

October 28, 2010
Ellensburg City Planning Commission – Regular Meeting Minutes
(5:45 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.) City Council Chambers

NOTE: The Planning Commission meetings are not recorded except for the Public Hearings. These minutes are not a verbatim transcript of the meeting, but have instead been prepared from staff's notes taken at the meeting and staff's contemporaneous memory of the meeting. All public hearings have been recorded and are available for listening or copying at the Community Development Department, 501 N. Anderson Street, Ellensburg, WA 98926.

Members Present: David Miller, Bruce Simpson, Bob Hood, Sarah Bedsaul

Members Absent: Jason Berthon-Koch, Doug Mitchell

Also Present: Nancy Lillquist, Gretchen Thatcher, Gordon Thatcher, Beverly Heckert, Mike Smith, Community Development Director, Shannon Johnson, Community Development Planning Technician

Chair Miller opened the meeting at 5:45 and welcomed Nancy Lillquist, Chair of the Non-Motorized Transportation (NMT) Committee to begin the presentation for the Non-Motorized Transportation Committee Code Report on Draft Policies.

Nancy Lillquist introduced Gretchen Thatcher and Sarah Bedsaul as NMT committee members and presented a power point presentation which she and Sarah Bedsaul had prepared and gave background information on the implementation of the 2007 Comprehensive Plan and 2008 Non-Motorized Transportation Plan goals related to NMT and promoting walking and biking.

With the number one goal being promoting walking and biking, in 2009 the NMT committee was convened with members from communities such as the Ellensburg School District, CWU, the Biking Community, the Disabled Community, the Homebuilding Community, Economic Development, Health Department, Walking Community, Kittitas Valley Fire and Rescue, a Citizen at Large, and staff from Public Works, and Community Development. This committee met once a month for a year to develop the recommendations before the Planning Commission today. The committee focused on street standards and what is built in the right of way to come up with the recommended street policies. As the recommendations were coming together in August, the Land Use Development Code Update was getting off the ground and the NMT Committee asked the Land Use Code Update Consultants to review these and the NMT accepted some of the Consultants' recommendations, and rejected some. Where the consultant's recommendation differs from the committee's it will be noted. The goal of the recommended Street policies is to create more safe and attractive environment for all modes of transportation, and more specifically, to enhance walkability and bikeability.

Where are we going? The NMT committee will take the Planning Commission's comments and the comments from the Environmental Commission and present them to the public as part of the LDCU Open House in January 2011.

There are 3 categories of recommendations: Connectivity, Street Design, and Miscellaneous. Sarah Bedsaul gave background on how the committee came up with problems and solutions and visuals for each scenario.

Chair Miller and Bruce Simpson asked questions regarding new construction vs. old construction and how this could be implemented. Nancy Lillquist spoke about infill and redevelopment and how they

would be implementing the 2008 NMT Plan. The proposed changes to the existing plan are in red, while current code is in black. Mike Smith spoke about the plan being available on the website, however from his standpoint, this is a big piece of the Land Development Code Update and Energy Efficiency Conservation Strategy puzzle which will enhance the process. The consultants would likely be making recommendations like this if the NMT committee hadn't worked on the process already. For the most part, the consultants said the recommended changes are good.

Nancy Lillquist spoke to Planning Commission members about 1996 when a recommendation for a ¼ mile grid was made – which was never implemented. The historic core block pattern is 350 to 400 feet blocks and recent development has not always connected streets. There are no current requirements in place to connect streets. Advantages would be reducing distances between points, which would promote walking. A key part of the EES is more choices for walking/biking. Less connectivity like we have currently leads to congestion on arterials and it takes a lot of money to upgrade those to meet the Level of Service standards.

Discussion continued regarding smaller, more connected neighborhoods. Sarah Bedsaul noted that there is an issue with cut-thru traffic. Bruce Simpson asked for an example of this. Nancy Lillquist spoke about her neighborhood on 2nd Avenue near Craig's Hill when school lets out about 3:00 -3:30 there is cut -thru traffic from the congestion on Capitol Avenue. Another example of connectivity issues is the area by Mt. Stuart School. There is no way for children to walk to Mt. Stuart without having to go all the way around. Bob Hood spoke about Radio Hill and how the neighborhood fought the thru street to City Council and succeeded in stopping it. He would like to see decisions like this help pay for where the traffic actually goes. Nancy Lillquist said there is no legal way to do this currently because it is not in the code. Bob Hood spoke about developers wanting to get the most out of the land. Bruce Simpson spoke about cul-de-sacs, and possible non-motorized extension benefits. Bob Hood and Nancy Lillquist believe this can get better. Nancy Lillquist spoke about the need for "skinny" streets.

Prohibiting cul-de-sacs would solve problems such as snowplow issues, fire access issues, long fencing issues etc. Sarah Bedsaul spoke about staff strongly agreeing with eliminating cul-de-sacs. Mike Smith spoke about current code and how cul-de-sacs are limited to serve 40 lots or less, and 500 feet in length. Chair Miller discussed the exceptions to the rule that have come before the Planning Commission and that there seems to be a lot of gray area here. Bob Hood agreed and spoke about developers wanting cul-de-sacs and see these as a type of free pass. He would like to see mandatory maintenance fees for these, and prefers that they not be allowed, however, 10% of developers will push the issue, and therefore he thinks additional fees would hinder this type of development. The flip side of this is that gated communities such as the condos Bob Kelley built on Mountain View Avenue, or similar communities like Rosewood shouldn't be prohibited unless it interrupts the street system. The LDCU consultants have concerns about gated communities and the stigma they create.

Nancy Lillquist spoke about arterial streets, and how these most traveled streets often have back yards and long fences along the frontage. She showed examples of Water Street and Reecer Creek Road. David Miller asked if the frequent curb cut/driveways on Water Street were worse than back yard fences. Sarah Bedsaul pointed out the example of Reecer Creek Road.

Discussion continued to review the NMT's Arterial Street recommendations. Chair Miller asked questions regarding the half street drawings. Mike Smith suggested drawing a dotted line thru the center car in the diagram for clarity. Snowplows can dump snow into the planting strips in this scenario. Chair Miller spoke about the current bicycle/skateboard problem for pedestrians in the downtown on the sidewalks. Code Enforcement is the department to contact on this issue.

Nancy Lillquist discussed the problems of wide streets. When streets are too wide, it equals high speed and makes them more dangerous. She gave the example of Ellington Street – there is no buffer for pedestrians. There are 3 options for local streets. The current standard for local streets is 38 feet wide. Following the national trend of “skinny” streets, the committee recommends local streets be 20, 24, or 30 feet wide. An example of a 20 foot wide street in Ellensburg would be Cliff Avenue on Craig’s Hill between 3rd and 4th Avenue. There would be no on-street parking, but a neighborhood parking lot for guests.

Discussion followed regarding the transitions which will need to happen for smaller street development. Members discussed planting strips on both sides. Mike Smith asked about the maintenance of the planting strips. Chair Miller discussed tree planting and Nancy Lillquist noted that we are a Tree City.

Nancy Lillquist continued the presentation by explaining the concept of Queuing. She explained how it works on 2nd Avenue. Bob Hood is concerned this won’t work on longer streets such as Spokane Street etc. Bruce Simpson asked if there was anything else other than modern day queuing to slow traffic down. Traffic bumps and traffic circles are options, but are a problem for snow plows.

Bob Hood noted that there are a lot of positives in the recommendations. Nancy Lillquist noted that it is a national movement. Sarah Bedsaul spoke about the purpose of these local streets – that they are to provide local access. Members asked if this was only for single family dwellings. The NMT did not designate only for single family dwellings. Chair Miller noted that these local access options wouldn’t work for apartments. Bob Hood noted that zoning would solve all of these issues. Beverly Heckert noted that it does work for multi-family. It would encourage people not to use their cars as much. Mike Smith noted that it is a carrot stick approach. Chair Miller spoke about shade being an incentive for dual planting strips. The NMT Committee majority and consultants were against the 34 foot street option – it looked like Bluegrass Lane. Mike Smith asked if there was any concern over too many options and if there was unanimity on the 60 feet vs. the 50 feet. The majority of the committee voted for 60 feet, and the strong minority, including LDCU consultants were for the 50 feet.

Collector streets are currently a 44 foot standard. The goal is to get a buffer on at least one side. The NMT committee was divided on whether to require planting strips on both sides or an option to put the buffer behind the sidewalk on one side. Local and collector streets would need to be mapped and adopted in the Comprehensive Plan.

Bruce Simpson spoke about determining the best place for a bike lane. The bicyclist on the NMT committee prefers the sharrow idea. Bruce Simpson spoke about cities having passenger side of bike lane putting bumps in the road or massive paint. Bob Hood spoke about this creating a nightmare for maintenance with snow removal etc. Chair Miller noted that access is always a challenge. Nancy Lillquist pointed out page 4 multi-purpose paths. Bruce Simpson discussed this being a good solution. Multi-use paths, bus shelters, and bike facilities are needed as options. The Comp. Plan has maps with trails and the City Attorney is researching and working on the possibility of reserving right of way or dedicating paths for this. Sarah Bedsaul noted that these need to be options available. If there is an option, it could be chosen at the time of development. Bike parking was tied to the number of parking spaces. The LDCU consultants recommended they tie it to the size of the building, and will provide numbers for the table in the document.

Chair Miller and Bob Hood commended Nancy Lillquist and the committee for the tremendous amount of work on this project. Sarah Bedsaul commented that Nancy Lillquist went above and beyond on this project. Bob Hood noted that this will make the Planning Commission’s work easier. Chair Miller asked what the NMT would like to see from the Planning Commission. Nancy Lillquist stated that at this point the committee would like comments and recommendations from the Planning Commission and the

Environmental Commission. It would be ideal for the committee to be able to show City Council who they have presented to and what their comments and recommendations were. Mike Smith noted that this is one piece of the bigger puzzle picture that we're working toward in January when we will have an open house and present a lot of these recommendations. The timeline for now is getting the information ready to present to Council in January. The Planning Commission will continue discussion and submit their comments and recommendations to the NMT committee.

Mike Smith noted that the Planning Commission's next meeting would be Thursday, November 11th, 2010. An email will be sent out to find another day which will work for a second meeting in November since we can't get a quorum for the 18th. It has been difficult getting in contact with some members.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Shannon Johnson, Planning Technician