

Comprehensive Plan Committee of the Planning Commission

Tuesday, May 29, 2018, 6:00 pm
Marine View, 4th Floor Conference Room

Members Present:

Andrew Campbell, Nathaniel Dye, Ben Haight, Dan Hickok, Mike LeVine, Dan Miller

Members Absent:

None

Other Officials Present:

Beth Weldon – Assembly

Paul Voelckers – Planning Commission

Staff Present:

Laura Boyce, Jill Maclean, Beth McKibben, Laurel Bruggeman, Bhagavati Braun

I) Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 6:05 pm.

II) Approval of Agenda

Approved

III) Approval of Minutes

Approved with changes

IV) Agenda Topics

a) Review of Committee Purpose

Mr. LeVine began the meeting by restating the Committee's purpose: to provide a recommendation to the Assembly regarding how to move forward in updating the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. LeVine stated that he sees this Committee as a short lived one that will deliver a set of recommendations to the Assembly. Mr. Voelckers added that the Committee is not intended to solve a problem, but to ascertain if there is a problem to solve, and to recommend how to do so if that is the case. Mr. LeVine continued that he would like to review the CBJ Comprehensive Plan and other adopted plans as well as look over plans from other jurisdictions to help inform the Committee's recommendations.

Mr. Voelckers asked if Ms. Weldon could inform the Committee about the Assembly's thoughts on this project. Ms. Weldon stated that she has heard the public state that the current Comprehensive Plan is cumbersome and outdated. She would like to see where it needs to be updated and update those places. She stated that the term cumbersome is subjective, and noted that it could be difficult to make a Comprehensive Plan that is much smaller, so would like to focus on the outdated parts of the document and update those. Ms. Weldon continued that the cumbersome element specifically relates to how adopted plans work together and confusion over what to do when the plans are duplicative or contradict each other. Mr. LeVine echoed Ms. Weldon, saying that it is not clear how adopted plans relate to each other and to the Comprehensive Plan. He added that the format of the plan is difficult to navigate online, and a search of the Comprehensive Plan may leave you without the full knowledge if part of what you were looking for is in another adopted plan. Mr. LeVine continued stating that the current Plan could be used to justify a wide range of development, saying that may be the right thing, but he would like to

address this issue. He stated that he thinks this Comprehensive Plan has stayed largely in the same format and model since it was conceived and he would like to strive for a more user friendly, useful, and inclusive Plan.

Ms. Weldon asked what staff thinks of the current Plan. Ms. McKibben stated that she certainly uses hers. She added that she would find an implementation table helpful to help see all of the actions, and to note progress more easily. She stated that a table could be a useful tool for others outside the department, both the public and other departments within the CBJ. Ms. McKibben continued that the current Plan looks a lot like it did in the 1980s, adding that the example plans provided have a lot more graphics and white space, many of the example plans have background or actions in separate documents. Ms. Maclean agreed with Ms. McKibben, adding that she thinks it's time for a new Plan. She continued stating that the community has changed a lot since the original Plan was written in the 1980s and has outgrown the current Plan. She stated that the current Plan lacks the more visionary aspect that the CBJ could use, it gets lost in the details which should live in the area plans or other specialized plans. She added that the Comprehensive Plan should be the umbrella that captures all of those smaller plans and the Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

Ms. McKibben stated that one of her frustrations in using the current Plan is the maps. She stated that she would like to revisit the Future Land Use Designations, adding that these designations, instead of being aspirational, are a reflection of the current use of the area. She added that there may be too many of these designations. Mr. Miller stated that he was on the Planning Commission (PC) for the first major revision of the Plan in 2006-2008. He stated that at the time the PC was split, the two sides were in conflict and that is why the Plan is written so broadly with strong protection for the natural environment and strong protections for development (for example). He stated that it was a struggle to make everyone happy and compromises had to be made. He also added that he agrees with Ms. McKibben that the maps need more work.

Mr. LeVine asked if the rewrite he referenced was an update or a fundamental rethinking. Ms. McKibben answered that the department hired a planner specifically to update the Plan, stating that we have many of the tiles from the work she did, the outreach and other efforts during the time. She added that the effort was intended to be a rewrite, but it didn't result in a full overhaul. Ms. McKibben continued that the update in 2011-2013 was intended to be an update on data.

Mr. LeVine stated that the community generally agrees on general principles, but not how to get there, suggesting that the Comprehensive Plan might be better containing those general principles. He thanked Mr. Miller for his comments.

Mr. Campbell stated that he thought the Committee is on the right track, he would like to update how the Plan is delivered to the public stating that he hadn't heard complaints on the content of the plan but on the outdated and cumbersome nature of the document. He continued that changing the content could be difficult, but changing the format could be a simple solution. Mr. LeVine supported Mr. Campbell's statement adding that he is confident that there are better mechanisms for delivering the Plan. He continued that he would like to look at the more substantive questions of how the plans relate to each other; how plans adopted by ordinance versus adopted by resolution apply; and how progress on the goals of the plan are measured. He added that the Committee might want to look at the Plan in detail and find where there are clear issues of duplication that should be harmonized, as well as looking for other substantive issues. Mr. Dye asked if there was a flowchart that outlined the plans' importance, Ms. McKibben stated that one does not exist, but could be created. Mr. Hickok stated that he would like to see a flowchart, and that it could be helpful for other users of the plans as well.

Mr. Voelckers brought up protected views, asking how the Comprehensive Plan might handle an issue like this moving forward.

b) Discussion on Model Plans

Ms. McKibben gave a presentation which highlighted the table of contents for a number of model plans, she gave her presentation, listing some of the notes from the table (see packet) that listed all of the model plans and some of their attributes. Below follows some notes on specific plans that were discussed:

- Boise – Mr. LeVine stated he liked the relationship noted between the plan and zoning ordinances.
- Sika – Mr. LeVine liked the information on their website, specifically information about their approach to writing the plan.
- Anchorage – This plan won APA awards and explains its relationship to other plans well. Mr. Miller stated his interest in looking more closely at this plan; Mr. LeVine added that we could probably call them and talk with them about their process. Ms. McKibben stated that Anchorage wrote this plan partially using consultants, but mostly in house. She added that the director who undertook the project was now gone but a few of the planners are probably around. Ms. McKibben continued speaking to the APA's Comprehensive Plan Standards for Sustaining Places, relating it to LEED certification – bodies can earn medals for how well their plans align with the framework. Ms. McKibben added that she could send a link of the criteria to Committee members.

Mr. LeVine discussed document length and that certain sections seem superfluous to the plan, such as “how we made the plan” sections. Ms. McKibben added that some plans have pulled the technical information and appendixes out of the main plan.

Mr. LeVine brought up the Comprehensive Plans relation to other plans asking if all of the plans are supposed to agree. Ms. McKibben stated that the CBJ's Comprehensive Plan has competing policies and suggested the direction of weighing these competing policies and making decisions based on that. She gave the example of the housing chapter in the Plan, stating that it was updated in 2013, but it wasn't a substantial rewrite. The Housing Action Plan (HAP) came out of that and is more focused on housing, and is at a greater level of detail than the Comprehensive Plan's chapter. Ms. McKibben cited the Lemon Creek Area Plan as another “finer grain” plan that echoes the Comprehensive Plan's broader ideas, stating that Ms. Maclean's writing of the Lemon Creek Area Plan was well thought out in how it related to the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Voelckers added his support for the implementation steps that were included in the Lemon Creek Area Plan.

Committee members asked if there is a level of precedence between the different plans. Ms. McKibben replied that all of the plans carry the same weight. Committee members again asked if a future rewrite would be bound by existing adopted plans, stating that if the plans were all in concert it wouldn't matter which takes precedence, but voicing concern for conflicts between plans. Ms. Maclean replied that most bodies would be in a similar situation where multiple plans exist and each new one will reflect those, but also push them forward. She pointed to the example of downtown where there are many plans that affect the whole area, the Blueprint Downtown process plans to analyze them all and create some organization and harmony between the many plans, and hopefully push the borough further with the new plan. Ms. McKibben echoed this by stating the new document can be a framework for moving forward, and during the process it may be found that some plans are less relevant.

Mr. LeVine stated that some of the plans have been superseded and not removed from the adopted plans. He noted issues about each of the plans, how they relate to each other, hoping that the rewrite could see where the documents are redundant, conflicting, and where the holes are. Mr. Voelckers stated three categories that he could see: area plans that have greater specificity; old plans that are no longer applicable; and current still germane plans that disagree, stating that some of these plans are in conflict so cannot be reconciled. Mr. LeVine noted that one of the Committees recommendations could be to identify the problems and attempt to smooth them over.

Mr. Hickok asked if anyone could foresee problems hiring a consultant. Ms. Weldon surmised that the Assembly could be amenable if there is a solid plan for the consultant's work. Mr. LeVine stated that whether or not a consultant is hired the project will take an outlay of funds and time. He laid out three steps for this Committee to take: do we have to make changes to the plan; why do we have to; and how do we make changes.

Mr. Dye stated his desire to undertake changes to the plan and to have a more succinct document, perhaps with appendixes in a separate document to make it more user-friendly.

Mr. Hickok asked if the city could easily make the current Plan more technologically up-to-date. Mr. LeVine stated that the city doesn't seem to have those strengths, adding that that could be a good use of a consultant.

The Committee looked at the Anchorage Plan online:

Mr. LeVine liked that before opening the plan on the website there are descriptions and ways to access the document by chapter. He asked if the history of a town is something that needs to live in a Comprehensive Plan. Ms. Maclean stated that it can be inclusive of a places heritage, showing where the area came from and where it is headed, adding that it makes for a more interesting document. Ms. McKibben stated that background and implementation could be housed in a separate document. Mr. Voelckers stated that he liked the snapshot of the economic plan (last page of Chapter 3 of the Anchorage plan). Mr. LeVine liked that all of the goals and actions for the plan were on three pages, adding that the measurements and implementations could add ease of use for the Planning Commission and the Department.

Mr. Voelckers asked staff if they view a good comprehensive plan as a terminal document or a more diffuse document that is meant to set the area up for more detailed action or area plans. Ms. McKibben stated that it could be either one; and Ms. Maclean stated her preference for the latter.

The Committee looked at the Spokane Valley Plan online:

Of note were their pull-out boxes and their tourism section. Ms. McKibben added that Olympia also had some good strategies for aging and homeless populations.

The Committee looked at the Sitka Draft Plan online:

Of note were their community engagement efforts, the website with a lot of info before you open the plan, and the Comprehensive Plan and Technical Plan.

The Committee looked at the Portland, ME Plan online:

Of note was its executive summary, its 92 pages of plan, with a large appendix, the color and graphics, public participation, and their discussion of other plans (page 20).

Mr. LeVine asked if doing a new plan is out of the question. Ms. Maclean stated that doing a new plan would allow for a lot of outreach and community building, both with the public and between CBJ departments. Ms. McKibben agreed, voicing her support for an implementation table to aid CDD and other departments in following through with the plan and using it more effectively. Mr. LeVine asked Ms. Weldon what she thought of a revision/update/new plan. Ms. Weldon replied that the name of it is less important to her, that if the city needs it then we should do it. Mr. Voelckers voiced support for bringing other departments in, so they have buy-in and use the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Dye stated that some of the chapters in the current Plan don't seem to belong there. Ms. McKibben stated that some states require certain chapters so this level of detail would need some more information; she added that the chapters in this document were created through the public process so the community must have wanted them.

Mr. LeVine stated his sense of the room was to move toward a new Comprehensive Plan more like some of the model plans that the Committee liked. Ms. Weldon offered that her idea Comprehensive Plan would be one that is a skeleton with the smaller plans filling in the muscles. Mr. Hickok agreed, stating that the Plan should be an umbrella over the borough that allows each community or stakeholder group develop plans for their specific area or interest.

Mr. Campbell suggested this could be two separate processes; creating a more internet friendly version and creating substantive changes to the Plan. Mr. LeVine stated he would like to figure out the next step before answering that, he thought there might be a hybrid, and that this decision might be up to the Assembly. He added that it might be one large process with both of the above outcomes. He then stated that he is hearing support from the Committee on moving forward with a new plan, and that the next steps are to determine the reasons why we want to do this and what we hope to accomplish in this process. He also called for the group to determine how they would like to proceed. He asked staff to pull the best parts of the model plans and make some recommendations on how to move forward. This will all aid in our recommendation to the Assembly.

The Committee was still concerned about how to tie in other adopted plans and how to make the Plan more user friendly in the short and long term. Mr. Voelckers and Mr. LeVine voiced their support for community input aiding in creating both a better document and a more accessible one. Mr. Dye echoed this stating that beautifying the Plan now, knowing it will be replaced soon, might be a wasted effort. He voiced his preference for sticking to content and why the Committee wants to change it, stating that the mechanisms for how it will look aren't in the Committee's hands until the Assembly approves changes anyway.

Mr. LeVine suggested that he work with Ms. McKibben to draft a recommendation to the Assembly that explains why what the Committee wants is necessary, shows a few models of plans and public process, and gives a flavor for what the Committee thinks would be an effective process for this.

Mr. Hickok added three goals: to be user friendly; cut the fat; and have a better grasp on how the plans relate. Mr. Campbell stated his preference for giving the Assembly a few options including smaller more user-friendly update.

Mr. Voelckers asked staff to look at the plans they find the best and see if they can find a range of costs for their creation, he suggested Ms. McKibben and Mr. LeVine choose which plans to use. Mr. Dye suggested that the Committee lay out options for the Assembly including public process, budget, and staff involvement.

Mr. LeVine suggested that the Assembly and Ms. Maclean might work together to come up with a direction for this process. Ms. McKibben spoke to the many in-house issues including multiple large scale plans being undertaken currently. Mr. LeVine asked that Ms. McKibben help him draft a plan that highlights the constraints in the Department in addition to what the Committee is looking for. Ms. McKibben and Mr. LeVine were to schedule a meeting to draft this document for the rest of the Committee to review.

c) How Ancillary Plans are Adopted as Part of Overall Comprehensive Plan

V) Committee Member Questions...

Next Meeting: Tentatively before the regular Planning Commission Meeting on June 26 at 5:30 PM.

VI) Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:52 pm.