



RENTON PLANNING COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

April 5, 2006
6:00 PM

City Municipal Building
Council Chambers

Planning Commissioners Present: Robert Bonner, Jimmy Cho, Ray Giometti, Jerrilynn Hadley, Nancy Osborn, Joshua Shearer, Greg Taylor

Planning Commissioners Absent: None

City Staff Present: Rebecca Lind, Planning Manager; Elizabeth Higgins, Senior Planner; Judith Subia, Recording Secretary

1. CALL TO ORDER: Commissioner Giometti opened the meeting at 6:00 PM
2. ROLL CALL: Commissioner Osborn called roll; Commissioner Hadley arrived at 6:02 PM and Commissioner Bonner arrived at 6:24 PM
3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: The Minutes of March 1, 2006, were approved as amended.
4. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED: Hearing Examiner Minutes of a February 21, 2006 meeting, regarding the Williams Setback Parking Appeal; Hearing Examiner Minutes of a March 7, 2006 meeting, regarding approval for a 13-lot subdivision of a 2.25-acre site intended for the development of single-family detached units; Hearing Examiner Minutes of a February 28, 2006 meeting, regarding approval in order to construct an addition to the existing Renton Bible Church
5. AUDIENCE COMMENTS: None
6. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS: None
7. POLICY/CODE STUDY SESSION:

Highlands Subarea Plan Discussion: Community Design Policy and Code Amendments
STAFF PRESENTATION

Rebecca explained that the version of the draft code presented to the Planning Commission is the "hearing draft," meaning that Staff will not be making further revisions to it until after the Planning Commission Public Hearing on April 12 and City Council Public Hearing on April 17. Tonight's meeting is a briefing of the content of the code, so that the Commission will be prepared for the Public Hearing next week.

Erika gave a short presentation regarding the zoning text and map amendments. The adopted Center Village (CV) Policy in the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan looked at development at 10 to 80 dwelling units per acre. It specifies the redevelopment of low density suburban land use patterns, calls for the creation of medium and high density residential areas. It also calls for a range of commercial goods and services. This is a compact urban development that is transit and pedestrian

oriented, and calls for structured parking and alley loaded development. The CV policy calls for a high standard of design and a clustering of commercial and community uses.

In order to comply with the CV designation, two zones are proposed: Center Village-Core (CV-C) and Center Village -Residential (CV-R). The Center Village-Core is located along Sunset Blvd. Its land uses are commercial, mixed use, and multi-family. It's the Heart of Center Village with a transit hub, commercial center, and the employment center. There are neighborhood services, open space and recreation area. This is the highest density area within the Subarea. Only the highest density is allowed with the provision of affordable units.

Erika went over the development regulations that are being proposed. A few things were added to the CV-C in building orientation and location, buildings are to be oriented to the street and commercial and civic buildings should have entry features on any side that fronts a street. Residential uses require parking to be underground or under a building. Parking for commercial uses cannot be in the front setback or between a building and public street, unless in a structured garage.

The Center Village-Residential is located around the Core. It provides a residential base to support the Core. Its land uses are cottage and townhouse, the base density would be in the medium range with a bonus density for the provision of affordable housing. There are also pedestrian connections to the Core.

Detached and semi-attached dwellings are prohibited in the CV-R zone, however will be allowed if the property qualifies for inclusion in the Flex Bonus District. Attached dwellings are allowed, however, is limited to townhouses in the CV-R zone. With participation in the Flex Bonus District, flats east of Kirkland Avenue and accessory dwelling units are allowed. The density in the CV-R zone is 10 to 14 dwelling units per acre. Most properties proposed for rezone to the CV-R are currently in the R-10 zone. They will be getting a modest increase in density.

Cottages is its own line on the use table to prevent allowing cottages in any zone where detached housing is allowed. Cottages on its own line and only allowed in the Highlands is a good place to do demonstration projects, and to introduce the idea to other zones at a later time. Cottages are laid out around a common space, have covered porches, and all units are within walking distance of the common space. Cottage housing is limited in size. The maximum floor area is 1200 square feet with a maximum footprint of 800 square feet. Each unit has its own ground related outdoor space, with a minimum of 200 square feet, in addition to the minimum 200 square feet requirement per unit for common space. Proposed standards are based on extensive research of other jurisdictions.

Cottage housing is a new section of code and a new unit type that hasn't been done elsewhere in the City. The front and side setbacks are minimal and similar to the underlying zones. They are increased if it is adjacent to a lower intensity residential zone. If a development has alley access, it can have zero setback from the property line, provided there is enough back up room. There is also a possibility in the cottage development that there could be a cottage that is built as a carriage house over an existing garage.

Cottages are required to have covered porches and the maximum height is limited. Additional height is allowed with pitched roofs. Commissioner Bonner asked about shed roofs. Rebecca explained that shed roofs are 18 feet and 25 feet with a pitched roof.

Commissioner Giometti asked about zero lot lines and if the cottage is right up against the sidewalk. Erika explained that the zero lot line is for the rear only. The front is 10 feet. Rebecca added that with the zero lot line, 24 feet of back up space is still required.

Commissioner Osborn asked about the driving area and street width into the garage access. Rebecca said that alley standard is 16 feet. In some areas, the Fire Department requires it to be 20 feet.

The meeting recessed at 7:23 PM and reconvened at 7:31 PM.

Erika presented the Commission with different photographs of alley loaded development at Ravenna Cottages in Seattle. Commissioner Cho asked how deep the lots were. Rebecca said that the standard is 80 feet. Most of the projects take two existing platted lots and put them together. Erika explained that in the Ravenna Cottages project, under the current zone, two houses could have been built on one lot. Instead, with cottages, nine were built. This was a demonstration project for the City of Seattle.

Continuing, Erika explained the Center Village Flex Bonus District. It allows different bonuses, such as a density and use bonus. To participate in the Flex Bonus District, it requires a minimum acreage, a provision of affordable housing of 2 units per net acre, and a master plan.

Commissioner Giometti asked about the definition of affordable housing. Erika said that it is anyone whose income is less than 80 percent of the median annual income, adjusted for household size, as determined by Housing and Urban Development for the Seattle-Metropolitan statistical area and who pay no more than 30 percent of their household income to housing expenses. The Housing Authority's primary duty is to serve households that are 30 percent or below the median income.

There are numerous ways that a developer can insure that a unit remains affordable housing. One way is to give the development to the Housing Authority, who would develop and manage it. There are a number of programs, such as Habitat for Humanity or a program that's run by the Eastside Communities called ARCH (A Regional Coalition for Housing). This program limits the equity of a house, for example a formula is used when someone purchases a home and then sells it. If a property is sold to someone while they were 80% of the median income and 5 years later wants to sell the home, would be required to sell it to someone who was also 80% of the median income.

The minimum acreage is one acre, and in the Highlands is typically the consolidation of 4 parcels. During focus group meetings with the development community, there has been a consensus that the minimum acreage should be higher -- as high as five acres. Erika gave an example of Sunset Terrace that is on about 7 acres. If the Housing Authority relocated their tenants elsewhere and redeveloped the entire site as townhouses, it would create a dramatic impact on the community.

The Flex Bonus District allows use of a PUD (Planned Unit Development) to modify development standards, densities of up to 80 units per acre, and allows additional uses, such as single family, flats, and accessory dwelling units.

Commissioner Giometti asked what the need for bonuses were and to create standards that are needed, rather than creating standards and giving someone a bonus. Erika explained that the bonuses are used as a negotiation tool. In writing the proposed code, the goal is to see wholesale redevelopment of this area. Staff also needs to be careful because while on one hand, want to allow individual property owners to be able to develop their properties, Staff also wants to be able to have the flexibility for someone who can consolidate a larger amount of property to be able to come in and do a very good quality development. When you write extremely strict rules, you can prevent a very good project from being developed.

The master plan process is where a plan is reviewed to make sure that it agrees with the Comprehensive Plan. It makes a number of small changes to accommodate the consideration of adopted subarea plans, or the Highlands in particular. It requires a City Council Hearing for master plan approval of projects in the Highlands. The master plan sets criteria specific to the Highlands Subarea.

Erika also explained the PUD and said that this was a very flexible tool, because it allows a master variance. Standards can be varied if it is shown that a superior product would be provided than what would have been provided under the underlying zoning standards. This tool is allowed in the CV-R district, only if they participate in the Flex Bonus District. New PUD changes were adopted last fall, however, the submittal requirements were never updated with the rest of the PUD ordinance. PUD changes allow superior compliance with the Comprehensive Plan as a public benefit.

Staff is proposing changes in areas that are currently designated for Center Village land use. The amendment prohibits detached and semi-attached units in the R-10 zone in the Highlands Subarea.

These areas are earmarked to be changed to Center Village and rezoned to Center Village-Residential. The amendment also requires R-10 areas in the Highlands Subarea to be subject to the Design Guidelines. District D of the Design Guidelines is in the CV-C zone and District E is in the CV-R zone and a portion of the R-10 zone. Some small changes were made based on Planning Commission comments at the last meeting.

AUDIENCE COMMENT

Howard McOmber, 475 Olympia Ave NE, Renton, WA 98056: Mr. McOmber encouraged the Planning Commission to keep an open mind. He feels that there is another solution, that is already being taken care, which is that the property owners will be fixing their properties. This will allow for residents who are living there now, not to be moved. Mr. McOmber feels that this plan will require every family that is living there to be gone. Creating non-conforming property is not fair.

Theresa Elmer, 3101 NE 13th St, Renton, WA 98056: Ms. Elmer lives in the area near the Fire Station, against the Shopping Center. The owner purchased the building for retirement income and had no intention of selling. She inquired about how the ratings of the properties were determined because she does not feel that all of the properties are run-down and need rebuilding. Ms. Elmer would also like to know how which properties need to be replaced is determined. She has managed the building for 10 years and have always kept the rates affordable compared to other units in the area.

Rebecca explained that Ms. Elmer currently has a Public Information Request submitted that Staff is in the process of responding to. Ms. Elmer will be receiving that information in a few days.

Brett Hawton, 1308 Harrington Ave NE, Renton, WA 98056: Mr. Hawton purchased his home brand new 6 years ago, which is in the middle of a duplex area. Mr. Hawton feels that all the zone changes are geared towards large renovation, not single homes being replaced individually. He asked about the alley design and how it would affect his property.

Commissioner Giometti explained that the Commission is looking at a plan that Staff has been asked to prepare by the City Council and Administration. If someone wanted to purchase his property, he would be approached and offered a deal that is attractive for Mr. Hawton to sell or not. Commissioner Giometti explained that there are other tools in the toolbox that the Planning Commission does not vote on.

Rebecca added that Staff would look at alleys when Staff moves forward with the Comprehensive Plan Amendments or the Subarea Plan. Staff has not decided which form it will take. An alley plan would be taken to the City Council for adoption and would be implemented when development came in.

Commissioner Bonner gave the Downtown Plan as an example. The Plan was developed in 1993 and took about 10 years before any type of substantial project came in and does not think that the City has used eminent domain during that type. Commissioner Bonner lives in a non-conforming home, with a big development in his yard. He is for it and likes to see change and growth. He explained that the rezone will increase Mr. Hawton's property value.

Jennifer Hawton, 1308 Harrington Ave NE, Renton, WA 98056: Ms. Hawton asked about the zoning and becoming non-conforming and where information can be found about it.

Rebecca explained that Staff is working on a handout for distribution about what non-conforming means. In general, it means that property can be maintained as-is. All manner of maintenance can be made, however square footage to the house cannot be added. A property can also be made conforming into the zone. In this instance, transforming a single family home into a townhouse or multi-family building.

8. DELIBERATION/RECOMMENDATION: None
9. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS: The next Planning Commission meeting will be a Public Hearing on April 12, 2006 regarding the Proposed Rezones and Zoning Text Amendments. The Planning Commission deliberation will be on April 19, 2006.

10. ADJOURNMENT: The Meeting was adjourned at 8:31 PM



Ray Giometti, Chair



Nancy Osborn, Secretary