



City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

McCaela Daffern and Jamie Stroble, Co-Chairs
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, September 12, 2024

Approved Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Xio Alvarez, Cecelia Black, McCaela Daffern, Andrew Dannenberg, Dylan Glosecki, Matt Hutchins, Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson, Dhyana Quintanar, Dylan Stevenson, Jamie Stroble, Kelabe Tewolde, Nick Whipple

Commissioners Absent: Matt Malloy, Radhika Nair, Monika Sharma, Lauren Squires

Commission Staff: Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; John Hoey, Senior Policy Analyst; Olivia Baker, Planning Analyst

Seattle Planning Commission meeting minutes are not an exact transcript and represent key points and the basis of discussion.

Referenced Documents discussed at the meeting can be viewed here:

<https://www.seattle.gov/planningcommission/meetings>

Chair's Report & Minutes Approval

Co-Chair Jamie Stroble called the meeting to order at 3:05 pm and announced several upcoming Commission meetings. Co-Chair Stroble offered the following land acknowledgement:

'As we begin our meeting, we respectfully acknowledge that our meeting today is taking place on occupied Coast Salish land. We pay respect to Coast Salish Elders past and present and extend that respect to their descendants and to all Indigenous people. To acknowledge this land is to recognize the history of physical and cultural genocide and settler colonialism, which continues to displace Indigenous people today. It is to also recognize these lands, waters, and their significance for the resilient and wise peoples who continue to thrive in this region despite the consequences of displacement and broken treaties. Those who hold settler privilege in this city must work towards supporting the Coast Salish people and all Indigenous people using the various forms of wealth and privilege they reap due to it.'

Co-Chair Stroble noted that this meeting is a hybrid meeting with some Commissioners and staff participating remotely while other Commissioners and staff are participating in the Boards and Commissions Room at Seattle City Hall. She asked fellow Commissioners to review the Color Brave

Space norms and asked for volunteers to select one or more of the norms to read aloud. She suggested to Commissioners that they collectively agree to abide by these norms.

ACTION: Commissioner Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson moved to approve the August 8, 2024 meeting minutes. Commissioner Andy Dannenberg seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed. Commissioner Dylan Glosecki abstained.

Announcements

Vanessa Murdock, Seattle Planning Commission Executive Director, reviewed the format of the meeting. She noted that public comment could be submitted in writing via email at least eight hours before the start of the meeting or provided in person by members of the public attending the meeting at City Hall.

Public Comment

Dear Commissioners,

As stewards of Seattle's development planning, please review and comment on CB120824. The bill eliminates Design Review in the Center City for three years, during which time SDCI can grant waivers and departures outside current zoning code that cannot be appealed. The bill is drafted to automatically approve bigger buildings without respect to code and without public input and oversight. It conflicts with city and state laws, and disregards cautions by city staff and the auditor about potential ethical breaches. Among the conflicts:

--The bill preempts State Law that defined and mandated a streamlined Design Review process compulsory across Washington in 2025. It will deny 100,000 Seattleites the right to participate in this process for three years.

--The bill also eliminates SEPA review for large mixed-use and residential towers because a previous ordinance was approved with the provision environmental review of height, bulk and scale would now occur as part of Design Review.

--After years of stakeholder engagement, the bill rejects the City's Design Review SLI report finding that "Seattle's design review is valuable and should not be eliminated."

Then there are ethical questions.

--A Central Staff report notes "This legislation has no protection against abuse of discretion, provided by public visibility into the decision-making process . . ." (P.7)

--The concern is real. Last year a city auditor report stated, "About 30 percent of the SDCI employees we interviewed commented on the ethical environment of the department" including "The City being influenced to make permit process changes by and for big developers," (P.10)

--Finally, the legislation scope is undefined. Staff don't know if projects currently in Design Review or recently completed, can simply withdraw and submit new plans for waivers and departures.

In summary:

Seattle's land use policies and actions should be above reproach. The State has provided a streamlined Design Review mandate that keeps the public involved.

Please speak up for a public process that preserves integrity, transparency and fairness in land use decisions.

Thanks for your consideration,
Megan Kruse
District 7 resident

Briefing: Ethics Considerations for Seattle Planning Commissioners

Wayne Barnett, Executive Director, Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission

Mr. Barnett provided an overview of the following ethics considerations for the Planning Commission:

- **Conflicts of interest**
Commissioners will only have a conflict if they have a personal financial interest in the matter being discussed. If they do, they will need to recuse themselves from discussion of that issue. If a Commissioner does not have a financial interest but is otherwise involved in a matter under consideration, an appearance of conflict can be disclosed. These rules for recusals and disclosures are created to incentivize good behavior. Any recusals or disclosures are part of the public record.
- **Abuse of Position**
Commissioners cannot use their position on the Planning Commission to forward themselves in their relationships with City departments. Commissioners can only use their position for the purpose given to them as a member of the Planning Commission. Commissioners cannot use their position as a member of the Planning Commission in political endorsements.
- **Gifts**
There may be a conflict if a gift appears to have a connection to a Commissioner's role as a member of the Planning Commission. For example, Commissioners should not allow Downtown property owners take them to dinner. Commissioners should not accept a gift if they think it is being offered because of their role on the Planning Commission.

Commission Discussion

- Ms. Murdock provided an example of ethics considerations for the Planning Commission. Several years ago, the Commission reviewed an extension of the Burke-Gilman Trail. One of the Commissioners represented a property owner along the trail. It was suggested that this Commissioner recuse himself and he left the room during discussion of this project. In another example, a Commissioner was a consultant to the Seattle Department of Transportation working on the Pedestrian Master Plan. She did not have a financial ownership interest in the consulting firm. However, she disclosed her role as a consultant on the project being discussed and did not participate in the Commission's deliberations on the issue.
- Ms. Murdock stated that she will contact Commissioners in advance to determine if they need to recuse themselves or disclose any potential conflicts. She stated that Mr. Barnett has been generous with his time and advice to the Planning Commission in the past on a variety of issues. Mr. Barnett stated that Commissioners may also contact him if they have any questions or concerns.
- Commissioners inquired whether volunteer advocacy work with organizations such as the American Institute of Architects presents a conflict. Mr. Barnett stated that this is not a conflict if Commissioners do not mention their role as a member of the Planning Commission. He stated that Commissioners should not mention their role on the Planning Commission in endorsement of any City ballot measure or candidates for elected office. Ms. Murdock recommended Commissioners inform her of any advocacy efforts outside of the Planning Commission that may overlap with the

work of the Commission. Commissioners need to be clear about their affiliations. Only the co-chairs speak on behalf of the Commission.

- Commissioners stated that anytime there is a perceived conflict, they make it clear that they are not involved with that project to avoid conflict of interest. Commissioners provided a recent example when the Planning Commission was reviewing the Seattle Transportation Plan, several Commissioners would disclose that their employer was working on that project.
- Commissioners stated that they always try to inform Ms. Murdock of any potential conflicts and when in doubt, they ask her for guidance.
- Commissioners stated that they have always received clear answers from Mr. Barnett and expressed gratitude for his assistance.

Working Session: Seattle Planning Commission budget and housing papers

Olivia Baker, Seattle Planning Commission staff, provided an overview of the most recent staff draft of the Planning Commission's paper on housing affordability and the City budget. This paper has been discussed in various Commission meetings starting in July. The Commission is reviewing the draft paper at this meeting in anticipation of the Mayor's proposed budget to be released on September 24th. The Commission will review the final draft paper at the September 26th meeting. The paper will be published in the week of September 30th before the Council budget deliberations and public comment periods that will continue throughout October and early November.

Ms. Baker stated that the goal of this paper is to help more people understand the importance of the annual budget process in long-range planning outcomes and to encourage people to get involved this year. The target audience for the paper is members of the public who are interested in the Comprehensive Plan or the affordable housing crisis but have not been involved in the budget process in the past. She stated that the intended call to action is to get involved in this year's budget process due to concerns about housing affordability and displacement.

Ms. Baker summarized how the budget impacts the long-term vision with the following key takeaways:

- It is important to start implementing the 20-year Comprehensive Plan vision this year.
- Affordable housing is fundamental to this vision.
- Community outreach consistently shows desire for abundant housing.
- A true commitment to preventing displacement requires consistent, sustained investment over multiple budget years.

She reviewed the following content about regarding housing affordability and livability in Seattle:

- There is a significant gap between the number of homes we have and the number we need. More than 60% of the homes we need to add must be affordable to households making 0-80% AMI.
- The gap in the housing supply is related to negative outcomes like displacement, homelessness, and housing cost burden – an issue that compounds over time and particularly impacts people of color and low-income households.
- City leadership must address a large budget deficit. Funding for affordable housing and displacement were intentionally increased in recent years to address decades of underinvestment. Now those increased funds are under scrutiny.
- The City must continue to support all the programs and departments working on the complex puzzle of affordable housing.

- Large scale affordable housing investment and equitable development strategies are still new and need time to meet their full potential.

Ms. Baker summarized the following ways that readers can get involved:

- Follow the City budget process this year.
- Speak up for programs that support the work of affordable housing and community-led anti-displacement.
- Learn more about the proposed budget.
- Contact the City Council.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioners stated that the draft paper is short and understandable. It presents an evocative message in layperson terms.
- Commissioners asked if the paper should make a stronger connection to issues of public safety and homelessness. The public pays attention to those messages. Ms. Baker stated that the draft paper includes references to those issues, such as stating the gap in housing leads to negative outcomes.
- Commissioners suggested moving the paragraph that includes homelessness up in the document.
- Commissioners noted that the paper makes the point that a dollar spent on housing equals a dollar spent on other outcomes. Investing in housing is also investing in reducing homelessness.
- Commissioners suggested emphasizing the point of preventing homelessness by including that text in a call out box.
- Commissioners recommended citing budget figures in terms of how much is spent per capita rather than a percentage of the overall budget. Commissioners stated that large budget figures may intimidate people and discourage them from participating. This information can be included by providing links to external sources.
- Commissioners stated that development project costs have gone way up. An important policy issue is that the City is not spending enough overall to ensure that people in Seattle have a home.
- Commissioners stated that the most significant call to action is about the budget gap. This paper encourages people to get involved and advocate for outcomes. Commissioners recommended making it clear that the City has a budget deficit and may have to make difficult decisions on funding, including slowing production of affordable housing because of the budget gap.
- Commissioners requested clarification on the audience for this paper. Ms. Baker stated that the intended audience is those who are interested in the Comprehensive Plan and housing issues, but do not typically get involved in the budget. Commissioners suggested keeping the tone of the paper as broad as possible to capture multiple audiences.
- Commissioners recommended language for the paper's title, emphasizing investments in housing and an affordable, equitable Seattle.

Public Comment

There was no additional public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:53 pm.