

## **ASTORIA PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING**

Astoria City Hall  
April 7, 2015

### CALL TO ORDER:

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

### ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present: President David Pearson, Vice President McLaren Innes, Kent Easom, Sean Fitzpatrick, and Jan Mitchell

Commissioners Excused: Daryl Moore and Frank Spence

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

### PUBLIC HEARINGS:

President Pearson 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 3(a):

A14-05 Amendment 14-05 by Community Development Department to amend the Development Code, Zoning map, and Comprehensive Plan to implement the Riverfront Vision Plan in the Bridge Vista Area (Partway to 2nd Streets, West Marine/Marine Drive to the Columbia River Pierhead Line); add Pedestrian Oriented Commercial District Overlay Zone; add Bridge Vista Overlay zone; add design standards for development; miscellaneous related changes with new code references; and rezone the existing C-2 (Tourist Commercial) zoned parcels to C-3 (General Commercial) zone, and S-2 (General Development Shoreland) zone. Amend the Comprehensive Plan Sections CP.140(C & E) Columbia River Estuary Aquatic and Shoreland Designations, CP.210.1 Economic Development, and Figure 1.4 Riverfront Vision Plan map area boundaries. The Planning Commission recommendation will be forwarded to City Council tentatively scheduled on May 18, 2015 City Council meeting at 7:00 pm for public hearing at 1095 Duane Street.

President Pearson 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. Hearing none, he asked Staff to present the Staff report.

City Manager Estes reviewed the written Staff report. Three pieces of written correspondence have been received from Nancy Walker, Ed Wornicky and Rhonda Gerwin, and George (Mick) Hague. The letters were provided to the Planning Commission prior to the meeting. Consultant Matt Hastie presented an overview of the proposed Code amendments the Planning Commission worked on during work sessions. The Code amendments were tentatively proposed be presented to City Council in May and Staff would continue to refine the amendments based on feedback from the Planning Commission and City Council.

President Pearson confirmed the Commission had no questions for Staff and opened the hearing for public testimony. He explained that the Staff report also served as the Applicant's testimony because the City is the Applicant. He called for any testimony in favor of the application. Hearing none, he called for any testimony impartial to the application.

Mike Weston, Port of Astoria, said the Port has adopted a procedure that allows for some waterfront development and some pedestrian friendly developments on some of the properties within the Bridge Vista Area. He believed the procedure would allow for a good mix and balance of developments. The Port is still concerned with building envelope size, but he believed the proposed process in the system would allow enough flexibility that the Port could



do the necessary developments. While the Port is impartial to the application, they believed some portions are good and some are bad.

Ted Osborne, 345 Alameda, Astoria, said the community meeting in January was fairly energized. He asked the Planning Commission what lessons they learned at that meeting that led to revisions and which revisions were incorporated into the proposed amendments. He also wanted to show the final revisions were reflected in the Code amendments being proposed at this hearing.

President Pearson responded that the Commission would reserve the right to answer those questions and discuss after the public hearing.

Del Corbett, 701 NW Warrenton Drive #22, Warrenton OR 97146 said there were some interesting, thoughtful, and valuable elements in the presentation, as well as some aspects that would poison the community. Economic development is a given in society and he feared the framework of thinking is that development is necessary for progress. He suggested that some areas be kept as-is instead of developed. He asked the Planning Commission to realize the Astoria riverfront is the only thing of its kind in the world. He requested the riverfront be preserved and protected from building north of Marine Drive as far as the Port of Astoria and possibly the West End Basin. There are thousands of creative opportunities and technical means for economic development. However, there is only one Astoria riverfront. He urged the Planning Commission to keep this in mind and eliminate all of the building that destroys what nature has given, making Astoria very special.

Suzanna Gladwin, 82316 Highway 103, Seaside, said she has a home in Astoria and visits often. Many people drive and walk along the streets near the water want views. She was impartial to the fact that a lot more was going on near the pier than in other areas. She understood the shipping channel changes and wondered if people understood what happens to the bridge supports as the currents and channel change. She believed boats and ships could not safely come in any closer. This affects water-dependent uses that are proposed near the moorage and the Port. She questioned whether the Code amendments would work in Astoria. She used the map to point out areas she believed the Code amendment would not work because of the tides, currents, bridge piers, and the way the shipping channel turns. Maybe this should be studied if it has not already been studied. She pointed to an area on the map where she believed water dependent uses should not be allowed. At the last meeting, a certain percentage of water-dependent uses and a planning mandate were discussed. She did not understand to which area these uses and the mandate would apply. She asked if the mandate could be fulfilled or changed. She believed it was important for the Planning Commission to consider these questions. If certain areas are not safe because of currents, the proposed percentage of water-dependent uses and mandates become problematic. She believed chokecherry and Alder were inappropriate because chokecherry spreads and Alder gets tall. She wanted to hear more about the water-dependent uses.

President Pearson called for testimony opposed to the application.

Richard Schroeder, 8918 Manion, Warrenton, said he did not own any property. However, he had become friends with Roger Forney and Bob Wright who own the property where Robert Jacob received approval to build condominiums. Mr. Forney and Mr. Wright called him several months ago and he became interested because his grandfather, Will Talent built the pilings. Mr. Talent and Peter Grant built the Talent Grant Packing Company on the property. He understood the process the City was going through. However, instead of making blanket zone changes in all of the properties, he requested the Planning Commission wait until a master plan for the property is developed. He and the property owners are in the process of starting to discuss a master plan with various people. He asked the Planning Commission to give him until the end of the year to submit a master plan for the property. He said the property is located on the riverside of Northwest Natural Gas. He has already had some discussions with Northwest Natural Gas. The master plan would include the property and possibly Northwest Natural Gas. He was not aware of what was going on until the first part of November when Mr. Wright called him. Mr. Wright and Mr. Forney have four different projects going throughout the country and neither could attend this meeting because they are both out of the state. Therefore, he was speaking to represent their interests. He has been working with Lawrence Claymore, who did the master plan for Mill Pond. All he and the owners want is a little bit of time.

Juanita Price, 373 Altadena, Astoria said her family came to Astoria in 1964 and she has retired from the Astoria Public Library. The Planning Commission has forgotten its Astoria roots. Astoria is a fishing village that never grew up with tourists in mind. However, the City has retained the concept of a working waterfront, which was in the Murase Plan implemented when Edith Miller was Mayor. The plan prompted the citizens to clean up the waterfront. She participated in work parties on Saturday mornings, cleaning up the waterfront and making it available for the



City to create the Riverwalk. The cleanup was done in increments over about 10 years. The Riverwalk and the bridge are defining features of Astoria. She asked why corridors were necessary to keep views of the river for the people riding the trolley or walking along the Riverwalk. She did not understand why the Planning Commission wanted to add the proposed zone and allowable use changes to the code. This plan is not a bridge vista plan; it is bridge blackout plan. She asked the Planning Commission to refrain from approving the ordinance.

Robert Clark, 145 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, Astoria, understood no petroleum businesses would be allowed in the parcel just west of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. However, a petroleum business already exists on this property. There are larger forces that have plans for exporting cargo, such as propane, coal, and oil, out of the shipping channel on the north face of the area proposed for non-industrial uses. Navigation is not a perfect science. He wanted to know the general plan for disaster evacuation, should some of these vessels run into some of the development. He suggested the Planning Commission prioritize, above and beyond, reconstruction of existing buildings that need work in Astoria.

Suzanna Gladwin, 82316 Highway 103, Seaside, said that at a meeting several months ago, the general sentiment was to refrain from developing the waterfront. If there was an economic turnaround and the City did not have so many empty buildings, there might be a reason to develop the waterfront. However, once the waterfront is developed, it is difficult to go backwards. So many people love Astoria and the views. She owns a house above the Bridge Vista Area and her views would change with a 45-foot tall building. Buildings this tall would block the views of houses and views from the road. The river can be seen along a few places from Marine Drive and she would hate to see these blocked. She was opposed to development.

President Pearson called for any further testimony about the application.

Chris Farrar, 3023 Harrison Avenue, Astoria, said he understood that some place along the river had to allow development. Maybe some of the parcels in the Bridge Vista Area would be good for development. However, he believed development would be too close to the bridge on the west side. He did not understand why the Planning Commission believed a 150-foot wide strip would preserve the vista of the bridge from the west. He believed the bridge would only be visible by pedestrians and cyclists from the east looking west. The view from the opposite direction would be cut off. The Planning Commission acts like 35 feet is not high. However, these buildings will be high and will block a lot. He stated at a past meeting that development should be condensed to a smaller area and leave other areas open so the water can be seen. Looking out 200 feet through a 45-foot wide window will not provide a view of much. He was surprised to learn that the setbacks on the Rivertrail would only be 10 feet on one side and 20 feet on the other side. This would create a very narrow alley with 45-foot tall buildings on one side and 35-foot tall buildings on the other side. He preferred trees because they provide protection from the wind and rain. The landscaping should be kept natural, not barren.

Nancy Montgomery, 279 West Marine Drive, Astoria, said parking is already minimal along the waterfront and the proposed parking reduction requirements for new businesses would impact the existing businesses. She asked if there was any way to lower the 35-foot building height limit.

President Pearson closed the public hearing and called for closing comments of Staff.

Mr. Hastie responded to questions asked during public testimony, as follows:

- Vegetation would be allowed in the area next to the Rivertrail. The proposed code would reduce the number of tall trees and require trees be spaced farther apart north of the trail.
- A three-story building is approximately 35 feet tall and a four-story building is approximately 45 feet tall. The height restrictions for development on land are consistent with the current zoning and the recommendations approved in the Civic Greenway Area. Proposed height restrictions for over water development are lower than the current zoning allows.
- Setbacks along the Rivertrail would be set back from the existing right-of-way, which is 50 feet wide. This would result in a total minimum width of 80 feet.
- The code amendments have been recommended in order to implement the Bridge Vista Area of the Riverfront Vision Plan, which requires views of selected areas be preserved while allowing overwater development. Staff is not recommending development. The view of the bridge, particularly in front of Maritime Memorial Park, and the area west of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, were deemed essential vistas. Therefore, development has been condensed into other areas. To prevent a wall of buildings, one of the recommendations is to keep buildings under 60 percent of the parcel width and under 150 feet wide.



Commissioner Mitchell believed the width of the right-of-way on either side of the Riverwalk corresponded to the right-of-way of the train tracks. Mr. Hastie added the right-of-way is 50 feet and the recommendations add to this width. She understood the Riverfront Vision Plan was developed because the existing zoning allowed uses beyond what is currently being discussed. It is important to remember that what existed in the area when there was a big push for development several years ago was a bit scary. Staff did not have any way to prevent development because the zoning allowed it. She did not understand all of the zoning, but appreciated the list of uses that would no longer be allowed. People who own land adjacent to the river need to understand that the City cannot create an area where development is completely prohibited.

Mr. Hastie and City Manager Estes continued to respond to the questions asked during public testimony, as follows:

- Many people at the Town Hall meeting indicated they wanted very little to no overwater development allowed. However, the City must implement the Riverfront Vision Plan, which requires a balance of development and protected vistas in this area. Therefore, Staff has identified areas where overwater development would not be allowed and has limited the uses that could occur over water. Visual simulations were created in response to questions about how development would affect views from up on the hill. If development were to occur to the maximum extent allowed by these recommendations, views from the hill would still be expansive.
- Petroleum and fossil fuel terminals would be prohibited in the aquatic zones, just as in the Civic Greenway Area. Existing fueling stations for vessels would still be allowed, but new coal terminal and petroleum transfer terminals would not be allowed. Existing uses in the commercial zones on land would be grandfathered in.
- Parking restrictions would only apply to uses where the majority of a site on land was occupied by a building or the expansion of an existing use up to 10 percent. This will have a minimal impact on parking in the area.

Commissioner Mitchell understood the parking concerns. However, large parking lots cannot be placed along the riverfront. City Manager Estes explained how the code amendment would allow a business to expand up to 10 percent without having to add additional parking. Staff knows parking is tight in the area, but it is also difficult for many of the businesses in the area to expand or redevelop. This recommendation provides those businesses with some flexibility.

Mr. Hastie reminded this was a balancing act and he believed the parking recommendations would have a minimal impact. In response to the concerns about the shipping channel, he said the channel was beyond the area regulated by the City of Astoria. Development in the shipping channel would require permits from other entities.

City Manager Estes added that the City has jurisdiction up to the pierhead line, which is outside of the shipping channel. Staff has heard that development costs for piers and structures in this area are high. The City is not proposing to encroach into the shipping channel or north of the pierhead line, which is 150 feet from the shipping channel.

President Pearson called for Commission discussion and deliberation.

Commissioner Easom said he supported the proposed code amendments.

Vice President Innes said each time the Planning Commission meets, she tries to think of another way to say the following: The Riverfront Vision Plan was built by the community through hearings and votes and was adopted in 2009. There was an agreement that balance would be sought when planning the future of the riverfront. The balance was to be between an opportunity for economic development and an opportunity to view and treasure the vistas. People who are showing up at the meetings now do not support the economic development. However, she cannot ignore the fact that the majority of the community has requested balance. The City needs to do something about overwater development soon because 45-foot tall structures are currently permitted. She is devoted to the view and the river trail. However, the Planning Commission must speak for everyone who has given their opinion in support of a balanced plan. She believed the City demonstrated how this balance could be achieved through implementation of the Civic Greenway Area. Moving forward with this amendment concludes the risk of having liquefied natural gas (LNG) loaded or stored in Astoria.

Commissioner Easom added that there would be access to the river if development occurred. He believed people lose sight of the fact that they can walk out on a pier and get beyond the buildings to look up and down the river. His office is at the foot of 14<sup>th</sup> Street, where people walk out on to the pier all the time. This plan does not eliminate views of the river and out on the river.



Commissioner Fitzpatrick said he was conflicted for a number of reasons. Many people who have spoken at the hearings and public meetings have asked that all overwater development be prohibited and that building heights be reduced. However, the Riverfront Vision Plan states there would be a balance and that development could not be allowed in the Civic Greenway Area. People who spoke in favor of prohibiting development in the Civic Greenway Area reminded the Planning Commission that development would be allowed in the Bridge Vista Area. The City does not currently have any height restrictions and the proposed allowed use restrictions are considerable compared to currently allowed uses. He did not believe the proposed amendments were perfect. However, no one seems to agree on what would be perfect. While the plan is imperfect, it is still a very good plan. He planned to vote in favor of the amendment.

Commissioner Mitchell said in 2009, she was very concerned that all of a sudden, the City received many proposals for development on properties along the riverfront and there were no boundaries or barriers. The City was dealing with zones and uses that had been implemented when the zoning code was adopted in the 1950s or 1960s. The City was completely unprepared for this, which made her a bit thankful for the economic crash. She prefers restoration over new development because the community has limited capacity and wants to retain its current quality of life. However, the City was given an opportunity to try to put some things in place that would give Astoria more control over what could happen. She has no greater wisdom than Staff and the consultant about these amendments. Having a vision is one thing, but it needs to be implemented so that great ideas have a way of fitting into the community. A lot of effort has gone into these amendments and no plan is perfect. However, she believed the amendments would be a huge step in the right direction and would leave the community less vulnerable to corporations that do not know much about how Astoria sees itself as a fishing village or a river community. She hoped the amendments would give the City more ability to manage the community.

President Pearson thanked everyone in the audience for attending. This is the fifth hearing and the document is very comprehensive. The Planning Commission and Staff have been fine-tuning the code amendments since October. The City is working towards a compromise between allowing development so Astoria can continue to grow, while respecting Astoria's working waterfront, introducing design review, protecting pedestrian vistas, and appropriate landscaping. There are many compromises, but there have also been many steps forward. He believed the proposed amendments provided the best possible balance and he supported sending them to City Council for consideration. This process has not been easy. The Plan is being implemented one section at a time. The Civic Greenway Area was meant to protect a large section of the waterfront and keep the riverfront as it is. The intention of the Bridge Vista Area is to allow development in a controlled manner while preserving elements that are special to a working waterfront and respects Astoria's heritage. There will be more opportunities for the public to voice its opinion at City Council.

Vice President Innes moved that the Astoria Planning Commission adopt the Findings and Conclusions contained in the Staff report and recommend the Astoria City Council adopt Amendment 14-05 on the Riverfront Vision Plan Implementation Ordinance for the Bridge Vista Area; seconded by Commissioner Easom. Motion passed unanimously.

President Pearson announced the next hearing on the Bridge Vista Area would be at the City Council meeting on May 18, 2015.

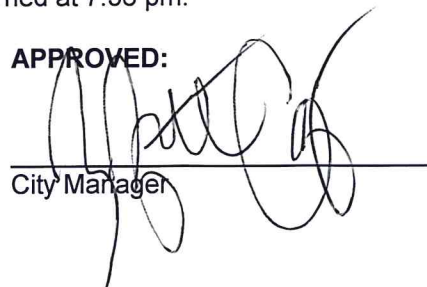
**ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:56 pm.

**ATTEST:**

  
Secretary

**APPROVED:**

  
City Manager