monument signs were not considered appropriate for the pedestrian-oriented area because they can be up to 10 feet tall. The Planning Commission could allow monument signs and limit their size. However, most monument signs are scaled so that drivers can see them easily as they pass by in a car. Commissioners and Staff discussed typical uses for monuments signs and possible limits that could be implemented to ensure the signs looked appropriate in the area. Staff noted that way finding, highway, road, directional, and interpretive signs generally placed in rights-of-ways are exempt from sign regulations in the code. However, signs placed on private properties behind the sidewalk would have to comply with sign regulations.
- Setbacks: Commissioner Easom believed the recommended maximum setbacks were inappropriate for the north side of the River Trail. The Plan requires the encouragement of industrial uses in this area and the recommended setbacks would make it difficult for businesses to create access.
- Landscaping: Staff explained the process they used to determine which trees should be recommended for landscaping standards. The list of recommended species was finalized after the Planning Commission approved the Civic Greenway Area, so Staff planned to forward the list to the Commissioners for review.
 - President Nemlowill supported pedestrian amenities, like benches, being counted towards landscaping requirements, as was done in the Civic Greenway Area. Such an incentive would encourage companies to think about how the outside of their buildings would be used by the public.
- Off-Street Parking: Commissioner Fitzpatrick agreed with the recommendation to reduce off-street parking requirements. Commissioner Easom was concerned that the reduction in requirements could create parking issues. Staff explained that their recommendations were based on existing uses and buildings. Currently vacant buildings in the area have not been able to redevelop because the buildings encompass the entire lot and cannot provide parking. Staff explained the differences in off-street parking requirements between the Bridge Vista Area and Downtown which does not require off-street parking. The Planning Commission must decide if off-street parking requirements should be reduced for the entire Bridge Vista Area or just in the pedestrian-oriented portion of the area.

Mr. Hastie said a town hall meeting had been scheduled for January 6, 2015 at the Cannery Pier Hotel, to publicly share and receive feedback on work session discussions about the Bridge Vista Area. The meeting would be held in the evening, but the exact time was yet to be determined. He and Staff are updating their recommendations to reflect Planning Commission feedback in preparation for the meeting. The meeting will be publicized through public service announcements, media releases, and notifications to property owners in the area, emails, and flyers. Standards and guidelines, updated to reflect feedback received at the town hall meeting, would be presented to the Planning Commission at their January 27, 2015 meeting.

Planner Johnson stated for the record that the Planning Commission had letters from Russ Farmer, Anne Meyers, Mike and Marion Soderberg, and George Hague. The letters included comments based on the draft recommendations currently available.

President Nemlowill called for a recess at 7:56 pm and reconvened the work session at 8:02 pm.

City Manager Estes stated that during the recess, he was informed the town hall meeting might be relocated.

President Nemlowill opened the work session for public comments.

Drew Herzig, 628 Klaskanine Avenue, Astoria, said the term pedestrian-oriented zone had not yet been defined and he believed decisions were being made between meetings that were shaping the zone. At the last meeting, the Planning Commission was told the zone would be anything the Commission wanted to make it. However, at this meeting, the zone was being referred to as a benchmark for decisions and he did not understand this.

President Nemlowill understood the pedestrian-oriented zone to be a geographical area.

City Manager Estes reminded that at the last meeting, a possible area for the zone was identified. He explained that in this area, the buildings are already built out to the sidewalk and have more of an urban feel similar to Downtown. The Planning Commission could establish guidelines for this area that would require buildings to be of a scale and design that would be friendly and inviting to pedestrians. Staff will be better prepared to explain the concept of the pedestrian-oriented zone at the town hall meeting.

President Nemlowill closed the work session to public comments and called for the Commission to give Staff and Mr. Hastie feedback and direction.

Window Glazing Standards

Mr. Hastie understood that the Commission supported less window glazing standards be applied to industrial uses even within a pedestrian-oriented zone. Staff explained that more glazing in a pedestrian-oriented zone was important because buildings without windows were not inviting to pedestrians. Windows open the building up to the public space on the street. Tinting on windows has also been addressed in the recommendations because dark windows can also be uninviting to the public.

Commissioners Fitzpatrick and Pearson agreed with the recommended standards. President Nemlowill agreed the standards should be considered for the proposed pedestrian-oriented zone, even if the new zone is not implemented.

Siding and Wall Treatments

Planner Johnson listed some specific examples of materials that Staff believed should be discouraged or prohibited such as corrugated metal, false stone veneer, etc. Commissioner Easom noted that some of the buildings were historic and he believed corrugated metal should be allowed on all buildings along the south side of the River Trail. In an industrial area, even if the building were a commercial building, the corrugated metal would be appropriate. Commissioner Gimre believed other metal materials should be defined because some metal materials are not corrugated.

The Commission and Staff discussed buildings in Astoria that had metal siding and considered regulating the color of metal materials. The Commission agreed that buildings facing West Marine Drive should not be allowed to use metal materials. Staff said they would research the use of other metal materials.

The Commission and Staff discussed the pros and cons of regulating colors. A specific color may seem appropriate to one person and not to another, making the regulation of specific colors subjective. Additionally, being too specific about which colors are allowed could lead to a monochromatic look. Staff recommended that neon, fluorescent, bright, and primary colors be discouraged or prohibited. The Commission discussed issues created by the use of inappropriate colors on other buildings in Astoria. Mr. Hastie said he would prepare some alternative recommendations for regulating colors. Commissioner Easom believed colors should be regulated. However, Commissioner Gimre did not believe it was appropriate for the Planning Commission to play a role in part of the design process. Even the Design Review Committee does not design the building with the Applicant. Staff noted that most other communities do not regulate colors, and the communities that do say it is a nightmare because colors are so subjective and easily changed. Color has been defined by the Supreme Court as a form of freedom of speech. President Nemlowill believed that color can change the look and character of a building, but also agreed that colors were too subjective to be regulated. City Manager Estes said Staff would work on code language that would require some uniformity. The Commission agreed that specific colors should not be regulated.

Signs

The Commission agreed pole-mounted signs should be prohibited and monument signs should be regulated to their historic nature and/or height, at least in the geographical area where the pedestrian-oriented zone has been proposed.

Landscaping

Commissioner Pearson was concerned about the maintenance of trees. Trees can outgrow their space, but the public tends to complain when trees are trimmed. In the fall, foliage that has fallen from the trees clogs up the sewer system. He was concerned that City may not have the ability to maintain more trees when there are already issues maintaining the existing trees.

Mr. Hastie agreed that the City should have a process in place for maintaining trees. However, street trees have a lot of value because they can do more to improve the look of a street than anything else can. Commissioner Pearson believed this was true only as long as the trees can be maintained.

City Manager Estes noted that much of the landscaping in this area would be on private property, so the property owners would be responsible for maintenance. However, fall foliage falling into the street would still be an issue for the City.

Off-Street Parking

The Commission agreed with Staff's recommendations to reduce the off-street parking requirements in some circumstances.

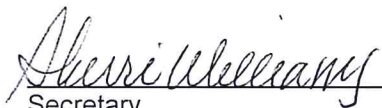
NOT ON THE AGENDA

President Nemlowill noted that this was the last Planning Commission meeting for Planner Johnson, Commissioner Gimre, and herself. Planner Johnson said she would continue to work on the Riverfront Vision Plan and certain code amendments, so she would still be attending some meetings in the future. Commissioner Gimre said his time on the Planning Commission has been very rewarding. President Nemlowill said it has been a pleasure to serve the public and she felt lucky to have worked with such a thoughtful Commission. She looked forward to seeing the Commissioners at City Council meetings. Even though Commissioners have had different views from time to time, all of the Commissioners care a lot about Astoria. She thanked the Commissioners for their work.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the work session adjourned at 8:30 pm.

ATTEST:


Secretary

APPROVED:


City Manager