

**CITY OF EDMONDS
SUMMARY MINUTES OF PLANNING BOARD RETREAT**

July 9, 2014

Chair Cloutier called the meeting of the Edmonds Planning Board to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Fournier Room at City Hall, 121 – 5th Avenue North, Edmonds, WA.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Todd Cloutier, Chair
Neil Tibbott, Vice Chair
Ian Duncan
Bill Ellis
Philip Lovell
Valerie Stewart
Daniel Robles
Carreen Rubenkonig

STAFF PRESENT

Rob Chave, Planning Division Manager
Shane Holt, Development Services Director
Diane Cunningham, Administrative Assistant

DINNER

The Board Members shared a potluck dinner.

INTRODUCTIONS (NEW AND OLD MEMBERS)

Each of the Board Members introduced themselves and shared their background and expertise.

DIRECTOR/PLANNING MANAGER REPORT

Ms. Hope provided a brief summary of her written “Director’s Report” as follows:

- Implementation of the Strategic Action Plan is continuing to move forward, and the consultant provided a report to the City Council on June 24th.
- She and Mr. Chave worked with a representative from the Washington Cities Insurance Authority to review the City’s regulations, policies and practices regarding land uses. The information they provided was well received.
- The City Council reviewed information on the 2015 Comprehensive Plan Update process on July 2nd and concurred with the Planning Board’s recommendation for moving forward with the process. They will consider a budget amendment on July 15th to fund a part-time staff person to assist in the work. A special webpage will be created for the project.
- The Architectural Design Board approved a five-unit townhouse project in a multifamily zone on 240th Street SW, with conditions.
- Staff is working with the Public Utility District to promote incentives for solar use and other energy conservation programs.
- The grand opening for the City Park playground improvements took place on July 8th. The second phase of the project will be a spray park installed next summer.
- The six-year Transportation Improvement Program was approved by the City Council on June 24th.

Board Member Stewart asked that Planning Board Members be notified when there are public events, such as the dedication of the new playground at City Park. Chair Cloutier pointed out that consumers in Edmonds spend \$40 million per year on electricity and gas. Turning the thermostat down two degrees would result in a 10% reduction in consumption, which would result in a \$4 million savings. He also encouraged the City to consider promoting water conservation programs.

BEST PRACTICES/MAKING THE MOST OF DIGITAL DOCUMENTS AND ACCESS

The Commission discussed ideas for using the digital documents provided on the City's website more efficiently. Ideas included:

- Use a Drop Box or Cloud folder to store Planning Board documents.
- Rather than printing documents, electronic documents could be copied to an application like Onenote. This allows you to highlight and add notes to documents and sync them to all of your electronic devices.
- Utilize the "search" option on the City's website to access archived documents.
- Download and save documents as pdf files or word documents so that highlights and comments can be added and saved.
- Most scanned pdf files cannot be changed or highlighted, and Board Members can request the document in word format.
- Adjust the tracking options so that the page numbers on digital documents are consistent with paper copies.
- Provide more descriptive and consistent names for the attachments and exhibits included with the Staff Reports.
- Label documents, including the code, to identify the version and how it has evolved.

EDMONDS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CODE (ECDC) REWRITE/UPDATE DISCUSSION

Ms. Hope provided a brief overview of the sections of the current Edmonds Community Development Code (Titles 15 through 23) that will be the subject of the code rewrite/update. She explained that the development code is important to direct development in the City and offer predictability to property owners. She reviewed the complaints and concerns the City has received related to the ECDC:

- The code is not well organized. The various elements are not integrated well, and it appears to be a piecemeal approach.
- The code is confusing and there are contradictions and inconsistencies amongst the various chapters.
- The processes outlined in the code are unclear and inefficient.
- The code is not up-to-date and is missing definitions.
- Some chapters of the code contain vague language and inappropriate standards and requirements.
- The code does not include a tree code, and the critical areas and stormwater regulations need to reflect the latest state guidance.
- The code discourages development or allows too much development.

The Board discussed how the current code regulations and processes discourage development, and shared several examples and comments from developers. They agreed that some of these concerns could be addressed as a customer service issue, and others could be addressed as part of the code rewrite, particularly Title 20 (review criteria and procedures).

Ms. Hope reviewed that the City Council has allocated a budget for the ECDC Update, which will include the Critical Area Regulations update, Tree Code development, and overall Development Code update. A consultant will be hired later in the year to assist with the Critical Area Regulations update, and a consultant (Elizabeth Walker) has already been hired to help with development of the Tree Code. A consultant (Carol Morris) has also been hired to analyze the existing Development Code and make suggestions for legal processes and organization.

The Board questioned why a consultant was hired to help develop the Tree Code rather than doing the work in house using tree codes from other jurisdictions as a starting place. It was discussed that tree codes can be complicated when dealing with critical areas and views, and the needs of each jurisdiction are different. It was noted that staff does not have the time and/or

the expertise to accomplish all of the code update in house but would be heavily involved in the process. In addition, it is important for the citizens to be involved in the process rather than simply adopting a code from another jurisdiction.

Ms. Hope said the consultant's review of the current ECDC indicated that the permitting processes need to be cleaned up, simplified and made more consistent; more terms should be defined, and some of the existing definitions should be refined; and some titles/chapters should be reorganized for clarity. Mr. Chave pointed out that some terms are used in different contexts, and a single definition does not work in all situations. He said the update would be done with internet capability in mind, and links would be provided wherever a section of the code is cited. He shared some of the capabilities he anticipates will be available using the on-line version.

Ms. Hope said other issues that staff hopes will be addressed as part of the update include legal lots; new development standards for Westgate, code amendments to encourage development on Highway 99, tree code, critical area regulations, stormwater regulations, green features, State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) update and signage. She reported that the City of Edmonds is working with neighboring jurisdictions on "regional code collaboration." Ideally, all jurisdictions should have similar code requirements, particularly related to green features.

Ms. Hope explained that tonight is an opportunity for the Board to provide guidance on principles and priorities for updating the code. Staff will continue to analyze the code issues and priorities and develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) for consultants to work on priority items. It is important to develop a schedule and public process for considering the different aspects of the code update. She stressed the importance of moving at least the key elements of the update forward in a timely manner.

Ms. Hope provided a draft list of key principles to guide the outcome of the code update, as well as a draft list of the key objectives and invited the Board Members to share their thoughts.

Key Principles

- Consistency with current state laws
- Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan
- Predictability for developers and the community
- Some flexibility
- Clear, user-friendly language and format
- Recognition of property rights
- Enforceability and compliance;
- Sustainable development for both Edmonds and the region

Key Objectives

- Ensuring reasonable and clear processes for all actions
- Providing an expanded and up-to-date set of definitions
- Encouraging appropriate development
- Protecting critical areas and shorelines
- Recognizing diverse neighborhoods and their characteristics
- Encouraging pedestrian and bicycle access
- Incorporating low-impact stormwater management
- Encouraging transit-oriented development in key locations.

In addition to providing feedback on the key principles and objectives, Ms. Hope invited the Board Members to share their thoughts regarding priority topics and other code update issues.

The Board discussed the importance of clarifying and streamlining the process. It was suggested that they work on making the process more efficient first. If they start clarifying rules with a process that is complained of being cumbersome and costly, they will simply be delaying and developers, homeowners and the staff will still be hamstrung. Ms. Hope stressed the need for balance. She cautioned against spending too much time cleaning up the process based on the existing code regulations, since changes would likely be needed as the updated regulations evolve. Mr. Chave also cautioned against

working on the process first. The regulations influence the process, and conflicts in standards, as well as uncertain and vague standards, can complicate the process. The Board agreed they should not spend too much time on the process before updating the regulations, but they could clean up the obvious and critical vulnerabilities in the process that tend to stifle and discourage development. As they fix the process, priorities for other code amendments will become apparent.

The Board agreed that it is crucial that the Development Code be updated to be consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan outlines the image the City wants, and any updates to the ECDC should spring from its goals and policies. The Board felt the Comprehensive Plan is a good document, and ECDC should implement the Comprehensive Plan.

The Board asked staff to provide direction on what items they feel need to be addressed first. Mr. Chave agreed that there are some code requirements that consistently cause problems. For example, there is a general definition for "street," but the standards for street width, setbacks, etc. change as more development on the street occurs. Properties that were legally developed can become non-conforming. A more flexible code would allow the City to acknowledge and address these situations.

It was suggested that rather than hiring consultants and spending countless hours getting the Development Code update perfect, the City could hire a few more integrated staff members who have a clear understanding of the code requirements and process and give them authority to make flexible decisions. Ms. Hope agreed that is one option, but right now, they must work with what they have and do the best they can.

The Board continued to discuss their concerns about what seems to be a cumbersome and costly process for getting projects approved in Edmonds. Ms. Hope agreed that is a concern and one reason why decisions need to be made at the right level. She recalled that there was a time when jurisdictions thought their city councils should decide everything. Not only is this a big responsibility, but elected officials tend to make decisions based on input from their constituents rather than from the legal standpoint of whether or not the proposal meets the code requirements.

The Board agreed it is also important to enable sustainable development by integrating green building standards into the code. The Council appears to be supportive of the idea, and the concept has evolved over the last two years. It was noted that some Planning Board Members have expertise in this area and could work with staff.

The Board stressed the importance of recognizing and respecting the rights of property owners. If a developer has drafted a plan that is in compliance with the existing code, it should be approved. The City should never be allowed to dictate to property owners what must happen on their land. Mr. Chave noted that respecting property rights is a requirement of state law, but it could also be called out in the code separately.

The Board discussed how important it is that citizens attend public meetings and provide input. Oftentimes, developers and local jurisdictions are eager to address the desires of adjacent neighbors, but they must participate in the public process and express their viewpoints.

The Board recommended the City conduct a developer roundtable to solicit input regarding the current Development Code and potential changes. They also agreed it would be helpful to conduct a green building forum and share ideas and information with developers.

Mr. Chave provided an update on the mixed use project in Downtown Edmonds that will house the new post office. He described some of the design features of the project and briefly explained how it is consistent with the code requirements.

OTHER ISSUES OR DISCUSSION ITEMS

There were no other discussion items.

REVIEW OF EXTENDED AGENDA

There was no discussion about the extended agenda.

APPROVED

PLANNING BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Board Member Stewart announced that she is working with staff to provide a pilot rain garden cluster workshop at her home on July 14th. In addition to City staff and other experts, homeowners who indicated an interest at the workshop that was held several months ago have been invited to attend. They are hoping to identify a neighborhood where they can have four to six contiguous lots that can create rain garden cluster. They hope to incorporate regulations into the code that will enable rain gardens.

ADJOURNMENT

The Board meeting was adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

APPROVED