

ASTORIA PLANNING COMMISSION WORK SESSION

Astoria City Hall
April 26, 2016

CALL TO ORDER:

Vice President Easom called the work session to order at 7:01 pm.

ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present: Vice President Kent Easom, McLaren Innes, Sean Fitzpatrick, Daryl Moore, Jan Mitchell and Frank Spence

Commissioners Excused: President David Pearson

Staff Present: Planner Nancy Ferber, Community Development Director Kevin Cronin, and Parks Department Employee Ian Sisson. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT MASTER PLAN:

Ian Sisson provided the Commissioners updated copies of the draft Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan and draft recommendations. He reviewed the master planning process, timeline, next steps, details of the draft Master Plan and draft recommendations, the Plan's impact to the Comprehensive Plan, and next steps. Director Cronin briefly described the public/private partnership between the City and the Senior Center and suggested the City needed to get smarter about its facilities. Mr. Sisson asked the Planning Commission to provide feedback and advise Staff about how to move forward. He noted that Commissioners were welcome to submit feedback at any other time, as some of the information presented was new.

The Commissioners agreed the draft documents were thorough. Commissioner Spence said he was surprised the Parks and Recreation Department was able to do so much with limited funding and personnel. Three full-time employees are not enough to cover all of the Parks. If the Plan is implemented, the Parks Department will need additional personnel.

Director Cronin explained that this Public Facility Plan would allow the City to accomplish several land use and planning goals required by the State. The final Plan will be presented to the Planning Commission in a public hearing as an attachment to the Comprehensive Plan. Parks play a big role in how the City determines its land needs as the City must plan for future growth. Therefore, the Parks Board, Planning Commission, and City Council must consider policies that accommodate Astoria's future needs. He recommended the City optimize what it already has.

Commissioner Spence noted the City owns 1,300 parcels of land and asked how many parks sites were included in the study. Staff replied the Parks Department has 63 facilities; 35 are parks and the rest are trails and indoor facilities. The Plan includes a diagram that shows the growth of the Parks system and the department's financial metrics since 1990.

Planner Ferber asked if there were any high priority areas that stood out in feedback from the most recent open houses. Mr. Sisson stated that feedback from open houses indicated the community's two highest priorities are to increase revenue and staffing and to improve existing properties before adding new properties. He told the Commission where this information could be found in the draft Plan and reminded that Commissioners could call or email him with comments.

The following Astoria Development Code Amendments were moved to the work session from the public hearings scheduled during the regular Planning Commission meeting.

Amendment A16-01 to Amend the Astoria Development Code, Article 9 – Administrative Procedures, City Wide

Director Cronin noted that one of City Council's goals was to streamline the permitting process and Article 9 has not been updated in a long time. He considered the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) model code for small cities to develop the proposed amendments. No major changes had been made since the

Commission's last review of the proposed amendments in March. However, the on-site notices are now only being proposed for Type 3 applications, which require public hearings before the Commission. This change was made based on feedback given at the March work session.

Vice President Easom confirmed there were no public comments.

Amendment A16-02 to Amend The Astoria Development Code Housing Section to Encourage More Infill and Development of Existing Residential Lots as Part of a Larger Affordable Housing Strategy, City Wide

Director Cronin explained that one of City Council's goals was to promote housing that is affordable to all Astorians. He displayed the housing project website on the screen and reviewed the work done to date. He briefly reviewed the City's efforts to improve the home stay lodging program. When Staff discovered the scale of the problem was much smaller than originally thought, City Council decided not to move forward with changes to the home stay lodging program. Therefore, the Planning Commission just needs to focus on Articles 2 and 3 of the Development Code. He briefly reviewed Amendment A16-02 included in the Staff report, noting the most recent changes.

Discussion from the Planning Commission and responses by Staff to Commissioner questions was as follows:

- Raising the height limit by 8 feet in the R-2 zone would allow three-story homes or more floor area in townhomes.
- New development within 100 feet of known flood areas should require a site investigation report, just like new development near known landslide hazards. While people should be made aware of flood hazards, digging in a flood zone would not impact adjacent properties owners as it would in a landslide area. The building permit form already includes an option to require a flood permit or certificate.
- All of the updates to the proposed amendments have been published online and are publicly available. Interested parties have also been notified via email.
- Suburban front yard setbacks are typically 20 feet from the edge of the right-of-way. Astoria is a small town that has been built to suburban standards. So, Staff is recommending setbacks more typical of the historic properties that were built prior to the Zoning Codes. Proposing a 10-foot setback in the R-2 zones gives more flexibility to the Applicants.

Director Cronin noted that Staff would update the Commission on a tiny home demonstration project in about a month.

Vice President Easom called for a recess at 8:00 pm; the work session reconvened at 8:10 pm. He called for public comments.

Rachel Jensen, 1445 Lexington, Astoria, confirmed with Staff that tiny homes would be allowed as accessory dwelling units (ADU) and that tiny homes had to be manufactured off site, just like manufactured homes. She wanted to know if tiny home designs would need to be preapproved for historic neighborhoods. Director Cronin explained that tiny homes would need to be removed from the trailer, placed on a permanent foundation, and connected to utilities. Tiny homes would not be considered temporary structures by the City, but financing might be difficult to obtain. Staff is working on placing a model tiny home on City property for people to look at because there is a lot of interest in them. Tiny home designs will be chosen by the homeowners and if placed next to a historic structure, design standards will apply.

Ms. Jensen understood density would not change. However, in an R-1 zone, single-family homes with ADUs would result in an increase in density. Director Cronin explained that the overall density would not change because ADUs are not considered full housing units; they are an accessory to the main dwelling unit. ADUs add capacity without changing the overall density. Ms. Jensen asked if two off-street parking spaces could be tandem. Planner Ferber said only up to two parking spaces could be stacked.

Commissioner Moore added that ADUs allow more residents in one home without building another home on the lot. Director Cronin said the City could not regulate the number of people living in one single-family home. ADUs allow up to two more people.

Charles Silvas, 8023 N. Berkley, Portland, said he was a former Astoria resident and currently works close by. He supported tiny homes and ADUs and was excited that Director Cronin had stopped by to see the tiny home he was building. He made available some handouts that noted positive aspects of living in tiny homes. Right now, people are building and living in these structures regardless of building codes, especially in the Portland

area. The industry is completely unregulated and structures are built without smoke alarms or egresses. Some of the tiny homes may not be structurally sound and he hoped tiny living could be done in a safe and regulated way. Astoria has an opportunity to make ground-breaking decisions, be on the forefront of these changes, and set precedence for other communities to follow. He believed tiny houses were a viable option for low-income families and people seeking alternative living. This is an opportunity to create local jobs. His business in Hammond is licensed, insured, bonded, and currently supports two fair paying jobs. If his company can build more, more jobs would be created. Astoria does not have a lot of land and tiny homes do not take up much space. Tiny homes make good use of the space that is available and provide people with a nice place to live. The novelty of tiny homes would be good for a community like Astoria, bringing in tourism and generating income for local businesses. He believed tiny homes would be healthy for the local economy. If Astoria made some changes, it would likely get media attention. Also, the City could collect land use taxes and permit fees. He confirmed that his tiny homes are all handmade structures built from the ground up. He invited the Commissioners to stop by his business to see the tiny home he was building.

Director Cronin explained that were quite a few new ADUs in Portland, which led the Multnomah County Assessor to reassess those properties. Property tax bills have increased significantly. He reminded Vice President Easom of the current minimum lot sizes that allowed 500 square foot ADUs and Staff's recommended reduction. Tiny homes would still have to meet setbacks, lot coverage requirements, and sometimes design standards. Staff could consider tiny home developments, as Article 3 of the Development Code includes a section on cottage clusters. This section of the Code has not been used outside of Mill Pond and Staff would have to make sure any changes were accessible for both the applicants and the City. In tiny home developments, the tiny houses would serve as the main dwellings. But, ADUs must accompany a primary structure.

Commissioner Moore said he was not opposed to cottage or cluster developments, but they could not be referred to as ADUs. Director Cronin added that those developments would require a large parcel of flat land, but land in Astoria is mostly sloped.

Dennis Covell, 1020 10th Street, Astoria, said he lived on the southwest corner of 10th and Jerome. His house and several others front the old school. He was concerned about what would be done on the old school property. When he and his wife visited Astoria 25 years ago, Commercial Street looked like their home in Whittier, California. They decided to retire in Astoria in 1991 because it was a neat community. At that time, the area was pretty depressed, but things have improved since then and he loves Astoria. His property is at the tail end of a historic district and a great deal of effort was necessary to designate the area as historic. Putting multi-family homes in would be very bothersome. If 20 or 30 units were put on the property, what impact would that have on affordable housing? He wanted to know why the City wanted to change the Codes now and just for a few sites. The proposed Code changes will make it easy for the old school site to be developed. He was not opposed to this as long as it was done right. He understood the property would be developed eventually and he would support a project that was reasonable. However, the proposed changes seemed radical. He understood building heights were measured at half the height of the arch in the crown of the building and anything above that was not figured in. This would mean the proposed 40-foot height limit to buildings in the R-3 zone would allow buildings up to 45 feet tall. This is an immense height, especially next to homes that are close to the street. He believed these issues were being handled the wrong way. Nice homes could be built in the area instead of multi-family units and all of the issues would pencil out. One reason for changing the Code is to address the large number of variances allowed, but the City is on the tail end of that issue. He recommended the City continue with the Codes as they are and use variances if they come up. It is very alarming to the community that these changes are being considered. The Commissioners are good stewards of the city and he hoped the Planning Commission would rethink the amendments.

Director Cronin displayed a map of Mr. Covell's neighborhood and explained he had referred to the Central School site, in the R-2 zone just south of Irving. The site has been vacant since the school was demolished and cannot be developed in its current state. He doubted that changing the property from an R-2 to an R-3 zone would generate enough interest for the owner to sell the site. The property has a lot of costs and a developer would have to build many units to get their cash back. Without an 8 to 10 percent return on their investment, developers will not put money into the property.

Commissioner Moore asked how the City could allay concerns about the property being developed. When changes were made to the Bridge Vista Area of the Riverfront Vision Plan, people expected the area to be built up despite the lack of developable land in the area. Director Cronin said public comments were based on the fear that a hotel economy would be developed. Hotels will continue to be built in Astoria, but it is not likely that

multi-family units will be. Astoria is in a tough spot because the State requires the City to have a 20-year land supply, but Astoria currently has a 15-acre shortage. The City has a great relationship with DLCD, but at some point, Astoria will have to make changes.

Commissioner Fitzpatrick understood the old school site was originally zoned R-3 and previous owners had the zoning changed to R-2. Director Cronin said the new codes would allow more attached single-family and multi-family units in the R-2 zone. Any development on that site will be required to complete the design review process with the Historic Landmarks Commission. This will ensure that the look of the building will fit in with the rest of the neighborhood.

Commissioner Fitzpatrick said he walks by the old school site every day. He agreed that the engineering required to build on the property would be cost prohibitive. There are five houses at 9th and Harrison and seven houses on the block to south. Higher density zoning in that area just seems out of place because the neighborhood is an island of R-2 surrounded by R-1 zoning. He was also concerned about the level of traffic along Irving and 11th.

Director Cronin asked if attached single-family units with shared courtyards, like townhouses or row houses, seemed appropriate in that neighborhood. Commissioner Fitzpatrick said he would be first in line if a development like that was built, but that neighborhood would not be the right place for it. However, he has never been able to come up with a viable use for the old school property either. A single-family unit on a 50-foot by 100-foot lot would be the best option.

Director Cronin said Astoria only has a few developers, primarily single-family home builders. The local business community does not have the capacity to support the City's efforts.

Leanne Wilma asked if the Planning Commission had made a final decision on the medical marijuana shop in Westport. Vice President Easom said Westport was out of Astoria's jurisdiction. Director Cronin explained that the Clatsop County Planning Commission would make the decision. He suggested she contact Heather Hanson, Clatsop County Community Development Director.

Jay Rosen, 934 Irving, Astoria, said his Victorian house fronts the Central School property. He understood the desire for more housing, but the City cannot shoehorn a solution into a property. The school property is in a historic district surrounded by neighbors that have spent a considerable amount of time, money, and resources to improve their homes. There is no discussion about the existing neighborhood's investment. Homes in the neighborhood have been converted from second homes to primary residences and residents have made the conscious decision to spend money on their properties. Discussions about potential development are secondary to the people who already live there and the City should talk to the residents of the neighborhood. At some point, the City will have to make a decision about the old school property. The proposed changes to lot sizes and heights make him wonder about the end goal. He asked how much of an increase in housing stock the City believed the Code amendments would attain. Director Cronin said the private housing market determines development, not the City. The City must figure out how to ensure the development conforms to the Development Code. The proposed changes are meant to allow other types of development to occur in Astoria. There is no end goal. Astoria just needs more housing opportunities. The City is 15 acres short of the required 20-year supply of buildable land, but the State does not mandate a specific number of housing units. There is no production going on in Astoria right now.

Mr. Covell asked what the City would do if the old school property was not used. Director Cronin said the City would not have to do anything. The property has already been counted as vacant land. Mr. Covell asked how the City would comply with State standards if the property were not part of the mix. He understood the City was trying to change the Codes to make the property desirable for a developer, which would be a good idea only if the development were suitable to the community.

Director Cronin explained that Astoria is required to review its Buildable Lands Inventory (BLI) every few years and determine how much land is available. Right now, Astoria is 15 acres short. He noted the most recent inventory was conducted in 2011 and a summary of the inventory was included in Attachment 2 of the Staff report. All zone changes have to be accounted for. The proposed Code amendments will help the City comply with the State's requirements.

Mr. Covell asked how the City would overcome the 15-acre shortage if the old school property did not exist. Director Cronin explained that the City is not in the business of buying property.

Mr. Rosen noted the school property was about one acre, so even if it were developed it would only account for six percent of the 15-acre shortage.

Mr. Covell said that would leave 14 acres, which is not that bad. Director Cronin stated he could not put a value on the shortage.

Mr. Rosen understood that meeting State standards through ADUs, tiny homes, and changes to heights have been proposed because there is not a lot of land. He believed Astoria should efficiently use what is currently available.

Vice President Easom clarified that no proposals had been made on the old school property. Director Cronin added the proposed amendments were not specifically designed to develop that property. Mr. Rosen understood, but said the amendments would still apply to the property.

Beth LaFleur, 938 Kensington, Astoria, said she has lived at her current residence for almost 17 years. She owns two lots that overlook the Central School site. She understood that the BLI and housing units were two separate things, but the BLI has been mentioned as justification for the proposed Code amendments. When a community runs out of buildable lands or has a deficit, an urban growth boundary or land reserve can allow for expansion. There are so many issues addressed by the proposed amendments that she has found it difficult to write a comment letter in response. Multi-family units are already allowed in the R-2 and R-3 zones, so she did not understand why different housing types were being referred to as a use. It is difficult to tease out what is really important because there is so much going on in the proposed amendments. This is a cannon ball approach to addressing affordable housing and the proposed changes are a big deal for Astoria. She wanted to know what other communities were doing to address affordable housing. Portland has more staff and resources, but they are struggling with the same issue. So, why is Astoria going through the same motions? She suggested Astoria look at communities with effective tools for dealing with affordable housing. Once the height limits are raised, they cannot be lowered. Some of the changes could have unintended consequences, like an increase in demolition requests. She was opposed to changing the height, lot coverage, setbacks, and density. Allowing more people on a single-family lot is still increasing density. The existing regulatory framework works well and can be used to target specific sites to provide housing opportunities. Astoria has planned unit development codes, variances, conditional uses, and the City could change institutional zones to residential zones. She wanted to know what variances had been granted for. She did not understand why the City would change everything if there were just one specific problem area. She was opposed to removing regulations to make it easier for out of town developers or speculators to develop at higher densities. Some companies buy a house, fix it up, and rent it out, which she agreed did not work in Astoria's zoning. The proposed amendments to the zones do not appear to have a direct benefit to Astoria's residents and seem to be targeted to the vacant, underutilized, or undeveloped lands. If the purpose is to add housing units to the market, perhaps the derelict building Code could be utilized more effectively and incentivize property owners to fix up or sell their properties. If the problem is landlords that rent low quality housing at market rates, landlords could be incentivized to invest in upkeep and upgrades. Increasing lot coverage will not impact Astoria's existing housing stock. The definition of an ADU should be broader and the community should discuss what makes sense in the current environment. Without very careful consideration, deliberation, and a much more visible and longer community conversation, these Code amendments will make Astoria look like a miniature Portland with outside investment, price out the working class community, and threaten the historic charm and character. Astoria has an authentic environment because of careful and deliberate development, planning, and community involvement. Increasing density while relaxing standards may result in increased demolitions and big ugly buildings everywhere.

Mike Sensenbach, 110 Kensington, Astoria, said tiny homes are cost effective in part because they are not subject to any building codes. He confirmed that they would still be considered a manufactured home and not subject to building codes even after being placed on a permanent foundation. Director Cronin added that tiny homes would have to be connected to utilities and must be built to recreational vehicle or Housing and Urban Development (HUD) standards that currently apply to manufactured homes. Tiny homes are built off site and it will be up to the private market to decide how to meet the standards. The City is allowing a property owner to locate a tiny home on their lot under certain conditions.

Andria Mazzarella, 875 Franklin, Astoria, said she was concerned that there is no definition of affordable or work force housing for the City to use when holding developers accountable. Director Cronin said the terms were defined in the housing study, which could be found on the City's housing project website. Ms. Mazzarella stated the median income of home owners was \$44,000 while the median income of renters was \$25,000. She was

concerned that the proposed amendments would just create non-profit housing. The State prevents cities from creating any kind of rent control, but she believed there were efforts to change this. She asked if the City would support rent control measures if they were allowed. Director Cronin said if the State granted the authority to implement rent controls, City Council would have the opportunity to consider it as a potential solution for Astoria. However, he did not believe this would ever happen. Housing costs increase when rents are controlled. Unless the City enters into a public/private partnership like the one it has with the Astor Hotel, the City cannot control housing costs.

Linda Oldencamp, 1676 Jerome, Astoria, said she just heard about this meeting a week ago and wanted to know if she had missed anything that was published in the newspaper. Director Cronin said the *Daily Astorian* had originally planned to publish a story to help advertise this proposal. However, the story was pulled because the public hearing was postponed. He had done outreach with several organizations and people who came to City Hall. Town hall meetings were not part of the original proposal, so this work session was scheduled to allow public comments.

Ms. Oldencamp said the proposal really needed to be advertised in the newspaper. She was not in any of the organizations Director Cronin spoke with and neighborhoods all over Astoria need to know about the proposed amendments. She was concerned and said it was not good to publish a press release when the community has not heard anything about the proposal. She has been involved in the preservation movement since the beginning and has lived in Astoria since 1976. She had always been enamored with the architecture in this little fishing village and it took a long time for the community to figure out what it had. The Lower Columbia Preservation Society (LCPS) had to convince people that their homes were incredible and little by little, people finally became proud to live in an old historic house. There is still a very strong feeling in the community that Astoria is unique. She was very disturbed by tonight's discussion. She had not read the proposed amendments, but she believed they would change the character and fabric of the community. She hoped this would be published in the newspaper because people in the community need to know what the City is considering. She also hoped the Planning Commission would slow down and consider what the people in the neighborhoods want their community to be.

Director Cronin said he would make changes based on Planning Commission and public comments made at this meeting. Whether a public hearing or work session is scheduled for May is yet to be determined. Vice President Easom believed Amendment 16-01 was ready for a public hearing. If Staff believes Amendment 16-02 was ready for action, it should be added to the agenda as public hearing. Director Cronin said he would speak with City Council first.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the work session was adjourned at 9:17 pm.

APPROVED:



Community Development Director