



PLANNING COMMISSION
Meeting Notes June 18, 2025

Commissioners present: Jason Evans Joel Metlen, Gary Walvatne, and Tom Watton. David D. Jones arrived late.
Commissioners absent: Kathryn Schulte-Hillen and Kris Kachirisky
Councilor present: Carol Bryck
Staff present: Planning Manager Darren Wyss and Administrative Assistant Teresa Howard

The meeting video is available on the [City website](#).

1. Call To Order and Roll Call

Chair Metlen called the meeting to order at 6:00pm. Planning Manager Wyss called the roll.

2. Public Comment related to Items not on the Agenda

None.

3. Work Session: Proposed CDC Clean-Up Amendments

Planning Manager Wyss delved into a series of proposed amendments to the Community Development Code (CDC), part of an ongoing effort to clarify regulatory language, align with state statutes, and enhance overall compliance. The discussion centered on what's being referred to as a CDC "cleanup"—a strategic update designed to address technical inconsistencies and improve the functionality of land use regulations.

Wyss outlined key topics, including how minimum and maximum density is calculated, exemptions for land partitions, and standards for the shape of newly created lots. One major objective is to eliminate irregular lot configurations that can disrupt neighborhood consistency and create long-term planning challenges.

A significant point of discussion was the shift in decision-making authority prompted by recent state legislation. Many limited land use decisions, once subject to public hearings and Planning Commission review, are now processed at the staff level. This change streamlines approvals but has raised concerns about reduced opportunities for public input and transparency. In particular, the public's ability to comment on appeals is now limited, with appeals bypassing the Planning Commission and going directly to City Council. Additionally, the Historic Review Board (HRB) no longer has quasi-judicial authority over design reviews for permitted uses, further consolidating decisions within city staff.

Throughout the discussion, Wyss emphasized the importance of working closely with the city attorney to ensure the code amendments remain compliant with evolving state requirements.

Vice Chair Walvatne expressed concern about the lack of public comment in decision making. He expressed concern about the appeals process. Wyss noted that he had previously brought the topic of appeal procedures to the City Council during last year's discussion on code concepts. At that time, the Council had expressed interest in learning more about the use of hearings officers and how other jurisdictions handle appeals. Wyss's research showed that most jurisdictions in the Metro area use the City Council as the appeal body.

Commissioner Watton noted that, under the current process, the Historic Review Board (HRB) provides a recommendation to the Planning Commission for design review within the Willamette Falls Drive Commercial Overlay Zone. Wyss explained that under the proposed code updates, the HRB's recommendation would instead go to staff, as staff would become the decision-maker for Class II design reviews. Wyss noted that this needs to be further discussed with the attorneys.

Commissioner Evans recommended that the code updates be revised to route appeals of staff decisions to the Planning Commission because the Commissioners have more knowledgebase.

As the nature of planning decisions evolves, the Planning Commission's role may shift toward more of a legislative body. Commissioners acknowledged the implications of this trend and emphasized the need to maintain meaningful public engagement and transparency in the development process.

Additional proposed minor changes include:

- removing references to street vacations and vacation notice from the Community Development Code and relocating them to the Municipal Code. This change would clarify that street vacations are no longer land use decisions subject to appeal to LUBA. Instead, vacation decisions would be treated as policy decisions made by the City Council—specifically, whether or not to vacate a right-of-way. Wyss noted that this approach is consistent with how many other jurisdictions handle similar matters; and
- adding a new notice type called "Limited Land Use Decision" and reference the applicable state statute to define its requirements.

The next work session will be on the Code update will be July 16, 2025.

4. Briefing: West Linn Waterfront Project

Wyss provided an update on the Waterfront Project, which is grounded in community engagement conducted from 2016 to 2019. The final draft Vision Plan is complete. Summer outreach will include open houses and a final recommendation from the working group as the city moves toward adoption.

Adoption of the Vision Plan is not a land use action, so it won't require a legislative process. Instead, it will be adopted by resolution to establish the vision, allowing the City to move forward with the next phase: zoning, zoning code updates, design standards, and amendments to the Transportation System Plan. After Vision adoption, the intention is to start with the zoning for the Historic City Hall District. The City will apply for grant funding for the next phases.

The Waterfront Project's four guiding principles are reinvestment opportunities, transportation improvements, river access, and preservation of historic character. Additionally, the project area is divided into three distinct planning districts: Historic City Hall, Cultural Heritage, and Pond. Each district has different natural resource protection, topography and access and transportation challenges.

Preferred transportation improvements were identified near Historic City Hall area where Willamette Falls Drive connects to Highway 43.

Vice Chair Walvatne noted his concerns with participation from the Tribes in the draft Vision Plan and environmental review.

5. Planning Commission Announcements

None.

6. Staff Announcements

Planning Manager Wyss reviewed the upcoming Planning Commission schedule. The McLean House National Register Celebration is June 28 from 11:00 to 12:30. He noted that the July 2 is canceled. Instead, the PC will meet on July 9.

7. Adjourn

Chair Metlen adjourned the meeting at approximately 7:15pm.