

Agreement

CONFLICT AVOIDANCE AND RESOLUTION WITHIN THE PLANNING COMMISSION

Preface

The public interest is best served by a diverse Planning Commission representing a broad set of viewpoints, knowledge, experience and expertise.

The Planning Commission is a volunteer group appointed by the City Council to help form land use and related policy, including making formal recommendations to the Council. All members come to the Planning Commission to help make the City a better place to live, work and play. Each Commissioner is appointed because they bring a unique perspective and have something to offer in this process.

The Planning Commission is a deliberative body that deals with legislative and sometimes quasi-judicial issues. The Commission functions best when members question the assumptions and reasoning of fellow commissioners and staff. In order to be effective, the Planning Commission must trust one another and the City staff. Trust is based on communication and respect. Public trust is maintained when Commissioners behaves in an open, transparent and ethical manner.

Comment [AB1]: Edit suggested at last OPC meeting.

Comment [AB2]: Suggested by Commissioner Bardin.

When disputes arise between members, the best approach to resolving them is generally the simplest – face to face communication. Each Commissioner should work to resolve conflicts at the lowest possible level and with the least amount of conflict and with the highest levels of respect for other members.

The Agreement below is not intended to address disagreements over the appropriate recommendation to make to the City Council; by nature, such work will result in disagreements of opinion, which are welcome and handled through the process of deliberation and voting.

Comment [AB3]: Added for clarification after last OPC meeting.

Nor is this agreement intended to address issues of impropriety, such as actions against state statute or City policy. Should a Planning Commissioner have concerns that an action by the Planning Commission, a Planning Commissioner or City Staff has transgressed the legal framework in which the Planning Commission operates that Planning Commissioner should raise those concerns with the City Manager or City Attorney immediately. It is the job of the City Manager or their designee to investigate all such complaints and determine an appropriate course of action based on the laws of the State of Washington and the City's Administrative Guidelines. If that is not an option, the Commissioner should contact the State Attorney General's Office. Results of major concerns or actions should be reported to the public.

Comment [AB4]: Suggested at last OPC meeting.

Comment [AB5]: Suggested by Commissioner Bardin.

For all other issues of potential conflict or concerns related to the operations and decision making of the Planning Commission the following agreement shall apply:

Agreement

Themes from Commissioner Comments:

Need for guidelines for raising and discussing concerns/things uncomfortable with OPC members

Minimize opportunity for conflict and misunderstandings

A protocol is needed for handling conflict - need for order of operations

Resolve issues and concerns in a manner that follows channels that build trust and respect

Comment [AB6]: Commissioner Bardin's comment: "These themes and other comments brought up at the retreat also speak to the need for a code of conduct."

Objectives

- Avoid conflict through early and timely communication to clarify information, point of view, context, perspectives and motives.
- Support communication and problem solving among Planning Commissioners.
- Preserve the integrity of the Planning Commission. Acknowledge that the Planning Commission does get judged by the actions and opinions of its members. Actions that violate public trust should be avoided.
- Establish steps for authentic dialogue about perceived, potential and real conflicts or disputes within the Planning Commission.
- Define a process for timely response to potential conflicts or disputes.
- Address conflicts and grievances with good faith, honesty and respect.
- Resolve issues in a manner that builds and maintains trust and respect among Planning Commissioners.
- Except as otherwise noted herein, Often, internal resolution of conflicts and grievances is in the best interest of individual Planning Commissioners and the Planning Commission as a whole.
- Ensure a non-hostile environment for Planning Commissioners and City staff.

Comment [AB7]: Suggested by Commissioner Bardin.

Comment [AB8]: Suggested by Commissioner Bardin.

Procedure

It is in the best interest of the Planning Commission, the individual Commissioners and City staff to resolve disputes and disagreements internally. When a Planning Commission member is in disagreement with an issue or Planning Commission actions, these are the steps for addressing

Comment [AB9]: Commissioner Bardin's comment: "We have to be careful to differentiate between personal disagreements that can be decided on an individual basis and disagreements related to "open public meetings" considerations that involve things such as differences in opinion where the public should be involved as part of the public process."

Summary of OPC Discussion Groups from June 21, 2014 Retreat
Updated with OPC Feedback from July 21, 2014

the issue (steps do not necessarily need to be followed sequentially; a member may begin with the person they feel most comfortable with):

1. Pro-actively address concerns immediately with the appropriate individual to resolve the issue or misunderstanding and avoid the opportunity for conflict to occur.

Comment [AB10]: Edit suggested at last OPC meeting.

2. The Planning Commission Chair is responsible for maintaining a constructive and non-hostile working environment for the Commission.

Comment [AB11]: Edit suggested by Commissioner Bardin.

3. When a misunderstanding or conflict arises between Commissioners or City staff it is incumbent for the Commissioners to identify a mutually agreeable location and time to hear one another's perspective and seek understanding of the nature of the conflict and opportunity for resolution. *If a resolution is not possible then pursue the steps below.*

Comment [AB12]: OPC Replaced "neutral" with "mutually agreeable" at the last meeting.

4. Contact the Planning Commission Chair or Vice Chair to discuss the issue with the intent to find resolution to the concern or conflict. The Chair or Vice Chair may choose to take the issue before the Commission. *If this is not a satisfactory option then:*

Comment [AB13]: Changed from "Leadership Team" by the Commission on 7/21.

5. Given the individual circumstances, the best person to contact should be left to the discretion of the OPC member.

Comment [AB14]: Suggested by Commissioner Bardin.

6. Contact the person that is most appropriate to inform of the concern, this may be: the OPC staff liaison; the Director or Deputy Director of Community Planning & Development; the City's Communications Manager; or the City Attorney. *If this is not a satisfactory option then:*

Comment [AB15]: Commissioner Bardin's comment: The OPC is appointed by and reports to City Council. Although relationships with staff are important, the OPC shouldn't have to go through so many steps before they ultimately report to Council.

5.6.

Comment [AB16]: Suggested by Commissioner Bardin.

6.7. Take the concerns may also be taken to the City Manager, the City Councilmember who is appointed as the liaison to the Planning Commission, the Chair of the City Council General Government Committee, or another appropriate City Council member.

Comment [AB17]: Suggested by Commissioner Bardin.

Out of respect and concern for the integrity of the Planning Commission, It is suggested individual Commissioners, and City Staff, members are expected to follow the above steps to seek resolution of the issues.

Comment [AB18]: Suggested by Commissioner Bardin.

Commissioner Bardin's comment: The integrity of the OPC is maintained if we have an open public process, not if we hide our disagreements behind closed doors. I don't agree with this statement.