

Meeting Agenda of the City and Borough of Juneau
Title 49 Committee of the Planning Commission

Thursday, October 8, 2020
Community Development Department
Virtual & Telephonic Meeting

Members Present: Nathaniel Dye, Joshua Winchell, Erik Pedersen, Travis Arndt

Members Absent: Weston Eiler

Commissioners Present: Paul Voelckers

Staff Present: Jill Maclean (CDD Director), Alexandra Pierce (CDD Planning Manager), Irene Gallion (CDD Senior Planner), Allison Eddins (CDD Planner), Laurel Christian (CDD Planner)

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 12:03 P.M.

II. Approval of Agenda

MOTION: *by Mr. Arndt to approve the agenda.*

The motion passed with no objection

III. Approval of Minutes

A. Draft Minutes March 5, 2020 Title 49 Committee Meeting

MOTION: *by Mr. Arndt to approve the March 5, 2020 minutes.*

The motion passed with no objection.

B. Draft Minutes September 10, 2020 Title 49 Committee Meeting

MOTION: *by Mr. Arndt to approve the September 10, 2020 minutes.*

The motion passed with no objection.

I. Agenda Topics

A. Landscaping & Vegetative Cover

Ms. Eddins discussed the memo provided to the Committee.

Mr. Arndt suggested using “porous pavement” not “concrete” to open up the materials that may be used.

Mr. Dye recommended using the wording “porous hardscaping used to control water”. Mr. Arndt agreed.

Mr. Winchell asked why are porous pavement would be added to the purposes of vegetative cover.

Ms. Eddins responded stating with the purpose statement, Staff wants to define what vegetative cover is. The idea is that vegetative cover is for storm water control, not aesthetics. This gives developers options other than live planting to control storm water.

Ms. Pierce added that current provisions do not define what vegetative cover is, or landscaping. Many other jurisdictions do. Vegetative cover is for storm water management and landscaping is for aesthetics. Not having a definition or purpose makes it difficult for applicants to know how to meet the requirements. Having the purpose statements and lists of included items will help applicants know what we expect them to install for the purposes of landscaping or vegetative cover.

Mr. Winchell asked what Staff means when they say porous pavement.

Ms. Eddins stated porous pavement is a specific kind of material that allows water to seep through it. This does not mean standard concrete with storm drains every few feet; it is a specific surface.

Mr. Arndt asked if the purpose statements are adopted, what happens next? Is the plan to go back and determine how to quantify things and make standards?

Ms. Maclean replied that this amendment will run with Auke Bay Area Plan code amendment. Ms. Pierce agreed, because the Auke Bay Area Plan code amendment has landscaping bonuses. The plan is to eventually go back and set standards.

Mr. Arndt asked how these lists/purpose statements are being used. Is it so the applicant can use the materials until the rest of the language is written?

Ms. Maclean said there are not many requirements currently in Code, other than how much vegetative cover to provide. She anticipates people will use the purpose statement to meet the minimum vegetative cover requirements.

Mr. Arndt stated he was fine moving forward with this now, as long as there is an intent to revisit the standards. He Agreed we will use vegetative cover requirement percentages for now.

Mr. Dye recommended changing the last sentence of the purpose statement to read “porous hardscaping”.

B. Downtown Juneau Parking

Ms. Gallion discussed the memo provided to the Committee for this meeting and the previous meeting that was cancelled. The contextual goal is to spur development. She also discussed the Parking Management Plan that was adopted into the Comprehensive Plan and the recommendations within. Ms. Gallion asked the committee how they would like to move forward and what information they need to inform Code changes.

Mr. Voelckers stated the downtown Parking Management Plan is for on-street parking. There is not much for off-street parking. He noted that Staff had asked Commissioners to look at parking requirements for new development. He asked if there is a functional connection between street parking and meeting off-street parking requirements.

Ms. Gallion agreed and added that there are operational constraints for on-street and public parking. If off-street parking requirements for private property are reduced, there may be operational issues for on-street parking.

Ms. Pierce stated the Blueprint Downtown Steering Committee discussed parking and found if barriers to development are lowered, this may create a demand/need for better parking management on-street. Reducing barriers to development through parking reductions is a first step and parking management is a second step.

Mr. Dye asked if the Blueprint Downtown plan has enough background on parking downtown to help inform the committee.

Ms. Pierce replied that the project doesn't need to be completed. Most of the discussion is about parking management and at a high level. The plan is at a rough draft. These off-street discussions may help inform what is in the plan.

Mr. Arndt stated he does like the fee-in-lieu parking option being a choice – it allows for a relief valve. A good way to capture the money, and actually use it, is needed. Mr. Arndt stated that he is not in favor of getting rid of fee-in-lieu parking, but he would be interested in discussing a different number for the fee. He further stated that he has difficulties with developers saying how much parking they need for their development, and that parking is getting pushed to the streets that are congested. Developers should provide some parking, not necessarily as much, but he is not in favor of no parking requirements.

Mr. Winchell agreed with Mr. Arndt. Mr. Winchell added that we need more on-street parking enforcement and that he likes the idea of fee-in-lieu parking. He believes people are over using on-street parking for commercial operations.

Ms. Maclean replied that there is a legal opinion that the City cannot set up a fund just for fee-in-lieu or tickets from on-street parking similar to an enterprise account; so these fees go into the general fund. Ms. Maclean added that she doesn't think we need to wait for changes to operations to start making Code change. Changes to Code are the first step, which could push enforcement to the next level. She also added that developments not in the parking districts can get parking waivers; people downtown can't due to the PD1 and PD2 parking districts. There is an equity issue based on location (downtown versus the valley). Downtown already has challenges to development, so fee-in-lieu parking seems inequitable. Another consideration could be eliminating the PD1 and PD2 parking districts and allowing waivers to what the development actually needs.

Mr. Dye stated there is an inherent value to land downtown, so he doesn't see an inequity. He also doesn't believe waivers are always down to zero. Mr. Dye agreed there would be a value to allowing waivers downtown. Zero parking does not make sense, but a reduction may.

Mr. Arndt added that downtown already gets a reduction that other areas don't for the PD1 and PD2 districts just for location. He is not in favor of parking waivers; most are for residences. Mr. Arndt noted that waivers are not automatic; you must apply and meet a threshold, but reductions for location based on the PD1 and PD2 parking districts are automatic.

Mr. Dye asked if fee-in-Lieu parking is automatic or if it must be approved.

Ms. Maclean stated that it depends on the number of spaces, but requires Director or Planning Commission approval.

Mr. Dye asked if reductions for PD1 and PD2 are automatic.

Staff did not have an answer at this time.

Ms. Pierce stated that direction from the Assembly came from concern about fee-in-lieu parking in its current state – it is prohibitive to development – and the Assembly sees it as a cost barrier to development.

Mr. Dye asked what projects drove the Assembly to this opinion.

Ms. Maclean recalled four projects: the Archipelago project, the 2nd Street and Franklin CBJ project, the residential Gastineau 70 units project, and another that she could not remember the location.

Mr. Dye asked if one was commercial and the rest were residential.

Ms. Maclean replied they were mixed use and housing.

Mr. Dye asked if these projects are entry level/workforce housing. If so, a low cost to create dense units is needed.

Mr. Voelckers added that he thinks it's wrong to say the Assembly doesn't agree with fee-in-lieu. He believes it's just a tool used to meet the parking requirement and believes that fee-in-lieu parking is a bargain compared to building a parking garage. He does not think fee-in-lieu parking is the issue; the true issue is whether parking in the downtown area is allowed or not, and how much parking is required. People can put their parking underground, so land is not the only constraint. An established business was built with no parking, and is critically dependent on the on-street availability of parking. On the other hand, Mr. Voelckers does not believe that new development will be seen without some reductions to off-street parking requirements.

Mr. Pedersen agreed with Mr. Voelckers. The fee-in-lieu parking program transfers maintenance of parking spaces to the City. On-street parking needs to be maintained. He also agrees that fee-in-lieu parking is a bargain, compared to long-term maintenance of off-street parking.

Mr. Winchell stated that centralized parking should be encouraged. We should also encourage people that use on-street parking long term to use centralized parking. Long-term parking that is clustering on-street parking needs to be addressed. Mr. Winchell also agreed with Mr. Voelckers and Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Arndt agreed with the legal opinion, but noted that the Assembly can decide how to spend general funds. The Commission can tell the Assembly that money is being collected for parking and they need to allocate money to parking solutions. Mr. Arndt stated that it doesn't matter where you are in the Borough, parking drives what you can develop. Parking requirements control size and number of units, and mixture of types. He added that the 2nd Street and Franklin Street project was trying to have enough parking for the development itself, but for a CBJ public parking lot, as well. Unfortunately, the project could not accommodate both.

Ms. Maclean replied that other states can create a specific account for parking money received. The Commission can recommend setting up a fund in a separate manner, or a separate budget, or as a Capital Improvement Project. We can track what is coming in and ask that general fund money be spent on parking. She also added that some non-profit projects ask for money from the CBJ Assembly – private developers may not be able to ask for money from the Assembly. Private developments don't have as much grant opportunities as non-profits do.

Mr. Dye asked what Staff needed from the Committee to continue working on this.

Ms. Maclean replied that variances got tighter, so we created parking waivers. The Assembly sees parking regulations as a challenge to development. She asked the committee how can we eliminate downtown challenges or should it stay as it is?

Mr. Dye replied that this has to be hand in hand with active management of on-street parking.

Mr. Voelckers asked staff what we would have done for the archipelago project? If we approved no parking, this may not be equitable to other existing merchants that do not have off-street parking and rely on on-street parking.

Ms. Maclean replied that developers need to have better arguments on variance in the current code. Existing buildings that are currently half vacant don't have to provide parking if they are within the existing building, even if they add a new business and need more parking. Ms. Maclean states she was not opposed to a downtown core with no parking requirements and believes it may lead to a revitalization and redevelopment of downtown.

Mr. Arndt asked if the committee needed to have this conversation with the assembly or their liaison? He added that Many downtowns don't have parking, some come up with creative ways to supply it. If we change parking requirements, it could create new problems. Does the assembly want us to change the number, or help with management?

Ms. Pierce added that developers do not always help themselves by asking for no parking requirements. CDD has not always been consistent with parking regulations and has created ways to get around them. If we have parking requirements and we are creating mechanisms to get around them, maybe the parking requirements are not correct. Zero parking in some areas may be helpful if we have management. Looking at where fee in lieu is allowed and how much is costs is also another good option. The assembly has heard the problem and is relying on the commission to have an in depth conversation to come up with a recommendation. A helpful first step would be to analysis the issues that the assembly has identified.

Mr. Winchell added that there is a vacant AELP lot downtown that could help relieve parking pressures through a lease. He believes the City should look at land opportunities for relieving parking pressures and creating public off-street parking.

Mr. Voelckers likes a zero parking requirement for portions of downtown. We would need a significant educational process. Urban centers economically do very well, but we need an educational process. Waterfront property downtown is very expensive. Surface parking is not developed on land that valuable, it's not economical.

Mr. Winchell added that the City should look at large properties to subsidize parking to relieve parking pressures and create more centralized parking.

Ms. Gallion stated that the Assembly's direction to the Committee is Code amendments. The Parks and Recreation Department is willing to have discussions on operations, but should inform the Assembly.

Mr. Dye read the charge of the Assembly to the Planning Commission. He asked how is public comment being received and factored into those Code changes.

Ms. Gallion asked if the Committee wanted information on variances and parking waivers.

Mr. Dye replied that it would be helpful and asked for next steps.

Ms. Maclean asked what the committee wanted to see next. She doesn't believe it is ready for public input, because the sense of the direction of the Committee is unknown at this time.

Mr. Voelckers wanted to more thought to the options.

Mr. Arndt wanted to speak to the Assembly at a meeting, to discuss what they would like the Committee to look at.

Mr. Pedersen agreed with Mr. Arndt. He would also like to discuss the options in the memo and make a decision on them.

Mr. Winchell wanted to send action back to the City. He would like to ask Assembly to set up a fund and find a way to set up centralized parking areas and meter parking areas. Mr. Winchell would also like to look into land options for CBJ public parking.

Mr. Voelckers supported Mr. Arndt's comments.

Ms. Maclean discussed Assembly meeting dates and noted that meeting with the Assembly may not be possible until February. Staff can ask for more feedback from the Assembly, but they have already given a direction to look at parking; they want to see recommendations from the Planning Commission on how to address parking as a challenge.

Ms. Pierce would like to look at the options in the memo at the next meeting to narrow down possibilities, then get public opinion on the options.

Mr. Dye agreed and stated that he wants to ensure the Committee is working within the charge of the assembly.

Mr. Voelckers thought it would be useful for Staff to pull examples from developments where there is an economic case for allowing no parking. He would like to see examples of economic analysis in downtown zones in relation to zero parking.

C. Prioritization of Land Use Revisions Underway

This item was continued to the next meeting.

II. Committee Member Comments and Questions

Next meeting date: October 29 at 12 P.M.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:27 P.M.