

Plan Implementation and the Role of the Planning Commission

Lloyd Skinner, AICP
Northwest Regional Director
ESA Adolfson
(and former LFP Planning Commission Chair)

September 9, 2009 – Bothell, Washington

AGENDA

- The Final Link: the “Planning Pyramid”**
 - Tools for Implementation**
 - Role of the Planning Commission**
 - Effective Meetings**
 - Relationships**
-

The Planning Pyramid

Community Development



Community Conversation

The Planning Pyramid

Community Development



Community Conversation

Tools for Implementation: Development Regulations

- Zoning ordinance
- Subdivision ordinance
- Development standards (streets, sidewalks, water and sewer systems, storm water, lighting, etc...)
- Shorelines Regs
- Environmental/Critical Areas codes
- Design Guidelines (optional)

Tools for Implementation: Zoning

- The “classic” planning tool
 - Can regulate and restrict uses, or require “mixed use”
 - Can regulate building size and location, etc.
 - Other options:
 - Floor area ratio
 - Density (dwellings per acre; min. lot sizes)
 - Parking ratios (# of spaces per 1000 sq ft)
 - Private and public open space requirements
 - Innovative approaches often include
 - “Form-based” codes
 - “New urbanism”
 - Design guidelines
 - LEED ND
-

Tools for Implementation: Capital Budgeting

- **Comp plan** identifies an area as commercial
 - **Water/sewer system plans** have appropriately sized system extensions to serve it
 - **Capital facilities element** describes a 6-year financial plan for construction of improvements
 - **Annual budget** reflects those costs
-

Role of the Planning Commission - Authority

RCW 35A.63.020

Planning agency -- Creation -- Powers and duties -- Conflicts of interest.

- “By ordinance a code city may create a planning agency and provide for its membership, organization, and expenses. ***The planning agency shall serve in an advisory capacity*** to the chief administrative officer or the legislative body, or both...
 - If any person or persons on a planning agency concludes that he has a ***conflict of interest or an appearance of fairness problem with respect to a matter pending before the agency*** so that he cannot discharge his duties on such an agency, he shall disqualify himself from participating in the deliberations and the decision-making process with respect to the matter. ...”
-

Role of the Planning Commission – Besides State Law, Why Have Them?

- ❑ Allow for an *in-depth examination* of issues.
 - ❑ Serve as a *communication channel* between elected officials and the community.
 - ❑ Bring a *broad range of ideas and expertise* to public decision making.
 - ❑ Assist in *resolving conflicts*.
 - ❑ Provide *training for new leaders*.
-

Role of the Planning Commission – Developing Credibility

- Be *knowledgeable* (Expand your technical expertise; be familiar with agenda items)
 - Be *clear* about roles (of the Commission, Council, public)
 - Understand and champion *the pyramid*
-

Effective Internal Commission Meetings

Chairperson

- Be conversant in all issues
- Maintain control of the meeting
 - Stick to agenda items
 - Limit sidebars and extraneous issues
 - End on time!

All members

- Don't take things personally
- Often members are purposely appointed because of diverse views, interests, and backgrounds
- Work toward, but don't expect, unanimity

Be patient and polite

- You may have to deal with turnover, lack of preparation, disruptive behavior
-

Effective Public Meetings

Be clear about who you are and what you do. For example:

“The Planning Commission is appointed by and is advisory to the City Council on the preparation and amendment of land use plans and implementing ordinances... The Planning Commission also reviews and makes recommendations on certain permits... Planning Commissioners are selected to **represent all areas of the City** and as many ‘walks of life’ as possible.

The actions tonight are **not final** decisions; they are in the form of **recommendations to the City Council** who must ultimately make the final decision.”

Effective Public Meetings – Explain the “Rules”

- Explain the purpose of the meeting
 - Indicate who speaks first, second, etc.
 - If a large turnout, explain time limits
 - How will the decision be made? (the correct answer: based on identified criteria – not a “popularity contest”)
 - When will the decision will be made?
 - Who will receive it (how do you become a Party of Record?)
 - Is there an appeal process?
 - Should you prepare a hand-out?
-

Effective Public Meetings

- **Chairperson**
 - Be conversant in all issues
 - Ensure that all citizens have been heard
 - Maintain control of the meeting (Prevent the “shout-down”)
 - **All Commission members**
 - Don’t take things personally
 - Remember that emotions often run high on land use issues – they’re close to home!
 - Andrew Young anecdote
 - **Be patient and polite**
 - Listen to testimony, even if repetitive
-

Effective Planning Commission – Staff Relationships

- ❑ Commission/staff relationships and expectations are highly *information-based*
 - ❑ Discuss w/ staff the appropriate level of detail (too much/too little) and format of reports
 - ❑ Summary sheets for staff reports, if helpful
 - ❑ Staff has expertise, education, and experience to share
 - ❑ Staff also has other assignments and responsibilities
-

Effective Relationships - Planning Commission and Elected Officials

- Recognize the different roles each plays
 - Elected officials are much more attuned to financial/budget issues
 - City/County Council time horizon may be shorter
 - Work with Commission Chair to establish regular communication and feedback
-

Your Role on the Planning Commission



- ❑ You are on the front line in helping your community achieve its vision
 - ❑ Your contributions are invaluable (if not always recognized)
 - ❑ Celebrate your successes (when they come)
-

Thank You

**For being a Planning Commissioner
(and for coming tonight)**
