

Tacoma Permit Advisory Group

Hybrid meeting

Meeting #42 – February 15th, 2023 2:00pm

Advisory Group Members in attendance: Layne Alfonso, Clinton Brink, Jim Dugan, Michael R. Fast, Ben Ferguson, Jason Gano, Justin Goroch, Robert Laing, Mandy McGill, Ken Miller, Claude Remy, John Wolters

Excused:

Absent:

2:00 Welcome

The construction market trends report for winter 2023 has been posted and Jim will send the liaison information to disperse to all members.

2:02 Welcome new members and introductions

The Tacoma Permit Advisory Group ([TPAG](#)) has welcomed three new members: Jason Gano, Robert Laing, and Ken Miller. We currently have 12 out of 18 member positions filled.

2:06 Approval of Minutes

Meeting #41 on January 18th, 2023

Justin Goroch, moved. Ben Ferguson seconded. No discussion or objection. Motion approved.

2:06 Public Comment

No comments were provided by the public at this time.

2:07 Quick updates: City staff new items of interest

- Administrative updates:
 - During meeting #41 Elliott Barnett was seeking input from TPAG on recommendations for developer interviewees. Elliott took recommendations and reached out to developers and has started those interviews.
 - City staff Carl Metz is present for today's meeting to be a representative for [Home In Tacoma](#) if any questions come up during the discussion. It is advised by city staff that any recommendations that come from the TPAG discussion today will want to be vetted by Elliott Barnett at the next meeting and then the final letter drafted to Peter Huffman the Director of Planning and Development Services.
 - Chair Jim Dugan takes a vote with leadership on how to proceed. The recommendation is agreed upon. Motion approved to move forward with

today's discussion and final letter of recommendation to be written to Peter Huffman.

- Next TPAG meeting recruitment efforts for new members will be discussed again so [Media and Communications](#) office can prepare to move forward with another news release to recruited new members. Okay for current members to recommend potential applicants to the TPAG site as the application is still published.

2:10 Subcommittee reports

- Design review – Ben Ferguson
 - Design review discussion is going well, and the team is working on the processes to submit to the planning commission.
- Home in Tacoma – Ben Ferguson & Claude Remy
 - Excited for today discussion to focus on Home In Tacoma.
- Impact Fees – Mandy McGill
 - No updates currently. There has been no communication for a while and Mandy will reach out for an update.
- Outreach & recruitment – Jim Dugan
 - Recruitment updates will be at the next TPAG meeting.
 - Ben Ferguson highlights that the next recruitment should focus on diversity. He feels the current members do not represent enough diversity and would like to extend out to the communities that are not represented during this next effort.
 - Mandy McGill and Jim Dugan both agree with Ben Ferguson and any current members can put in specific recommendations to Jim Dugan for him to reach out to or direct potential applicants to the website to fill out the application.
 - Jim Dugan inquired how new members felt the recruitment process went for them?
 - All three agreed the process was simple, clear, and streamlined.
 - Corey Newton will provide industry specific slots that are available during the next meeting.
- Sidewalk Policies and Recommendations – Justin Goroach and the committee
 - The committee includes Layne Alfonso, Jim Dugan, Justin Goroach, and Clinton Brink for TPAG members. Chris Johnson as a city staff member and Steve Victor will be asked to join as legal representatives for the City of Tacoma. First meeting scheduled 1:00 pm on 2/16/2023.

Jason Gano would like information on how to get involved with established subcommittees. He has an interest in impact fees and Design review.

Ben Ferguson expresses interest in adding housing bills to a future agenda. Olympia has a lot of housing bills that are at a state level that could force Tacoma to have some policy changes in the future. Ben Ferguson encouraged members to get involved so there are more active professionals in this field giving input to the state.

Ken Miller seconds the importance of this matter and asks if the City has taken any position on any of the bills.

Kurtis Kingsolver states he can have city staff present that material at a future meeting.

Justin Gorocho touches on another topic. He has heard Tacoma water is out nine months- 1 year for design. Should this be a future topic as well?

Corey Newton explains he has also heard the design is extended. He will provide more information at future meetings and try to have a staff member here for questions.

2:22 Home in Tacoma- Advisory Group Discussion

Jim Dugan, Chair of TPAG recaps that this is a continuation of [TPAG's January 18th, 2023, meeting](#).

Co-Chair Justin Gorocho worked with TPAG member Clinton Brink they have a list of topics they would like to bring to the group for discussion of interest and priority. The list is currently separated into four categories

- A. Reducing Complexity, increasing efficiency
- B. Setbacks, parking, and dimensional constraints
- C. Design and plantings
- D. Incentivizing development, miscellaneous

List and discussion below:

A. Reducing Complexity, increasing efficiency

1. No more than two residential zones (low-scale and mid-scale)
 - Ben Ferguson comments that there are some zones on transit lines and others are not so he questions what will be deemed mixed-use within Home in Tacoma. He feels C2 zone should be included in Home in Tacoma's mixed-use zone. Transit areas should have mid-destiny options when there is the possibility for people to walk to a bus stop and it should allow having markets, retail etc. The codes should not mandate certain places to be mixed-use when logically it would not survive, there should be room for options.
 - Layne Alfonso expresses that having only 2 zones is concerning and could limit choices.
 - Clinton Brink adds that it can depend on how broad or strict the zone is.
2. No neighborhood overlays (scale can be kept consistent with neighborhood using front yard setbacks per below)

- Clinton Brink provides clarity; this topic is to address front yard setbacks and consistency.
 - John Wolters states that if Home In Tacoma is looking into a form-based code it would need to maintain a pattern of the neighborhood. If you're giving up 20 feet and limiting density it doesn't always follow the pattern. Neighborhoods should be looked at and if it does not match what's there then add to it in a smart way.
 - Clinton Brink clarifies he meant this to apply to low-scale zones.
 - John Wolters feels there should be a form-based code instead of specific setbacks to match and then add to the existing neighborhood.
 - Ben Ferguson explains his biggest concern is having big buildings next to family homes. If the purpose is to add density to a neighborhood in a walkable city, then you want to minimize the density in the front yard. The setback on a house is to the porch but the bulk is the actual house. If the buildings are aligned with the porch, it would seem way out of scale. To not have a lot of pushback from the community we need to be sensitive about how new construction affects neighborhoods.
 - Ken Miller asks Ben Ferguson to clarify massing vs setbacks
 - Ben Ferguson explains modern is bulk front and heritage is bulk behind the patio
3. Upload codes to a digital code indexing site (e.g., UpCode)
 - Group feels it would be beneficial with all the Home In Tacoma changes to have it available online.
 4. Refrain from incentivizing any particular unit size
 - Group votes to keep the topic on the list for further discussion.
 5. No egress path width requirement (building code minimums will still apply)
 - Discussed as a group if this topic should be removed
 - Clinton Brink explains that there are current requirements for different walkway dimensions depending on the building code and it can take up a lot of potentially buildable land.
 - Group votes to keep the topic on the list for further discussion.
 6. Implement a formal expedited review process for designs that have been previously approved on other sites, especially if the design is being reused in the same zone - keep
 - John Wolters would like to not recommend this. He feels there are some really terrible designs being developed around the City and would hate to have an impracticable design reused. Current designs he feels are poor include box-shaped housing and 3-story ADU buildings.
 - Robert Laing is in favor of recommending this.
 - Michael Fast feels there should be two things a prioritize on a base plan have an already approved structural and mechanical review embedded in the plan.
 - Jason Gano adds that having base plan reviews would assist in affordability, and accessibility, and push to build lower-density housing.

- Mandy McGill agrees having base plans would increase the speed of the review process and there should be a bank of pre-approved designs. States the key is to design good buildings.
 - Ken Miller feels for DADUs the review issues are more about the site than the building so having the structural and mechanical pre-approved would not help with the site review setbacks.
7. Guaranteed review timeline or applicant gets proportionate amount of permit fee back per day late - keep

B. Setbacks, parking, and dimensional constraints

(Group voted on 2,3,5, and 6 topics to be removed)

1. Side and rear setbacks shall not exceed 5' in any residential zone
 - Group votes to keep the topic on the list for further discussion.
2. ~~Front setback shall be the lesser of 20' or 5' shorter than the shortest setback within ten neighboring houses~~
3. ~~Minimum lot sizes shall not exceed 2000 sq ft in any residential zone~~
4. Applicants should be entitled to subdivide lots smaller than 2,000 sq ft in all zones if the applicant is actively pursuing a buildable design for the undersized lot (e.g., for unit-lot development and fee simple townhomes). Approval of the building design may be required simultaneous with plat approval so as not to inadvertently create unbuildable lots. Allow for reduced drive aisles that are needed to achieve density through road standards.
 - Group votes to keep the topic on the list for further discussion.
5. ~~No density restrictions — violates phase 1~~
6. ~~The only dimensional constraint on residential construction should be a height maximum of 35 feet in low scale and 60 feet in mid scale~~
7. No frontage requirements or restrictions on non-rectangular and pipestem lots (except for emergency egress and other building code requirements)
 - Group votes to keep the topic on the list for further discussion.
8. No parking requirements within 1000' of transit; no more than .5 off-street parking spaces per DU further than 1000' of transit
 - Group votes to keep the topic on the list for further discussion.
9. Work with Fire Department - No sidewalk pedestrian connectivity requirement for rear units with alley-loaded parking, especially if the rear units are constructed behind an existing building
 - Ben Ferguson explains that this requirement is irritating but he has discussed the topic with the Tacoma Fire Department and due to limitations with locating dwelling units this is an important safety requirement they must have.
 - Clinton Brink concurs as he has had similar conversations with city employee Chris Seaman.
 - Michael Fast questions if all dwelling units have their own separate address so the fire department knows exactly where they are located.

- Ben Ferguson explains this is not always the case, so they keep this requirement out of safety.
10. Sidewalk pedestrian connectivity requirements should be reduced to the building code minimums
- Group votes to keep the topic on the list for further discussion.

Clinton Brink and the group all agree if any topics contradict phase one then they will be removed from the list. Group voted on 2,3,5, and 6 topics to be removed.

C. Design and plantings

1. Design requirements should be simple and objective to eliminate inconsistency and ambiguity
 - Jason Gano explains that by adding consistency we can make it easier to build.
 - Ben Ferguson disagrees and states this is not his experience.
 - Ken Miller explains there is a difference between having rules versus having principles. He asks in simple design -what are the principles of the designs to guide the requirements?
2. Design requirements should be carefully written to avoid increasing the cost or complexity of construction
 - Group votes to keep the topic on the list for further discussion.
3. Design exceptions for prefab units should be readily granted to take advantage of economies of scale and new technologies
 - Ben Ferguson asks Clinton Brink for an explanation. If there is a prefab company that has a design and then wants to sell it everywhere, but the requirements are so strict they cannot sell it in this area. Then wouldn't this hinder the idea of saving money by making it efficient? Then if a pre-fab is auto-approved that would allow it to be put anywhere even if it doesn't fit within the standards or codes of that zone? This topic rises concerns.
 - Clinton Brink explains this would have to have limitations.
4. Allow a broader variety of tree types for ROW plantings
 - Group votes to keep the topic on the list for further discussion.
5. Trees and dense native plantings should be encouraged, but lawns and open yard space should not be required (no ecological value)
 - Group votes to keep the topic on the list for further discussion.
6. Covered patios and exterior entries should not be included in calculating finished square footage
 - Group votes to keep the topic on the list for further discussion.

D. Incentivizing development, miscellaneous

(Time did not allow us to discuss section D today)

1. Extend MFTE to smaller projects to incentivize infill and empower mom-and-pop developers
2. Provide a swift variance process for all criteria unrelated to safety or environmental protection
3. Create a downpayment/construction financing assistance program for mom-and-pop owners to develop their yards
4. Fireproof exterior stairs and elevated walkways that are structurally independent from a building should be treated like a sidewalk rather than as part of a building for fire-rating purposes (e.g., concrete and steel staircase should not need to be situated 3-5' off the property line per R302.1-2)

3:25 Questions and discussion

Mandy McGill would like the group to prioritize the list to ensure TPAG is focused on things all members feel are important.

Jim Dugan directs everyone to take the full list and prioritize them to get a better idea of what TPAG members would like to focus on first.

The group agrees to remove the subsections (A, B, C, and D headers) and prioritize them as a full list.

Mandy McGill inquires if there is a mission statement for TPAG. We want to make sure we are sticking to the goals for which this group was developed.

3:27 Final Comments

Leadership agrees to have members look at the remaining list and prioritize recommendations to be discussed to organize the list better. Liaison, Char Carlyle, will send out a poll to all TPAG members and have it completed by end of day 2/16/2023.

Future topics

- Not Discussed

3:29 Adjourn