



Planning Commission

Low-Density Neighborhood Zoning Transitions - Work Item Briefing

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Title

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Recommended Action

No action required - briefing only.

Report

Issue:

The City Council's Land Use and Environment Committee has directed that the 2016 work program of the Community Planning and Development Department, and in turn the Planning Commission, include evaluation of zoning code changes to address commercial and mixed-use zoning lacking appropriate provisions for minimizing impacts to adjacent low-density residential areas.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter:

Todd Stamm, Principal Planner

Background and Analysis:

In May of 2014 the City staff proposed zoning map changes responsive to the then-pending Comprehensive Plan update known as 'Imagine Olympia.' Among these were elimination of the Community Services - High Density (CS-H) zone by moving the Capitol Campus into a 'Planned Unit Development' zone and changing the zoning of the two small remaining CS-H-zoned parcels to Professional Office / Residential Multi-Family and General Commercial zoning. (See file 13-0120.) Ultimately on July 7, 2014, the Planning Commission recommended the Capitol Campus change, but concluded that the other two properties should remain in the CS-H zone. A related motion to recommend a citywide review of these types of properties and commercial zones failed.

Early in 2015 Jay Elder and other residents of the Bigelow neighborhood northeast of downtown proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan to address issues raised by a development application submitted by John Tanasse. The amendment proposal was later revised to be development code issue instead of a Plan change and the City Council referred the matter to its Land Use and Environment Committee for consideration.

On August 27, 2015, the Committee concluded that a specific development code issue related to height bonuses should be addressed as soon as possible. That code amendment - which would remove the provision for height bonuses adjacent to historic districts, but retain it elsewhere -- is tentatively scheduled for public hearing by the Commission on October 19. (Note: Tanasse did not propose to exercise this bonus option, but apparently his proposal did make the neighborhood aware of the code provision.)

At that same meeting the Committee discussed the other issues raised by the Bigelow neighborhood regarding potential land use conflicts between their low-density neighborhood and the land uses and larger buildings allowed by the nearby downtown and urban corridor zoning. Committee members noted that these types of issues arise periodically as a result of particular developments and that they often lead to specific narrow code amendments, for example the high-density-corridor zones were recently amended to limit the height of buildings near low-density areas. The Committee concluded that this issue isn't unique to the Bigelow neighborhood, that it should be evaluated on a broader basis, and that it should be included in the Community Planning and Development Department and Planning Commission work programs in 2016.

Although the specific scope of this work item has not yet been determined, it is likely that it will include:

1. Evaluation of both the locations and content of the General Commercial zone. The 'GC' has been revised little since it was created about fifty years ago (then called Commercial Services - General). In many respects this zoning district dates from an auto-oriented vision for the community. A general update may be needed to better reflect the vision in the current Comprehensive Plan.
2. Revisiting the zoning of the two remaining CS-H zoned properties ('Henderson Park' and two blocks downtown) - possibly revising the CS-H zones or moving them into a revised version of GC zoning.
3. Review of all medium and high density commercial and mixed use zones to ensure they include appropriate provisions for transitioning the scale of buildings adjacent to low-density neighborhoods.
4. Review of the zoning of properties between Eastside Street and Plum Street east of downtown. This area is between downtown and the Bigelow and Eastside neighborhoods and serves as a large transitional area from the high-density neighborhood vision for downtown to these low-density neighborhoods. (Both the Comprehensive Plan and the Downtown Strategy describe "downtown" as being bordered by Plum Street.)
5. Review of the potentially-antiquated development code provision that allows accessory features such as elevators, mechanical equipment, and certain other portions of a building to exceed the height limit by 18 feet. (This height seems to have been 'borrowed' from older building codes and may be based on the minimum height needed for roof-top water tanks.)

Later this year the City staff will be proposing a specific scope for this work item. In the meantime, staff would welcome discussion and comments from the Commission on this issue.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

To date interest has been limited to residents of the Bigelow neighborhood and a few owners of commercially zoned property. The extent of eventual interest will depend on the scope of any proposal.

Options:

No action required.

Financial Impact:

Work item is expected to be within scope of standard budget.