

Tacoma Permit Advisory Group

Hybrid meeting

Meeting #53 February 21st, 2024 2:00pm

Advisory Group Members in attendance: Layne Alfonso, Clinton Brink, Jim Dugan, Michael R. Fast, Ben Ferguson, Justin Goroch, Robert Laing, Claude Remy, Gomer Roseman, John Wolters

Excused:

Absent: Jason Gano, Loundyne Hare, Ken Miller

2:05 PM Welcome

The meeting was called to order by Chair Jim Dugan.

Announcement: Jim Dugan is resigning from the Tacoma Permit Advisory Group and will no longer serve as a member or chair. Justin Goroch gives a big thanks for Jim's leadership and guidance for the past 6-8 years.

2:11 PM Approval of Minutes

Meeting #52: Ben Ferguson moved. Clinton Brink seconded. No discussion or objection. Motion approved.

Special Meeting: Clinton Brink moved. Ben Ferguson seconded. No discussion or objection. Motion approved.

2:13 PM Public Comment

No public comments were provided at this time.

2:11 PM Quick updates: City staff new items of interest

- Administrative updates
 - Jana Magoon reports the state has updated RCW and mandated land use permit's level of service goes down. It is currently 120 days, and it is going down to 100 days. Updating code by Jan 1, 2025.

Justin Goroch asks if there is a tip sheet. Jana's team will plan to provide one.
- TPAG Recruitment
 - Three applicants were interviewed on 3/6/2024 and leadership is currently in the process of recommendations.
- Design Manual
 - Going through an update. The last update was 2016. Looking at it through the lens of the design community not just internal city users. Chris Johnson is accepting feedback now if there are any specific items you want to be addressed by staff. September is the goal for adoption by the council, but the effective date is unsure. The plan is for every year to review and update 3 chapters and make it more of a living document.

2:28 PM Subcommittee reports

- Outreach & Recruitment
 - Three candidates were interviewed for the Tacoma Permit Advisory Group (TPAG). Ryan Babbit, Brett Johnson, and Courtney Davis.
 - Leadership is considering recommending all three candidates. Ryan and Brett were a unanimous yes from leadership while applicant Courtney was not. Leadership brings the discussion to all members to decide on the third applicant recommendation.
 - John Wolters comments that permitting background is important. Having someone participate in the program without that background and have a vote will be detrimental to the quality of the group. I would hesitate to approve. Mike Fast feels we are a technical advisory group and having someone come in with no experience would slow us down. Claude Remy agrees with both sides and would like to compromise and allow her to join a subcommittee that doesn't handle technical things. Then she will be a valuable contributing member. Clinton Brink would like to know the selection criteria and if it is required to be familiar with the code and permit process. He feels the more we get away from that we can reduce the success the group has. There is a place for that at the public comment. He expresses there should be permit experience required for members.
 - Ben Ferguson adds as co-chair it is worth a conversation at the leadership level. The resolution was made by the planning commission and will have to discuss an amendment to require experience to be mandatory.
 - Layne Alfonso adds that a previous TPAG member Mandy's participation was broad, and it was nice having that point of view. It is hard to second guess the leadership because they have always provided good recommendations for recruiting new members.
 - Gomer Roseman explains he would be careful about minimizing technical knowledge in the permit group.
 - Robert Laing is willing to bring diverse backgrounds into the group. Robert didn't claim to have a technical background in permitting when joining the group.
 - Corey Newton clarifies that ultimately the decision is made by the City Manager. Resolution states that the chair and vice chairs make a recommendation to the City Manager who has the final say. The only reason it was brought to the group is because it was not a unanimous decision, the leadership group is not required to bring recommendations to the group.
 - Clinton Brink adds that he met with Courtney Davis personally regarding urban canopy. He is concerned if we allow activists who are opposed to the building community, progress will be slowed down. Ben Ferguson having people with contrary thoughts is not always bad. It can challenge us to investigate the policies more. Clinton Brink agrees and can see that perspective.
 - John Wolters encourages leadership to reconsider. He feels arguing against each other from a technical viewpoint is beneficial not from an activist view.
 - Justin Goroach calls a vote.
 - Ryan Babbit: Unanimous yes

- Brett Johnson: Unanimous yes
 - Courtney Davis: 4 yes and 5 no.
 - Ben Ferguson explains this will go back to leadership for further discussion.
- Impact Fees – ~~Jim Dugan~~
 - Jim Dugan is no longer a member and if there are any volunteers to take over this subcommittee let liaison Char Carlyle know.
- Sidewalk Policies & Recommendations – Justin Goroch
 - Currently in the City’s court and they will try to come back with information targeting the June meeting.
- Unit Lot Subdivision - Justin Goroch
 - Ben Ferguson met with Jana Magoon. She said within the code ULS belongs in the subdivision part of the code and in that section, it does not say HIT it says what the subplot processes are so it will apply to any zone not just the UR zones. It is recommended this should be an agenda topic soon.
 - Justin Goroch asks if the transportation standards are associated with ULS? Will there be a chance for TPAG to view the draft before going into effect? He would like to know when this can be applied for. Is it any time in the process or just at the beginning? Can you overlay a ULS?
 - Clinton Brink adds you can do that now. You can subdivide the lot after it is developed. Justin Goroch replies yes but you must account for all the setbacks before development then.
 - Clinton Brink comments that TPAG kind of touched base on this in our recommendation letter to the HIT memo to the Planning Commission.

2:57 PM Process alignment: Commercial vs. Residential permit requirements

TPAG has “Future Agenda Topics” at the end of every agenda. There will be a yearly discussion of reprioritizing the list to make sure all members agree.

Ben Ferguson explains the first item on the prioritized list now that HIT is on pause will be process alignment. He explains that this topic is important because we do work on both sides, residential and commercial permitting. TPAG has spent a lot of time with the development process and steps. He feels commercial vs residential permitting processes differ in requirements. If there is a strong process for one- then the other process should be similar so that it is easy to follow. For the city maybe it is not different but from a developer, it is much different. Developers want things more aligned, and it should be easy.

Chris Johnson would like TPAG to define the process and difficulties developers are facing.

Justin Goroch explains residential IRC vs. IBC. IRC single-family, duplex, and townhome can be both. The commercial is IBC.

Ben Ferguson explains that what constitutes an acceptable submittal for commercial is not accepted by the residential group.

Justin Goroch would like suggestions on how we can streamline the intake process.

Chris Johnson asks that TPAG bring all issues forward. He also reassured that the city is currently looking at the SDEV and commercial process to make the process easier and more fluid. Where is the process unclear?

Ben Ferguson gives the example of view sensitive neighborhood that was required to get a separate survey of the air. Nothing in the submittals said it was required and then it was and that was time and money.

Claude Remy agrees with Ben, he just has no examples currently.

Mike Fast explains that accelera requiring homeowner's information in on the application creates problems. Clients get concerned when contacted by the city. Chris Johnson replies thank you, we get elevated requests from the mayor regarding a complaint from the homeowners about City staff or review time when the development engineer has maybe not fully explained their own part in the delay. Mike Fast adds that lately on plan reviews there are mistakes from plan reviewers that have to be sorted out and it brings alarm to the homeowners when it is unnecessary and he spends a lot of time explaining it to the homeowner. Chris Johnson appreciates the information as it is good to know how this affects the developers.

Justin Goroch on the site side- I haven't done a lot of small stuff until the last 4 months and seeing some consistency from reviewers would be nice. Finding a way to get to yes when there are unique constraints. With HIT I think we are going to be seeing a lot more of this and we need to get creative and consistent on them.

Gomer Roseman asks if the permit process is a one-size-fits-all. Are they not interchangeable at all?

Ben Ferguson answers no and is not consistent. Within one agency there should be consistency understandably, different agencies will have differences but with the same agency, it should be similar and share the same language.

TPAG requests that the city provide the diagram chart that Terry Forslund previously provided at a TPAG meeting.

Justin Goroch adds that site development and work orders have two separate permits.

Chris Johnson and Craig Kuntz explain to TPAG members that this is being talked about currently with staff. When parts of projects can be released, we should be able to get things checked off and started. This feedback is great and what things we don't do well that can hold up and cause problems on your end.

Mike Fast would like that to be the case however he feels new reviewers continue to ask for resubmittal until it is perfect instead of accepting these comments and your permit is issued.

Ben Ferguson explains that past work TPAG has done was making big improvements on the commercial side but not on the residential side. When one gets tweaked the other one is falling behind. Should be changed together. He understands that on the commercial side, there is a level of risk associated. Talk about your thoughts on risk and if it is not as critical then it can have a lighter touch on what is acceptable.

John Wolters adds that lots going on behind the scenes and members are interested to hear the full process of the city as it does help developers. Each process and project are slightly different, and unsure if a flow chart will apply to all projects. When there is a permit mistake from the city I call, and it is resolved very quickly. Your staff is excellent. The only problem is getting the reviewer on the phone.

Chris Johnson would like staff to get it to 51% consistent and improve from there – never perfect but predictable and continue to improve. Staff will plan to come to present next month.

Mike Fast adds speaking of the team noticing inspector inconsistencies. More education for the new inspectors.

Ben Ferguson states this is still my favorite place to permit.

Justin Goroch would like to remind members that we may need to repeat things we've discussed before. We have some members that have been here for 7 years and then green members and let us learn and reset together.

3:28 PM Final Comments

Chris Johnson summarizes an email from Tacoma Planning Commission chair Chris Karnes. Responding to this email will be discussed at the leadership level. Another item that needs to be addressed by leadership is an alternative process for signatures when the TPAG Chair is unavailable.

Justin Goroch expresses thanks to Clinton Brink and John Wolters for their hard work on the HIT memorandum to the planning commission.

3:31 PM Future Agenda Topics (Not Discussed- Due to time limitations)

- *Sidewalk Policies & Recommendations Subcommittee*
- Process alignment: Commercial vs. Residential permit requirements
- TPAG Mission Statement
- E-permits
- Pedestrian/Emergency Access DADU's
- Long Range Planning – update from city staff
- Capital Bond Projects
- Solid Waste Collection & Development Projects
- Urban Design (Stephen Antupit)

3:31 PM Adjourn