

City of Gig Harbor Planning Commission and Design Review Board
Minutes of Joint Work-Study Session
September 20th, 2007
Gig Harbor Civic Center

PRESENT: Commissioners Joyce Ninen, Jeane Derebey, Theresa Malich, Jim Pasin, and Dick Allen. Design Review Board members Kae Paterson, Darrin Filand, Charles Carlson, John Jernejcic and Rick Gagliano were present. Commissioner Harris Atkins and Jill Guernsey were absent. Staff present: Jennifer Kester, Tom Dolan, and Diane Gagnon. Kurt Latimore from the Latimore Company was also present.

CALL TO ORDER: 5:35 p.m.

Rick Gagliano introduced Scott Haas from New Homes LLC to answer questions on some builder related issues regarding housing designs.

Chairman Theresa Malich asked about the balance of tree retention and still allowing for development. Mr. Haas stated that he felt he could contribute some perspective from his industry. He spoke about the idea of clear cutting, if the community wants trees then homes will sell better so it is in the best interest of the builder to retain them; however, with the advent of growth management the lots are getting smaller so the reality of keeping a tree is practically impossible because of utilities and earth moving practices. He talked about the impossibility of letting people pick and choose which trees to keep on their lots, especially in production building. He said that anything within 15' of the foundation is gone. He explained how it was cost prohibitive and that the only way was to have larger lots. Mr. Dolan asked how big of a lot would work. Mr. Haas answered that you would need a quarter acre minimum. Mr. Dolan asked about the size of the trees and if the size of the tree made a difference to whether you could save it. Mr. Haas said that a tree has surface roots within their branch area so if any equipment drives over that it puts the tree into shock. Mr. Gagliano asked about maintaining clusters rather than the skinny strips of trees and Mr. Haas said that was wise as the trees have a better chance of survival.

Ms. Malich asked what the lot sizes were in Quail Run and Mr. Pasin replied that they were approximately 10,000 square feet. Mr. Haas said that size of lot would still be impossible to retain trees. Mr. Gagliano asked about slopes and maintaining natural topography. Mr. Haas said that builders like flat lots and he spoke about the expense of rock walls. Commissioner Dick Allen asked if the reality was that trees come down and if the industry had considered replanting. Mr. Haas said no, builders are going to do whatever they can to keep the cost down so the only way is to have a code that requires a tree or two in every yard. He stated that if he is not asked to do it, he lets the homeowner do it. He pointed out that a lot of landscaping just happens over time.

Board member Kae Paterson said that the city is beginning to work with new subdivisions within areas that have older subdivisions. Mr. Haas pointed out that builders don't have a cost for removing the trees as they sell the lumber. Ms. Ninen

asked if the state was making new problems by requiring the density. Mr. Haas noted that just because the code looks great doesn't mean that it works in reality.

Mr. Haas said that houses are 30 feet wide and 40 feet wide so he builds on 50 foot wide lots. 60 feet wide reduces the number of houses he can achieve. He talked about how sometimes you have to have a 40 foot wide lot. He noted that 5000 sq ft with a 50 foot wide lot nets 6/du per acre. Mr. Haas talked about the alley load idea with no backyard and everyone's cars parked on the street. He noted that you need the lots to be 100-110 feet deep. 100 feet is enough as most houses are 55' deep. 25' is needed to the garage door in order to park a large car in the driveway. He recommended having the builder put the street trees in to assure their survival. Mr. Haas talked about the need for 5-8 feet to play with in order to not have a straight line of garages. He noted that people will park on the street whether you allow it or not. He said that he preferred garages side to side as it allows for more separation and that the garage should be on the uphill side.

Joyce Ninen asked about the trend towards common wall construction. Mr. Haas stated that it is being done to keep costs down. He said that families will buy it because it's cheap but it's not what they want. Older people want to live in them, but families want their space. Mr. Haas talked about how ramblers are expensive to build. He then discussed manufactured homes and retirement communities.

John Jernejcic arrived at 6:15

Chairman Malich asked if there were other questions. Dick Allen asked about sidewalks on only one side of the street and Mr. Haas said he preferred only one side due to the reduced costs. He noted that it's about a 3 month process to build a house. Senior Planner Jennifer Kester noted that Quadrant had indicated they will turn in 10 building permits per month.

Ms. Kester noted that most of what he talked about was in line with what is required in the R-2 zone. Ms. Malich asked about a current subdivision that will be approximately 12 dwelling units per acre. Mr. Dolan explained that it is zoned RB-2 and how they achieved the 12 du per acre.

Mr. Pasin said that society has accepted an image that a lot and a house have to be a certain size and that image may not be realistic in today's world. Ms. Ninen agreed. Mr. Allen asked if there was anything that required a backyard and Ms. Kester explained that there is a 30' rear yard setback requirement. She also explained the 25' buffer around the perimeter of the plat and it doesn't say that it can't be part of the backyard. She also noted that clustering will eliminate that dilemma. Ms. Malich noted that there is a lot of public opinion to keep the outer strip. She noted that they could look at not allowing the buffer to be part of the rear setback. Ms. Kester explained how the clustering could work or how a tree density program would work. Mr. Dolan said that Harbor Estates is an example of the 25' buffer on the westerly side of the plat.

Mr. Gagliano noted that there have been smaller houses throughout time and that maybe the depth is the issue. Ms. Pasin said that the current plan is that every development is square they back up to each other and there is no connection. He went on to say that there are buffers with no traffic flow or pedestrian flow. Jeane Derebey said that the buffer is not to blame for not having a connection. Ms. Kester said that the reason why we have this situation is that cities will not impose connections until there are fire or safety concerns because there are too many homes on a road. She went on to say that now that we have this in our comprehensive plan and connections are established, they will happen. For example the Harbor Estates project will connect to Harbor Crossing. Mr. Dolan explained that there must be a public need; it can't just be because it's nice. He also noted that people want homes in these protected areas.

Ms. Kester talked about the draft of the subdivision design section. She asked for input on the title. Mr. Gagliano said that they had discussed whether they should be messing with housing designs at all and that he felt that this should be a subdivision thing. Ms. Kester clarified that he was saying it should be left where it is in the comp plan and not put it in the subdivision section. Mr. Gagliano said he felt that if the lot sizes are right the design will follow. Mr. Pasin said that he felt that it should not be put into this subdivision section. Mr. Gagliano said that he liked the idea of pushing against the GMA regulations to try to do what we can within the density regulations.

Mr. Pasin asked about the language and Ms. Kester explained that comprehensive plans do not have regulatory language and that the zoning code is where the regulations come in to play.

Ms. Kester reiterated that they wanted to leave it in the community design element and remove this goal from the subdivision design section. She pointed out where it was located now.

Ms. Kester asked if they wanted to leave the title "subdivision design". Mr. Pasin said that he wanted to include triplexes, condos, etc. Ms. Kester suggested residential development design and everyone agreed. Ms. Ninen suggested that perhaps in the body it explain what it includes. Ms. Kester said she would work on an explanation of the scope of the section and what it applies to. She asked if they wanted a statement regarding the preservation of the community. No one felt that it needed a statement about preservation but rather an explanation of what is included. Ms. Kester stated she would work on the language.

Chairman Theresa Malich called a recess at 6:55 p.m. The meeting was reconvened at 7:05 p.m.

3.10.1. Incorporate existing vegetation into new subdivisions.

Discussion was held on the Kirkland tree ordinance and Ms. Kester explained how the tree density calculations worked.

Mr. Pasin said he had problems with the word reflect, he suggested maintain and incorporate. Everyone agreed. Mr. Dolan asked how we would adopt code that would do that if 6 dwelling units per acre removed all the trees. Ms. Kester explained the drip line and it was decided to change the wording to micro climates which surround them. Road, lot layout and building siting in new residential developments should be designed to preserve existing vegetation by clustering open space and native trees in order to protect not only the trees, but the micro climates which surround them.

3.10.2 Encourage property owners to preserve native forest communities to maintain and enhance the connectivity of tree groves.

Discussion was held on whether to strike this section as it appeared redundant. Ms. Ninen pointed out that it talks about property owners and that Mr. Haas had said that he would rather have a regulation for planting new trees. Jeane Derebey suggested that 3.10.3 and 3.10.2 could be switched. Ms. Kester asked if they would rather see the planting of new trees and Ms. Ninen said that she would rather see the new trees planted since they are being removed. John Jernejcic said that since it seems impossible to preserve the trees with the density requirements, then we should be requiring planting of new trees. Mr. Gagliano said that in lower density we should incorporate existing trees and in higher density developments we should encourage planting of new native vegetation. Ms. Kester made the appropriate changes to 3.10.2 and 3.10.3.

Rick Gagliano said that there should be some kind of statement about preserving specimen trees. Discussion followed on limbing and topping practices.

It was decided to add language about preservation of high quality native trees and under story. It was decided to add the phrase "high quality" to 3.10.1. Ms. Kester then talked about how the City of Kirkland has a rating system. Kurt Latimore noted that Olympia does something similar.

3.10.5 Include landscape buffers between new subdivisions and access roads.

Mr. Gagliano asked if the intent was to remove or reduce the straight alley way type buffers if you are doing clustering. Ms. Kester said that she felt that if you look at two of the goals it just says that you want to cluster and where there is a main access road you are going to buffer from that but it doesn't say you must buffer between developments. She added the word adjacent. Mr. Gagliano wanted to make sure that the landscape buffers were not being used for hiding bad design. Ms. Kester asked if the language should be changed to landscape area rather than buffer. Mr. Dolan suggested that they say perimeter access road and everyone agreed. Mr. Gagliano suggested that it say "or support replanting of native vegetation".

Mr. Pasin asked if they wanted the planting of huckleberry and salal. Ms. Kester went over the other native vegetation that could be planted. Everyone agreed that they want native, not manicured and straight.

Discussion was held on the public works standards and street trees. It was decided to wait to hear the public testimony.

Charles Carlson expressed that he couldn't visualize these skinny buffers with the native vegetation and wondered what that leads to. Mr. Gagliano explained that it will be more visual when they begin writing the regulations and attach a number to these buffers. He also pointed out that he wouldn't mind developers having a choice between clustering and buffers. Ms. Derebey brought up the use of berms in the buffers. Kurt Latimore brought up the use of bioswales. Ms. Kester added wording regarding the use of berms and swales along with landscaping. Darrin Filand pointed out that sometimes berms and swales can prohibit the preservation of existing vegetation.

3.10.6 Maximize opportunities for creating usable, attractive, well-integrated open space in new residential projects.

Mr. Gagliano asked if this goal was really needed. John Jernejcic thought it was needed. Ms. Kester pointed out that this addressed some of the recent concerns.

3.10.7 Respect existing topography and minimize visual impacts of site grading.

Mr. Gagliano suggested that the wording be changed to add that retaining walls should be terraced. Mr. Pasin asked how the view basin would have been built today with this requirement and Ms. Kester noted that it was done individually.

Ms. Kester reminded the Planning Commission that they have to finalize this language at the meeting next week. She asked that everyone read and send any proposed language ahead of the next meeting. She pointed out that this doesn't deal with lot size or density if they wanted to address these issues.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was suggested that a footer with the page number and date be added to the minutes.

MOTION: Motion to approve the minutes of September 6th with spelling corrections as noted. Ninen/Carlson – Motion passed

UPCOMING MEETINGS

September 27th, 2007 at 6:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Move to adjourn at 8:05 p.m. Carlson/Derebey – Motion passed unanimously.