

A joint work session of the Astoria Common Council and Astoria Planning Commission was held at the above place at the hour of 5:30 pm.

Councilors Present: Brownson, Herman, Rocka, Hilton, and Mayor Jones.

Planning Commissioners Present: President Moore, Vice President Fitzpatrick, Commissioners Kroening, Corcoran, Price, Womack, and Henri.

Staff Present: City Manager Estes, Parks and Recreation Director Dart-McLean, Community Development Director Leatherman, Finance Director Brooks, Public Works Director Harrington. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, LLC.

JOINT MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL AND ASTORIA PLANNING COMMISSION

Item 3(a): Affordable Housing

City Manager Estes reviewed events that led to the creation of the County's housing study, which was completed a couple of years ago, and some planning processes that went into development from that study. He also outlined the steps taken by the City to complete an inventory of buildable lands and a housing analysis, and then move forward with recommended next steps. He asked the Council to provide direction to the Planning Commission and Staff on how to prioritize the recommendations that had yet to be implemented.

Mayor Jones noted that most of the recommendations in the County's plan were related to density, which residents were typically opposed to. The Council and Planning Commission needed to consider whether they were willing to defend good recommendations despite opposition. He did not want the Council to direct the Planning Commission to spend a year working on Code amendments only to refrain from adopting them because of opposition.

Director Leatherman and City Manager Estes presented via PowerPoint the sections of the County's housing study that were relevant to Astoria's Comprehensive Plan, Development Code, and housing policies. The presentation also included results of the study and recommendations for addressing housing issues in Astoria through Code amendments.

During the presentation, Staff answered clarifying questions from Councilors and Commissioners about the County's housing plan, current Codes, State laws, and Staff's recommendations. Additionally, the Councilors, Commissioners, and Staff discussed Staff's recommended Code amendments with the following key comments:

- The Council's overarching goal for Astoria was to provide adequate and affordable housing for those who want housing, but not necessarily to increase the population. However, providing more housing would require increasing density in some areas of town.
- Councilors and Commissioners discussed Staff's recommendations for increasing density in Astoria. It was possible that most new homes built would be single family residences (SFRs) due to Astoria's terrain and limited land supply. However, there was some concern that replacing SFRs with multifamily units would change the character of the neighborhoods. Staff gave a detailed description of the current protections against demolition, zoning restrictions and historic preservation laws designed to protect the character of Astoria's neighborhoods.
 - Councilors and Commissioners debated over whether to prioritize SFRs over workforce housing. Currently, professionals and living wage earners were unable to find an SFR in Astoria, Providing upscale homes and condominiums would free up more affordable and high density housing for others. However, since households with two incomes have more buying power and can afford SFRs, perhaps the City should focus on workforce housing. Ultimately, the Councilors agreed that all types of housing were needed in Astoria.
 - The final consensus among the Council and Commission was that the City should pursue Staff's recommendations for increasing density.

- Staff's recommendations for high density standards in residential zones were discussed. One way to increase density was to increase the height limit of buildings. However, building height was the one criterion most often opposed by the public. Therefore, if the City believed allowing increased heights was appropriate, the Council and Commission would have to defend their decision.
 - Increased heights would make developments cheaper to build. However, compatibility with neighborhoods could be an issue. Therefore, the consensus was that Staff's recommendations should be implemented in undeveloped areas of the City.
- The Council and Commission briefly discussed high density housing in commercial zones. Increasing heights in commercial zones would be easier as there would be less opposition. All Councilors and Commissioners supported Staff's recommendations, but Councilor Herman said she wanted more information.
- Staff shared their recommended changes to the current parking restrictions. Parking needs were starting to change, vehicles were starting to get smaller, and the City could encourage other modes of transportation. Additionally, the number of cars each household had seemed to correlate to the number of bedrooms in the living unit. Typically, the fewer the bedrooms, the fewer the cars. However, Astoria did not have any mass transit and parking patterns have changed since people have begun working from home.
 - Ultimately, the consensus among the Council and Commissioners was to support Staff's recommendations.
- The Council and Commission discussed whether to allow missing middle housing as an outright permitted use in residential zones. Some wanted to allow cottage cluster developments in low density zones while others believed they should only be allowed in high density zones.
 - There was concern that the recommended Code amendments would result in a repeat of what happened with the Mill Pond development. Mill Pond was originally intended to be a neighborhood of small modest homes, but builders started purchasing two lots, combing them, and building large high end homes. To prevent this from happening again, it was recommended that the size of the cottage cluster developments be limited or that buyers be prohibited from combing two lots.
 - President Moore noted that in his experience, cottage clusters were always very desirable and because demand for them was so high, they were expensive. Therefore, he did not believe cottage clusters would provide affordable housing.
 - The consensus was to support Staff's recommendations with additional restrictions that ensured cottage cluster developments would be developed as intended.

Mayor Jones called for a recess at 7:43 pm. The work session reconvened at 7:50 pm.

The presentation and discussion continued:

- Staff's recommendation to allow two accessory dwelling units (ADUs) was discussed. At least one of the ADUs on a property would have to be inside the main dwelling unit.
 - Generally, the Council and Commission agreed two ADUs would be appropriate. However, the consensus was to wait and see how allowing just one ADU ended up working out for Astoria first.
- Staff recommended that Code amendments to incentivize affordable and workforce housing be addressed separately due to the administrative workload that would be required. A separate work session would be scheduled to discuss Staff's recommendations.
- Staff noted that fees imposed on homestay lodgings had already been implemented and provided an update on compliance and enforcement of the homestay lodging Codes.
- Mayor Jones stated he did not want to pursue the recommendations related to Astoria's land supply and urban growth boundaries this year due to Staff's workload.

Mayor Jones called for public comments.

Stacy Stall, JVB Management, said her company owned five buildings in the Astoria and Warrenton area. She had submitted some notes to Staff earlier in the day. She wanted the City to understand what the public was looking for in apartment rentals, but she had heard that discussed during this meeting. She believed Astoria had an incredibly low inventory of available apartments. Her company had a waiting list of 34 households looking for rentals. Many people were moving from outside the area but had nowhere to go. And she had nowhere to refer them. Additionally, local workers cannot afford the rentals that are available.

Commissioner Price stated that based on the discussion, she had concluded that the Council wanted the Planning Commission to consider all of the recommended strategies with some modifications. The difficulty is writing Code that is neighborhood specific or specific to certain cases. She was glad to hear the Council's focus had not been limited to workforce rental housing because the City needs to give people the opportunity to build equity through homeownership. When density is increased in residential neighborhoods, she believed that lighting and noise should be addressed. Additionally, if Astoria's population increases over 10,000 people, a different set of State laws will apply to the City. Therefore, it is important to consider the large impacts that implementing these recommendations would have in the future.

Councilor Rocka asked if the City could discourage the purchase of second homes in any way. Staff responded that the City could not prohibit second home ownership. However, the prohibition of whole house vacation rentals and homestay lodging restrictions have limited the number of second homes in Astoria.

Mayor Jones said he had heard concerns about vacant and derelict homes. He wanted to know how many of these homes were in Astoria. President Moore suggested looking at the water use of each home to determine which ones were vacant. Councilor Brownson noted that if these homes were legally owned and no laws had been broken, there was nothing the City could do with that information. Staff responded that redevelopment incentives could turn some vacant homes into occupied residences, but Code enforcement has been successful when dealing with the derelict homes.

Mayor Jones excused the Planning Commissioners from the work session.

REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS

Item 4(a): Local Transient Lodging Tax Collection Through the State


Director Brooks provided the Council with details about the option to allow the State to collect local transient lodging taxes from online reservation platforms. She listed the services offered by the State, the cost of using the State's services, as well as the pros and cons to the City and Astoria's transient lodging providers. She recommended the City allow the State to collect these taxes on the City's behalf due to the benefits and efficiencies that the State's services would provide.

The Council briefly discussed the benefits of using the State's services and agreed the City should do so.

ADJOURNMENT

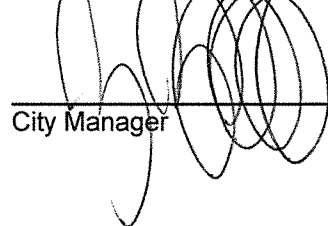
There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.

ATTEST:



Finance Director

APPROVED:



City Manager