



COMMISSION FOR CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

Minutes of April 6, 2011

Members present: Chair Robert Martin, Vice Chair Michael Babbitt, Gail Holmes, Holly Miller, Laura Horsey, Christine Steel and Dean Wood

Members absent: None

Council Liaison:

Staff present: John Sonnen, Planning Director; Chris Kerr, Senior Planner; and Damian Hall, City Attorney

Chair Martin convened the meeting at 9:35 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall, 22500 Salamo Rd., West Linn, Oregon.

WORK SESSION

**Discuss Docketing Proposal**

Chair Martin invited Norm King to participate in the discussion. Commissioner Horsey questioned whether the CCI should invite public comments at work sessions and whether the public was aware they could participate in work sessions. Chair Martin observed the CCI had no formal procedure to follow. Commissioner Holmes suggested that both the Council and the CCI needed to make it clearer on their agendas when citizens were allowed to talk. Chair Martin invited anyone in the audience to participate. He indicated that keeping things less formal would help promote dialogue. Horsey suggested that people needed to know that they could speak ahead of time so they could arrange their schedules and attend the meeting. They also needed to know if the meeting would be televised, in case they were not comfortable speaking at a televised meeting. She suggested scheduling a work session to discuss what type of public participation was to be allowed. Planning Director Sonnen advised that CCI Commissioners had the flexibility to decide what procedure they wanted to use. He agreed to schedule a work session to discuss it.

Sonnen distributed his March 30, 2011 Memorandum, "Establishing a docketing process that would be used to form the long-range work program for the Planning Department, Planning Commission and Historic Review Board." He clarified that the Council supported the concept but that the implementing proposal was still in the conceptual stage. The docketing process would be different from the current process, which allowed the Council, Planning Director and the Planning Commission to initiate legislative projects and code amendments. He noted the current code required the City to process amendments requested by neighborhood associations within 60 days. He explained the benefits of the docketing process. Anyone could submit an idea at any time. The ideas would be immediately posted on the website. The staff

would periodically perform an analysis and provide a rough cost estimate for each proposal. The Planning Commission and Historic Review Board would review the proposed projects, add projects of interest and identify priorities within their purview. The Council would have regular opportunities to review and prioritize projects that competed for staffing resources. When proposed projects exceeded resources, the Council would decide what had priority and what projects got deferred or dropped. The docket would be tied to the biannual budget to give the Council the ability to fund additional projects if desired. The Council would not need to wait for the schedule if it had to deal with something urgent.

King said the docketing process sounded very complicated. Even though the current process had not had any suggestions to process, people should still be allowed to use it. The City should still be required to respond in 60 days. The City should act on the suggestions right away to maintain the proper level of citizen involvement. If a neighborhood suggested a code change it would likely be very focused and not require a lot of code to implement. The Planning Department should be able to handle it, especially now, when few subdivisions were being developed. He feared a citizen who could only complete a form and drop it in a box would feel like it dropped into a black hole. That would tend to discourage citizen involvement.

Sonnen recalled his experience with the docketing system after Washington made it mandatory. The process had elicited many ideas regarding how to improve things and resulted in a high level of citizen involvement. Some major projects were initiated as the result of citizens' suggestions. He explained the problem connected to the the required 60-day turnaround was that gave the latest idea the highest priority, consequently real priorities could be neglected. Staff already had a long list of projects to work on that would occupy them for three years. The docketing process allowed the Council to prioritize projects and move forward in the best interest of the community. He said ideas would not be dropped into a black hole. Each suggestion and its status would be posted on the internet.

Vice Chair Babbitt was concerned about turning the land use docketing system over to the Council. The Planning Commission was supposed to be an independent body. It was not supposed to move with the political breeze. Horsey was also concerned about maintaining the Planning Commission's independent authority. She would change the 60-day response time code requirement if that was not doable so that code was not ignored. She suggested citizen suggestions for small changes should be considered in more frequent reviews that did not make them compete with bigger projects. She observed that citizens were disillusioned having to wait for so long for the Planning Commission to process implementation code for their neighborhood association plans. Commissioner Steel commented that it made sense to take a long view, parse the project list into two-year segments, and allocate staff time. She suggested the staff could work on small projects while it was working on larger projects. Commissioner Miller agreed. She recalled King's concern about limiting community involvement, but she also recalled Sonnen had reported the docketing process encouraged it. She suggested trying docketing to see if it would work. The current process did not always work for her neighborhood association. Wood indicated he needed more time to think about the issue. He recalled that King's perspective was that if a citizen had something he wanted addressed it

should not fall between the cracks. But the docketing process would be transparent and give the City an opportunity to prioritize things. He was concerned that allowing the Council to directly set the docket would take away the Planning Commission's ability to initiate projects. He suggested holding joint Council/Planning Commission meetings. Chair Martin observed the docketing process could help manage the flow of citizen and Planning Commission requests. He suggested the staff allocate 80% of its resources to the docketing process but hold back 20% to use to respond to things that came up at any time. That would allow them to manage the bulk of their workload. He wanted to highlight the concern that people would feel disenfranchised if it was more difficult for them to bring their ideas to the Planning Commission. He held the Planning Commission should retain the ability to propose new code.

Sonnen observed the proposed process allowed the Council to prioritize projects, and the Council liked having the final say. He offered to draft options to test the different approaches the Commissioners suggested related to joint meetings and how to address small projects. Holmes was concerned that the docketing process would mean it would take longer for the neighborhood association to get the City to look at changing something that affected the Willamette business district, like code regarding signage or sidewalks. But because she sympathized with the Planning Staff having to deal with constant changes, she suggested the process look at citizens' ideas every six months so people did not have to wait for two years to have a code problem addressed. Babbitt recalled the Council and Planning Commission had met a few years ago when the Council agreed the Planning Commission should work on WRA code and create a task force. But recently they decided the Commission should focus on Highway 43 planning. That indicated that even when things were docketed, the Council could still change it. That could be good or bad. But land use planning was the role of the Planning Commission. Once the Council appointed a Planning Commission it should not pull projects from it without cause and politically influence what the Planning Commission was doing. There had to be separation.

King agreed the discipline imposed by a docketing system was good because it required the city to make long range plans. Big projects that took years would not be set aside to accomplish little ones. But he suggested a mixture of big and small projects so all the staff time would not be spent on the big projects. King opined that the docket that had been presented to the Council had too many redundant projects on it for the Council to process. The staff should rewrite it so it was a more understandable set and summary of projects and the staff should recommend how to prioritize it. He stressed the importance of maintaining the vehicle the neighborhood associations used to be involved and suggest code changes, even if they did not use it very often. They had official standing and they were a good sounding board for how the public felt. Sonnen explained the staff did not want to edit the docket too much. He noted the list included implementing and updating neighborhood plans. But he recalled that in this particular cycle the Council wanted to accomplish one big project over the others: Highway 43.

Chair Martin asked King to describe how the "Code Busters" group had worked when he was on the Planning Commission. King explained Code Busters was a Planning Commission standing subcommittee composed of Jody Carson, himself and staff. They only met to work on a code

change when that was requested by the Planning Commission or staff. The Council had its own method, which was to pass a motion to direct staff to work on code changes the Council wanted them to work on. The structure allowed the Planning Commission to initiate a code change. He noted it was the staff that proposed annual housekeeping amendments now. He wanted to see the Code Busters committee resurrected.

Horsey observed the docketing process had some benefits. It captured and offered a very transparent and comprehensive view of projects. People would be able to see their suggestions listed on the City website. She anticipated that would trigger even more suggestions. That might reduce the level of cynicism. The docketing process would be tied to the budget and not just be "pie in the sky." Citizens would be able to see why if their suggestions were not adopted. Steel anticipated citizens who saw their suggestions on the docket would appreciate that they had received the City's attention, even if their project did not rise to the top for a while. King agreed that "day lighting" things would help with the "transparency" problem. People would know where their suggestion was in the process.

Sonnen confirmed for Chair Martin that the CCI could advise the Council about the public involvement aspects of the proposed docketing process and the Planning Commission could forward a formal recommendation after holding a public hearing. Chair Martin indicated that he sensed there was general support for the idea. But there were a couple of areas of concern about the ability of the Planning Commission to initiate code changes and have the resources that supported doing that. He particularly noted there was support for the "day lighting" aspect of it; having a mix of large and small projects; and reviewing the ideas every six months. Sonnen indicated he would craft those options in time for the Commissioners to consider them at a Planning Commission work session.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no other business, Chair Martin adjourned the CCI meeting at 10:40 p.m.

APPROVED:

  
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Robert Martin, Chair

5/4/2011  
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Date