

SALT LAKE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION RETREAT

October 4, 2006

City and County Building, Room 126

NOTES

Dinner was held at 5:00 p.m. A quorum was present, although no discussion of significance was held.

Members present: Frank Algarin, Tim Chambless, Babs De Lay, Robert Forbis, Peggy McDonough, Susie McHugh, Kathy Scott, Matthew Wirthlin and Mary Woodhead.

City Staff present: Cheri Coffey, Alex Ikefuna, Doug Wheelwright, Cecily Zuck and Louis Zunguze.

The Retreat began at 5:45 p.m.

Overview of Purpose for the Retreat and Planning Division Review (5:45)

Alex Ikefuna, Retreat Facilitator, began by reviewing the reason for the retreat, which was to educate new Commissioners, provide a refresher course for the existing Commissioners and to also give the opportunity for a dialogue between the Planning Division and the Commission.

Mr. Ikefuna offered two handouts provided by the City Attorney's office and asked that the Commissioners review them for future discussion.

Doug Wheelwright, Deputy Planning Director, offered a Power Point presentation containing basic information on Salt Lake City boundaries, including past and future land use information, the Department of Community Development Organization and review of the Planning and Zoning Enforcement Division Structure, noting the six vacancies within the Planning Division.

The Planning Division Functions were reviewed. There was discussion regarding the Zoning Enforcement policies. The 2006 Priorities for the Division and Planning Communities, particularly the Northwest Quadrant, were also reviewed.

Major Points

- The Commissioners noted that it is very important to have some education/input from a legal advisor, preferably City Attorney Lynn Pace. If Mr. Pace would not be available to attend every meeting, it would be helpful to have an information session with him at least once a month during dinner.
- The Commissioners stated that regular updates from Planning regarding Master Plans and the overall direction of the Planning Division would be extremely helpful, and if this information could be compiled on a Compact Disc, it would be even more beneficial and easily accessible.
- There was some discussion regarding draft motions and their implementation, but it was decided that draft motions may be too general to support defensible findings.
- It was noted that the Planning Commission is an advising body when it comes to decisions going before the City Council, however, in the case of subdivisions and conditional uses the Planning Commission is the deciding body.

- As the Planning Commission is appointed and not elected, they are meant to be more insulated from politics in making their decisions regarding land use.

Master Plan Development Discussion (6:45)

Mr. Wheelwright noted that one of the roles of the Planning Commission is to aid in developing the Master Plans. This is a role where the Planning Commission works on developing a plan and its approval to the City Council. Mr. Wheelwright noted that there have been City Master Plans where development has been reworked time and time again.

Major Points

- The Commissioners noted that they often are not in touch with Master Plan development and that it is discouraging. Mr. Wheelwright addressed this, stating that lately there has been a great deal of development and ordinance review and it may be necessary to bring more Master Plan involvement to the forefront.
- Mr. Ikefuna noted that the Downtown Master Plan process is in progress, therefore, the Planning Commission will have the opportunity to participate in the update.
- Several Commissioners inquired if more information regarding how a particular petition relates to the Master Plan might be included in the staff report, including any potential impact information that may be available.

Subdivision Standards: (7:15)

A handout regarding subdivision standards was given to the Commissioners for review.

Mr. Wheelwright noted that the subdivision standards are present to eliminate capricious reasons for approval/denial. He stated that staff tries to focus the staff report on those standards. If the Planning Commission does not agree with those Staff Report findings, then the Planning Commission must go back and review the report and state defensible findings.

Discussion of the Downtown Mall Project: (7:20)

Louis Zunguze requested cooperation of the Commission during the Downtown projects. He stated that the Planning Division should keep the Commission informed as much as possible about this project. He then noted that next week, all demolition plans should be submitted.

In the City Creek Center there will be special requirements regarding intersections. These requirements will require review by the Planning Commission. The other role of the PC regarding this project will be in their recommendation role to the City Council for final determination.

Mr. Zunguze noted that a tentative meeting is scheduled for the 19th of October. This will be a public meeting with the City Council regarding this downtown process. A formal introduction to this project will be made for the public on October 25. In order to provide this project with as much public comment as possible, there will be an allowed time frame for these comments, open for at least seven weeks, or at least three Planning Commission meetings.

Dialogue on Staff Expectations and the Role of Commissioners (7:46)

Mr. Ikefuna noted that one of the roles of the Commission is to make defensible findings; review the staff report, listen to comments from the petitioner and the public and balance those findings. It is the Staff's responsibility to provide information to the Commission in the form of reports and visual aids to enable the Commission to make informed decisions.

There was a discussion regarding the expectations of Commissioners and the Staff.

Major Points

- The Commissioners and Staff commended the Planners for their expertise and the wealth of information that goes into the staff reports; however they stated that the staff reports can be very confusing at times.
- Part of the confusion over the staff reports could be addressed by possibly providing a table of contents or continuous numbering throughout the report for quick reference during meetings.
- It was noted that the staff reports are not impartial. Mr. Wheelwright responded, stating that staff reports are not neutral in their recommendations due to the fact that the City hired Planners as professionals and as professionals, their opinions were warranted. He then stated that this does not mean a new concern which arises during a hearing cannot be considered.
- Many Commissioners noted that it would be helpful if more staff report findings offered any counter points which might feasibly arise within a hearing, points which may help the Commissioners create defensible findings when they do not agree with the position in the staff report.
- Mr. Wheelwright indicated that this input was very valuable and that maybe with all of the legislative changes being made today, the format of the staff report itself may need to be reformatted.
- The number of items on the Planning Commission agenda was addressed. The Commissioners felt that when an agenda had several items on it, fatigue set in after a certain amount of time, affecting their decision making.
- Staff noted that agenda items are unfortunately pushed as soon as they are ready, which can sometimes mean two items on an agenda, and sometimes eight. Ms. Coffey added that a Petition was recently approved by the City Council to allow some Conditional Uses to be approved administratively, which may ease this agenda burden somewhat.
- If Commissioners have concerns regarding a petition, it was noted that they should contact the Planner who authored the staff report with their concerns.

The retreat adjourned at 8:55 p.m.