

ASTORIA PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

Astoria City Hall
September 23, 2014

CALL TO ORDER:

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

ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present: President Zetty Nemlowill, Vice President McLaren Innes, Kent Easom, David Pearson, and Sean Fitzpatrick. Thor Norgaard arrived at 6:38 pm.

Commissioners Excused: Peter Gimre

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

ITEM 3(a): August 26, 2014

President Nemlowill asked for approval of the minutes of the August 26, 2014 meeting.

Commissioner Pearson noted the following corrections:

- Page 3, second paragraph – “Commissioner ~~Pearson~~ *Gimre* declared an ex parte contact, noting that he is a member of the First Presbyterian Church.”
- Page 4, fifth paragraph – “Commissioner ~~Pearson~~ *Gimre* asked if the facility in Long Beach was located in a high-density zone.”
- Page 4, eighth paragraph – “Commissioner ~~Pearson~~ *Gimre* noted that the facility would have a daytime manager, but no nighttime manager.”

Vice-President Innes moved that the Astoria Planning Commission approve the August 26, 2014 minutes with the corrections noted; 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):

V14-06 Parking Variance V14-06 by Jennie Hillard for Rod Gramson, from the required two off-street parking spaces to increase the existing single-family dwelling to a two-family dwelling with zero off-street parking at 1626 Grand in the R-3, High Density Residential zone. This item was continued from the August 26, 2014 meeting. The Applicant has requested this be continued to the October 28, 2014 meeting.

President Nemlowill moved that the Astoria Planning Commission continue the public hearing for Parking Variance V14-06 by Jennie Hillard for Rod Gramson to October 28, 2014, immediately following the Traffic Safety Committee meeting at 6:30 pm at City Hall in City Council Chambers.

Commissioner Norgaard arrived at 6:38 pm.

Motion was seconded by Commissioner Easom. Motion passed unanimously.

President Nemlowill read the rules of appeal into the record.

ITEM 4(b):

V14-10 Variance V14-10 by Astoria Co-Op Grocery from the maximum 50 square foot of signage to install three signs for a total of approximately 113 square feet of signage for an existing commercial building at 1355 Exchange in the C-3, General Commercial 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.

President Nemlowill declared that she is the marketing director for Astoria Co-Op; therefore, she would not vote. She stepped down from the dais.

Commissioner Fitzpatrick declared two potential conflicts. He is a member of the Astoria Co-Op and he rents space to the co-op, but not in the subject building. He believed he could vote impartially.

Vice-President Innes declared that she has been a member of the Astoria Co-Op for a long time. She shops there regularly, but believed she could make an unbiased about this application.

Commissioner Easom also declared that he is a member of the Astoria Co-Op, but believed he could make an unbiased decision.

Vice-President Innes 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.

Vice-President Innes called for questions of Staff. Hearing none, she opened the public hearing and called for a presentation by the Applicant.

Matt Stanley, General Manager, Astoria Co-Op, 1355 Exchange Street, Suites 1 and 2, Astoria, said the project would be done professionally. The co-op is working with a firm in Portland that also does the signage for New Seasons natural food stores. The signs will fit the architecture of the building. The sign company has put a lot of thought into the project and plans to do the work in a tasteful way. He is happy with the design. The signs will alleviate lack of visibility from the street. Co-op staff is used to telling people to look for Providence because the current co-op sign cannot be seen. The co-op is virtually invisible right now and Providence has two large signs on both sides of the building. The Providence signs can be seen as one drives down the street, but the co-op cannot be seen until people are right in front of the building and past the entrance. He has seen people make poor traffic maneuvers to get into the entrance. This situation is dangerous for pedestrians and drivers. The new signs will give drivers tons of time to get into the right lane as they make their approach and turn into the entrance. The building sets back and the co-op is in the corner, which is difficult to see. The grocery industry is very competitive, so every penny counts. The co-op would like to be taken more seriously as a grocery store in the community and they are the only downtown grocery store in Astoria. The new sign prominently displays the word "grocery" because the co-op wants to make sure people know everyone is welcome to shop there.

Commissioner Norgaard asked if the Co-Op would be placing signs closer to the road, like a sign at the entrance that reads "Co-Op Entrance". Mr. Stanley replied there was a sign that said parking was for tenants only, but there was nothing that referred to the co-op. There are trees in the area and cars parked in nearby spots could block the sign. There is a section of the curb that can be painted yellow to prevent people from parking along the curb, so the co-op might consider a sandwich board in the future.

Vice-President Innes called for any testimony in favor of the application.

Allisa Evans, 380 Exchange Street, Astoria, said she walks to the co-op with her children. It is scary when the children walk ahead of her and drivers make a late turn into the parking lot. Increased visibility means more safety for pedestrians walking in the area. Pedestrian safety is tenuous anyway because cars are coming in and out, so she would like to see the area be more pedestrian friendly. She also wanted to promote less driving, especially in the downtown area. The co-op did a market survey that indicated where shoppers and potential shoppers are shopping. Getting more shoppers to shop locally keeps dollars in our city. The co-op has a long way to go before it will be seen as a full-service grocery store. She would like to see residents get their money

back in Astoria instead of spending money at Safeway. Safeway and other grocery stores are great, but she supported the idea of shopping at a locally owned store, keeping money in the local economy.

Vice-President Innes called for any testimony impartial to, or opposed to the application. Hearing none, she closed the public hearing and called Commission discussion and deliberation.

Commissioner Norgaard said he had no problem with the application. He believed it was great a business that is trying to improve and supported the application.

Commissioner Pearson supported the application, adding that the scale of the signage does not reflect what the Commissioners are seeing on paper. The sign is well balanced, fits the façade, and is a great mid-century design. He hoped the sign helps business.

Commissioner Norgaard moved that the Astoria Planning Commission adopt the Findings and Conclusions contained in the Staff report and approve Variance V14-10 by Astoria Co-Op Grocery; seconded by Commissioner Easom. Motion passed unanimously.

Vice-President Innes read the rules of appeal into the record.

Planner Johnson noted for the record that a sandwich board would be allowed in addition to the variance.

President Nemlowill returned to the dais.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS/COMMISSIONERS:

Commissioner Fitzpatrick reported that he attended the City Fair hosted by the City the previous week. He was glad the City hosted this event and believed the fair should be held regularly. The Mayor's Ball would be held on October 4, 2014 and the Columbia River Symphony would be performing on November 15, 2014, both at the Armory.

President Nemlowill said she attended the Armory for the first time since it opened to see the roller derby. She was impressed with all of the work that had been done to the building. She was also impressed with the City's Service Fair. The City does not have a public relations department, but she heard about the fair everywhere. It was great to attend an event that really showcased all of the City's departments. Many different groups from the community attended and it was neat to have the opportunity to talk to police officers and firefighters. She believed the event was executed well.

President Nemlowill adjourned the meeting at 6:48 pm. Seeing that there members of the audience who wished to speak on the record, she reconvened the meeting at 6:49 pm.

Samantha Lundberg, 496 Hamburg Avenue, Astoria, said that there is a commercial project going on in front of her property. She asked who mailed the public notice about the Astoria Co-Op's variance application, noting that none of the neighbors received any notices about the commercial project.

President Nemlowill stated that the City of Astoria mails information to property owners within 100 feet when an application is submitted. She was not familiar with the construction project to which Ms. Lundberg was referring.

Planner Johnson confirmed that the project involves John Carrier Construction near the roundabout, which is a commercial building in a C-3, General Commercial zone. The property owner did not request any variances or exceptions to the code and the use of the building as a construction office is allowed as an outright use, so no review by the Planning Commission is required. The project is not adjacent to any historic buildings, so no review by the Historic Landmarks Commission is required. The developer did apply for a building permit, which was reviewed by Staff and approved. There were no public reviews required for the project; therefore, no public notices were required. She confirmed that the City does not prohibit building in slide prone areas. If development is to occur within 100 feet of a known geologic hazard, the City requires the property owner to provide geologic test results. Any site can be built on with enough engineering. The decision to build is made by a geotech engineer at the expense of the applicant.

City Manager Estes added that the geotechnical tests are reviewed by City engineering and building code Staff.

Ms. Lundberg understood, but said that every time she called about violations, Staff refused to visit the site to see what the property owner was doing wrong and continues to do wrong. The construction is on two sides of her property. A six-foot cedar fence, which the property owner refers to as the "hate" fence has been built and encroaches on her property. The property owner has removed a survey monument and has failed to comply with the geotechnical engineering report. There are cliffs on two sides of her property. She explained that if the toe of the building is 20 feet down, the slope needs to be 20 feet out at a 45-degree angle. She knows that many people see the construction. The City has not responded. She never received a notice and the City has done nothing about the violations. The City has said the property owner is responsible for doing certain things and calling for inspections.

City Manager Estes said he knew Ms. Lundberg had been in frequent contact with the Engineering Department. Engineering Staff Jeff Harrington, Nathan Crater, and Steve Ruggles were at the construction site after Ms. Lundberg called to express her concerns. The City of Astoria issued a stop work order on the site in response to her concerns. Mr. Carrier submitted a revised plan to the City because the initial approved plan was different from what was being constructed. The revised plan was reviewed and approved by the Engineering and Building Departments. Construction now complies with the plans. Adjacent property owners are able to construct six-foot tall fences between properties. If there is a difference of opinion about where the property line is located, the issue is a civil matter between the two property owners. The fence has been legally constructed in accordance with City of Astoria codes.

Planner Johnson added that to address Ms. Lundberg's concerns about geotechnical issues, the City required the property owner to have a geologist on site during some of the construction and submit reports to the City at his own expense.

Ms. Lundberg asked how many times Tom Horning was at the construction site. Planner Johnson said she would have to check with building official.

Ms. Lundberg requested a copy of the inspection report. She said there was about 4,700 square feet of landscaping along West Marine Drive. There was supposed to be a five-foot landscape buffer between the commercial and residential properties. She did not mind the fence, but believed the plants in the landscape buffer were to be itemized in the plans. No one is enforcing this. Black plastic was been sitting on the buffer zone for two weeks, which many people have seen. Someone told the police that she pulled the black plastic on to her property, but it blew on to her property. Another piece of plastic blew on to the Stephen's, which had to be cut off because no one would take care of it. The City is taking no responsibility and leaving everything up to the property owner, who is in violation of many codes.

President Nemlowill said she was glad Ms. Lundberg attended the meeting and that she felt comfortable speaking to various City officials about her concerns. However, she did believe the issues were out of the Planning Commission's jurisdiction. She recommended that Ms. Lundberg continue her efforts to communicate with Staff and speak at a City Council meeting if she cannot get what she needs from Staff. She explained that each City Council meeting included the opportunity for public comments. The next City Council meeting is scheduled for Monday, October 6, 2014.

Ms. Lundberg said this was the first time she has attended a Planning Commission meeting. President Nemlowill explained that the Planning Commission deals with very specific issues. Ms. Lundberg said Staff was only helpful the first two times she went to City Hall. Her attorney has been to her property. Her insurance company called her that day to cancel her property insurance.

President Nemlowill said she was sorry to hear this and recommended Ms. Lundberg speak at the City Council meeting on October 6, 2014 if she is unable to get what she needs from Staff.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:59 pm.

ATTEST:


Secretary

APPROVED:


City Manager