

MEMORANDUM

To: Olympia Planning Commission

From: Retreat Planning Subcommittee

Subject: Notes from July 29, 2020 Subcommittee Meeting

Introduction

As we briefly discussed at our last OPC meeting, we've tentatively agreed to schedule a virtual retreat sometime this fall, which will be limited to two hours. There is no money available for presentations or training. There seems to be some agreement, however, that this time of change and uncertainty presents an opportunity for the Commission to have a free-wheeling discussion about what we see as the critical planning issues facing the City, check in with individual commissioners about their interests and priorities, and see how we can increase the relevance and value of the Commission going forward.

The subcommittee appointed by the Commission to flesh out these thoughts met on July 29 and this is our report back to the Commission. The purpose of this evening's discussion is to get your feedback on these ideas and to decide on next steps.

Ideas and Major Theme

The subcommittee brainstormed ideas from each member. The following list of topics emerged from the discussion:

- Analysis of Commission performance (CR)
- Strategic Plan (CR)
- Vision of Olympia (CR)
- Equity in Planning (CR, CM, YH, AS)
- Post Covid19 world (CR, CM, YH, AS)
- Commissioner's passions and how we can address them as a Planning Commission or how Commission can add value to the Community (CR, CM)
- Increase profile of Commission (CR)
- Due process training (CM, YH, AS)
- Equity and inclusion training (YH, AS, CR)
- Sustainability (YH)
- Promoting group cohesion (AS)
- Reduce the cost of building and built environment (AS)
- Economy (CR)
- Home ownership v. rental inequities (CR)
- Food security (CR)

- Safe (non-motorized) streets (CR)
- Climate change (CR)

Candi likes the idea of having structured conversations around specific topics related to things that are within the OPC's purview. She sees two major issues facing the planning community:

- How planning has contributed to inequity in housing, transit, and capital improvements, and
- How COVID is going to change how we live and how planning should respond.

Yen focused her comments on the topic of equity. She would like to explore how planning efforts have contributed to social and economic inequities, with a focus on historical developments and institutional behavior. She supports having annual equity training. She also echoed Candi's comments about the post-COVID world and how planning can assist.

Aaron is also interested in equity and inclusion training, and is looking for a sense of alignment within the Commission. He would like to see better building quality at lower cost ("build better cheaper"), as well as more diversity in housing and an increase in sustainability. He is hoping that we all come away from the retreat inspired and energized.

Carole is interested in equity, but not in spending a lot of time on training. She thinks that equity is best addressed through "economic justice." Everyone should be housed, and everyone should be able to own a home (if they want to), no matter how modest. Home ownership is still the most important way that ordinary people can build wealth. Micro energy grids built by the City may also be a way to reduce energy costs for everyone.

She is also interested in sustainability, green building, and resilience (for example, food security as part of a post-COVID world). We could create more community gardens and encourage lawns-to-food activities (maybe even "agrihoods" in our urban growth areas), and provide for more food trucks.

The creation of safer non-motorized streets is also a popular adaptation to a post-COVID world.

We should also look at both mitigating climate change, per the forthcoming Thurston Climate Action plan, and preparing for climate refugees.

Carole has also had a decades-long interest in high-speed rail, which could provide more options for accommodating growth throughout the Puget Sound region, while increasing our quality of life and protecting our environment.

In summary, the theme of the retreat can be seen as "Big Ideas."

Commission Performance

It seems that the Planning Commission could play a more proactive role in planning. As an advisory group, we could add value as futurists and problem-solvers. Not all of the Big Ideas discussed above are within the purview of the Commission, but the Commission may be able to encourage other entities, through the City Council, to consider well-thought out suggestions or recommendations.

Part of the retreat discussion could focus on an analysis of commission performance, either through a formal “SWOT” analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), or something less formal.

Process

We also talked briefly about retreat process. The suggestion was made to have TWO 2-hour retreats – one on Big Ideas and one on the Role of the Commission in light of those ideas. Rather than retreats, these might be considered “seminars;” that is, group discussions in which a recorder keeps us on track and takes notes.

Some of the outcomes of these discussions may include a “statement of values,” a charter or “statement of commitments,” gratitude [?], a set of norms, and review of our Bylaws. We could also recognize particularly creative or interesting plans carried out by neighborhoods or other entities with an award.

Questions for the Commission

What are your thoughts in relation to:

- The suggested Big Ideas? Would you add or delete any? What are your priorities?
- The role of the Commission and possible analysis of its performance?
- Process for the Retreat?
- Outcomes of the Retreat?
- One or two 2-hour retreats and schedule?
- Anything else?