

**CITY OF EDMONDS
PLANNING BOARD MINUTES
February 22, 2006**

Chair Freeman called the regular meeting of the Planning Board to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, Public Safety Complex, 250 – 5th Avenue North.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Janice Freeman, Chair
John Dewhirst, Vice Chair
Jim Young
Virginia Cassutt
Judith Works
Cary Guenther
Jim Crim
Don Henderson

STAFF PRESENT

Rob Chave, Planning Division Manager

READING/APPROVAL OF MINUTES

VICE CHAIR DEWHIRST MOVED THAT THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 8, 2006 BE APPROVED AS CORRECTED. BOARD MEMBER WORKS SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY, WITH BOARD MEMBERS CRIM AND HENDERSON ABSTAINING.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF AGENDA

The agenda was amended to add a discussion of the February 21, 2006 City Council Meeting.

DISCUSSION OF FEBRUARY 21, 2006 CITY COUNCIL MEETING

Board Member Guenther reported that he attended the February 21st City Council Meeting to hear their discussion regarding building heights in the downtown. The first presentation was made by the Alliance of Citizens for Edmonds (ACE), who expressed their desire to preserve the two-story character of Edmonds and provide quality retail space on the ground floor. He said they used the term “low-level architecture,” which they appeared to define as two stories. However, he explained his impression of the term “low-level architecture” would be architecture at the street level. He said the ACE presentation provided slides of architecture that they found pleasing and included quite a variety of buildings throughout the downtown area. He said another gentleman presented the City Council with what he felt would be appropriate design guidelines, but they appeared to be very basic, vague and hard to enforce.

Board Member Guenther further reported that the Chamber of Commerce also made a presentation, which included comments from various business owners. A real estate agent made her point very clear that the low ceiling, first floor retail spaces are difficult to lease or sell. Mr. Chave added that the realtor spoke about the difficulty of leasing retail space that had either sunken floors or low ceiling heights. In addition, he said downtown business owners spoke about the difficulty of finding quality commercial space to expand in the downtown. Chris Fleck pointed out that even office type uses need decent

commercial space. Bob Gregg described how he had to re-estimate the cost of remodeling his building down to the penny to please the auditors and insurance companies. This gave him an opportunity to test the Heartland Study assumptions again, using new data. He found all of his numbers to be slightly higher, but very similar to the conclusions of the Heartland Study.

Board Member Guenther said Council Member Orvis also made a presentation, using various terms to describe the concept of a building height of 25 feet, with incentive for an additional 5 feet. He suggested that if the City's goal is to preserve view, they should consider setback requirements to pull the fronts of the buildings back. Mr. Chave summarized that Council Member Orvis was in favor of having residential uses behind commercial space on the ground floor and of requiring the third floor (if allowed) to be stepped back from the face of the building. Chair Freeman pointed out that Council Member Orvis' position was very similar to that of the ACE Group.

Mr. Chave reviewed that most of the discussion at the February 21st City Council Meeting was vague, and no specific numbers were discussed. The ACE Group particularly noted that they did not have a consensus on specific height numbers. Their general theme was that they liked two-story buildings, but they didn't rule out the option of allowing three-story buildings if designed properly.

Board Member Guenther advised that Council Member Marin made a presentation, which started with an analogy of marketing the downtown as a product. He briefly touched on the concept of creating density in the downtown.

Board Member Guenther summarized that the general public comments were split equally between those who wanted to preserve the two-story character of downtown and others who felt that controlled change would be good. Mr. Chave encouraged the Board Members who were unable to attend the City Council Meeting to watch the recording. Chair Freeman requested that staff provide copies of the Power Point presentations provided by ACE and the Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Chave reported that the City Council scheduled a work session to continue their discussion on February 28th, and they invited representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and ACE to attend. He pointed that none of the concepts presented to the City Council appear to be inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Board Member Young said the ACE group's presentation appeared to infer that things could be done from a design standpoint to make some parts of buildings over two-stories palatable. He suggested that perhaps the discussion should go back to the design guidelines. He pointed out that while Council Member Orvis' presentation focused on the preservation of view, it is important to keep in mind that preserving view is not a specific City responsibility. The issue is more about economics and creating more activity at the street level, which is more related to design than a specific height limit. Mr. Chave announced that the Architectural Design Board has nearly completed their review of the design guidelines, which would go back to the City Council for another round of public hearings and a final decision.

AUDIENCE COMMENTS

Stan Piha said that as part of the Board's consideration of possible amendments related to Highway 99, he previously requested that they consider changing the zoning of property he owns at 236th and 84th to BR2. He provided a drawing and overhead to show the location of his property and explained that the zoning proposal would mirror what was done for the BR zone, but it would reduce the height limit from 80 feet to 44 feet. In addition, the BR-2 zone would require a 25-foot setback from residential properties. Mr. Piha pointed out that the subject property sits adjacent to the Aurora Market Place Shopping Center and just off the corner where the proposed bus rapid transit facility would be located at 236th and Highway 99. Right now the parcel is vacant, and a BR-2 zoning designation would allow it to adapt to a mixed-use type development with a slightly higher density. The property would also contribute to a higher tax base, and would be in concert with what is being planned along the Highway 99 Corridor.

Wendall Hall said his understanding is that the properties at 215th Street Southwest, east of 76th Avenue would be considered for single-family residential zoning. He asked what implications this zoning designation would have on his home and the home across the street that are both developed as duplexes. Mr. Chave explained that the current zoning designation for the subject properties is multi-family residential, and duplexes are potential permitted uses within that zone. However, a

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single-family zoning designation would not allow duplexes. Mr. Underhill has submitted a petition asking the Planning Board to consider the rezone, but he has not submitted a formal application. The Planning Board may or may not elect to make a zoning change; but if they do, a public hearing would be held and the property owners would receive notice. Mr. Hall said he would prefer the zoning to remain as multi-family residential.

WORK SESSION ON HIGHWAY 99 ZONING ISSUES

Mr. Chave explained that since the Board's February 8th meeting, staff has started working on some draft ideas for how the zoning could work. However, before going too far, it became apparent they would need additional direction from the Board. He referred to the two maps that were provided. One map illustrates the existing zoning and the other attempts to distribute the district concept from the Highway 99 Plan. He recalled that the intent of the Highway 99 work is to streamline the processes, be more clear on uses, and take out some of the uses that do not belong. He explained that because the current CG zones were structured using a pyramid concept, any use that is permitted in any other zone within the City would be permitted in the CG zone. Because the CG zone allows almost any use to occur, it is difficult to focus the area for economic development.

Vice Chair Dewhirst said the Board must really ask the question of how different the zones along Highway 99 would have to be. They must also identify exactly what the community wants to occur along the corridor. While the Highway 99 Task Force did a good job, they stopped too soon. Mr. Chave said Ms. Gerend, Edmonds Economic Development Director, has talked about a "branding" concept, which involves the implementation of public improvements, design guidelines and sign standards to set off different areas rather than distinguishing the areas by uses or setback requirements. For example, they could allow more liberal signage in the international district than would be appropriate for the hospital area. Public improvements would also play a key role in implementing the "branding" concept. Vice Chair Dewhirst expressed his concern about giving a perceived advantage to one area over another by allowing more elaborate or larger signs. Chair Freeman questioned how the City would channel the market forces to focus certain types of development in the various districts. Mr. Chave said the intent of the international district is to create a synergy that would attract like businesses.

Vice Chair Dewhirst said that if the City wants to create a pedestrian environment along Highway 99, they must first find out where the stops for the new bus rapid transit system would be located. The areas around these stations could be different. Mr. Chave said that information is not available yet.

Mr. Chave said the Board must decide whether they want to use overlays or different zones to distinguish the various districts. Rather than craft a different zone for each district, the Highway 99 Task Force felt they should implement design guidelines and/or improvements that would call out the areas. Mr. Chave said he is leaning more towards the overlay approach as opposed to breaking the corridor into different zones. Vice Chair Dewhirst asked if an administrative use permit could be used along the corridor. Certain uses could be allowed outright, and then other uses could be allowed depending on the district. Mr. Chave said use could be used as an incentive. For example, extra height could be allowed for certain types of development or a reduction in the parking requirement could be offered to encourage transit oriented development. Vice Chair Dewhirst suggested staff begin by creating an administrative use permit process and a public hearing use permit process.

Mr. Chave explained that the original purpose for having a different height limit in the CG and CG2 zones had to do with properties being annexed into the City and trying to address the greater height limit that existed in the County. However, at this point, the differentiation is not very helpful and is no longer worthwhile. The uses are the same, and the only thing that is different is the height. He recommended that the CG and CG2 zones be combined into a single general commercial zone. Vice Chair Dewhirst asked how this would impact the light industrial area north of 212th, just west of Highway 99. Mr. Chave answered that this area is already zoned CG2, and the allowed uses would remain the same. He said it would be very difficult to acknowledge the light industrial area as an overlay, so it would make sense to make it a separate zone. Vice Chair Dewhirst suggested that the southeast corner at the intersection of 212th and Highway 99 should also be included in the light industrial zone.

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Mr. Chave pointed out that some of the multi-family zoning that lies between the commercial and single-family residential zoning was intended to be a buffer, which doesn't really make sense. Many of these properties have remained undeveloped or part of the commercial area. Staff may recommend changes in some locations.

Vice Chair Dewhirst suggested that before the Board assigns the BR2 zone to potential areas, they should discuss the BR2 zone concept, itself.

Board Member Henderson inquired regarding the zoning of adjacent properties in Mountlake Terrace and Lynnwood. He suggested that the zoning should be consistent. Mr. Chave said the zoning along both sides of the highway is commercial, but he would be hesitant to base the City's decision regarding height on what exists in the adjacent jurisdictions.

Board Member Cassutt suggested that the southern area should have its own BR2 zoning designation that is separate from the BR zoning that is located to the north. She noted that additional height would be more appropriate for the southern area than the northern area. Mr. Chave explained that instead of using a multi-family zone, the BR2 transitional zone would offer an opportunity for mixed use and be a buffer between the more intense commercial areas and the nearby single-family residential uses. Residents in the area told the task force they wanted to see more neighborhood oriented businesses. Vice Chair Dewhirst suggested that the new BR2 zoning designation could perhaps be applied to some of the areas identified on the map as RM-2.4. Mr. Chave agreed. He explained that he did not intend to show the extent of where the BR2 zone could be used, but just a few examples of where it could go.

The Board discussed staff's proposal to combine the CG and CG2 zones and agreed that would be appropriate. They also agreed that the light industrial area should have its own zoning designation, as recommended by staff. Mr. Chave suggested that a 45-foot height limit in the CG zone should not be an issue as long as there are adequate setbacks, landscape buffers, etc. The Board agreed. They also discussed the option of allowing a greater height limit in the CG and BR2 zones, unless adjacent to a single-family residential zone. Mr. Chave said one option would be to require an additional setback for greater height. This would protect adjacent properties because the additional height would not be allowed if there was insufficient depth to provide adequate setbacks.

Board Member Cassutt pointed out that the properties near 238th Street are ready for redevelopment, and she recommended that all of these properties have a 50-foot height limit. Board Member Crim agreed that having a greater height limit would be preferable to using some lower arbitrary number. No one would force development up to 50 feet, but it would allow the opportunity if it makes sense. There would be no negative impact of a 50-foot height limit. Vice Chair Dewhirst suggested that this area be extended to 236th, since there is more high-density residential within a quarter mile of that intersection than there is at 238th.

Board Member Henderson asked what would happen if they were to eliminate the BR2 zone and designate the whole corridor as CG, with a 50-foot height limit. Mr. Chave explained that the Comprehensive Plan called for a specific mixed-use area around the hospital and high school; whereas, the properties that are in close proximity to Highway 99 would be more auto oriented.

REVIEW OF EXTENDED AGENDA

Mr. Chave advised that numerous public hearings are scheduled on the Board's extended agenda. Chair Freeman advised that three public hearings have been scheduled for March 8th: Port of Edmonds Master Plan and Strategic Plan, Six-Year Update to the Capital Improvement Program, and the Draft Public Streetscape Plan. Mr. Chave said it appears the City Council would be ready to forward the draft Economic Development Plan to the Planning Board in time for a public hearing on March 22nd.

Chair Freeman asked when the Board would receive direction from the City Council regarding the MPOR zone. Mr. Chave said he does not anticipate additional instruction from the City Council. Chair Freeman noted that the City Council appears anxious to lift the moratorium, so the issue should be scheduled on the Board's extended agenda. Mr. Chave advised that

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staff would provide information regarding the MPOR zone to the Board on March 8th. It could be scheduled for further discussion on March 22nd.

The Board agreed to hold a retreat on April 12th. The public hearings originally scheduled for April 12th were rescheduled to the April 26th meeting.

PLANNING BOARD CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Freeman said she spent the last week in Santa Barbara, California, where she observed their building heights. She noticed numerous one and two-story buildings on their main street, with some older and taller buildings. All of the buildings had very high ground floors, and she noticed that the various heights made an attractive skyline. There were very wide sidewalks, which created a pedestrian friendly environment. Many of the stores were deep, with narrow store fronts that were attractive for window shopping. She was also impressed by the juxtaposition of the different types of uses. They also did a lot of walking through the single-family neighborhoods that were gorgeous. But while they were there, news broke that the County seat is going to be moved to the north because the County employees could no longer afford to live in Santa Barbara. That is definitely the negative aspect of having lovely single-family neighborhoods in the downtown. She suggested that the City could definitely learn from Santa Barbara's experiences.

Chair Freeman urged the Board Members to attend the Savoy Swing Club's performance on March 1st.

PLANNING BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Vice Chair Dewhirst inquired if The Hotel Group has filed any actions against the City. Mr. Chave said they have not. However, they recently leased space in Lynnwood.

Board Member Young provided an update on the recent Highway 99 Task Force Meeting he attended. He advised that the task force signed a contract with an engineering firm to initiate the traffic study that would result in data generation for how to get from one side of the highway to the other. He said he volunteered to sit on the citizen's advisory committee to the consultant. He further reported that the task force received a good presentation from the relatively new administrator of Stevens Hospital. He distributed copies of the materials that were provided. He reported that Stevens Hospital feels they are finished with the first phase of recovering from their financial issues over the past several years. They will be presenting their capital improvement plan to the Planning Board before the end of 2006, and it will include the concept of going out to the community for additional tax revenue. It was noted that Stevens Hospital has the lowest tax support per thousand dollars of any of the comparable hospital facilities in the region.

Board Member Young said Stevens Hospital also has a business plan that calls for restructuring and improving the services they already provide. It was noted that the hospital is currently very underutilized, which results in local citizens going to other hospital facilities outside of Edmonds. Their goal is to improve this situation and encourage local citizens to use the facility. Vice Chair Dewhirst pointed out that Stevens Hospital has the third busiest emergency room in the State. It is also one of the oldest emergency rooms in the State because it is the general purpose hospital for all of Southwest Snohomish County and North King County.

Board Member Cassutt said she has heard of situations where people have gone to Stevens Hospital, but were unsatisfied with the service they received. Therefore, it is important for Stevens Hospital to generate more positive feedback about the hospital to attract local people to their services. Board Member Young said the hospital understands this need, as well.

Board Member Young reported that the Puget Sound Regional Council has advised that the process is starting now for putting together the 4-year regional transportation improvement plan. Over the next three years, \$502,200,000 in funding would come through Puget Sound Regional Council. While the vast majority would be used for transit projects, \$129,000,000 would be available for local agencies. He noted that Edmonds has no representation on the transportation management board or the regional project evaluation committee. There is also a vacancy for the one person who represents

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all the other cities in Snohomish County. He suggested it would be appropriate for the City to consider opportunities for an elected official to participate.

Board Member Works advised that the Oregon Supreme Court upheld Measure 37. While there are still problems left to resolve, the Washington Farm Bureau seems to be thrilled by the outcome and might place a similar measure on a State ballot in the future.

Board Member Henderson said he recently visited Houston, Texas, where there are no issues regarding building height because the whole City is surrounded by a freeway that is 60 feet in the air.

Board Member Guenther reported that at a recent lunch discussion, the staff in his office discussed why the monorail failed and why Sound Transit is succeeding. It was discussed that part of the reason for the monorail's demise was related to the fact that there was very little information provided about how the project would interface with the public. On the other hand, Sound Transit illustrated this concept clearly. He suggested that if the City wants to sell building heights as an issue, it would help to provide a couple of renderings showing what impact a new building height would have. The remainder of the Board agreed that this would be helpful to create a vision for the future of downtown.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

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