

March 15, 2017

Public Workshop Synopsis

Approximately a dozen members of the public attended. Following a staff presentation, they were invited to review displays, enjoy refreshments, and talk with staff.

Steve Langdon presented a slideshow reviewing issues that will have some bearing on the area's comprehensive plan designation and will ultimately drive its zoning. Questions and comments from those present focused on the following:

- Is there a conflict with the Long-Bell covenants? Potentially. Mr. Langdon referenced the Columbia Valley Gardens #4 CC&Rs, which restrict commercial development. He thinks that Wal-Mart may have gotten signatures to remove the restriction from its site.
- Does City staff have an opinion? No, but the City will be working toward formulating a recommendation. Does that mean it will change? Not necessarily.
- There was discussion around changing the code versus changing the designation. Leave the Regional Commercial designation in place but change the suite of uses that are allowed under the zoning. There is no zoning amendment being proposed at this time, though; and no zoning update being done in conjunction with the comp plan update. Mr. Langdon explained that someone could apply to amend the code rather than waiting for the City to undertake an update.

Discussion lagged, and Bill Fashing asked what people want to see in the area. Responses included:

- Commercial developers stated that the Regional Commercial zone doesn't make sense. They have zealously tried to market the properties, but there has been no development interest in such a large (80,000 sf+) building. They do see interest from locally owned national franchises of smaller-size businesses; however, they are not allowed there. One "national retailer" wanted to locate in the vicinity of 30th/32nd but couldn't. Triangle Shopping Center is the most successful development in the area. The Longview market is not conducive to more big box without 30-40,000 more people. Costco won't come here and is currently expanding in foreign markets. The status of Three Rivers Mall plays a role. "I could zone it for unicorns, but the unicorn's not going to show up."
- It is likely the Ocean Beach Highway frontage would develop first, but "the rest will fill in." They are not interested in seeing the rear zoning line (adjacent to Olive) moved closer to Ocean Beach Highway. At the same time, the cost of improving Olive Way was seen as a deterrent to development of the rear portion.

- An alternate view was that only the first 100 feet along Ocean Beach Highway would develop. With two driveways apiece, this would create multiple and conflicting turning movements. Left turns should be restricted onto and off of Ocean Beach Highway.
- Opinions diversified. One comment was “It’s been this way for ten years and nothing’s happened. Let’s not have it be another ten years.” Another opinion was that, while ten years might be a long time for a developer, it’s a short time for a city to evolve. There isn’t another place for it if big box demand does emerge.
- Discussion turned to the relationship between residential growth and commercial demand. Growth to the south is already here. With residential growth comes commercial growth, whether or not it’s close to I-5. Mr. Langdon was questioned about pending multifamily permits; he stated there are several prospective West Longview developments at preapp stage.
- “Why can’t it be zoned both ways and whoever comes first ‘builds the castle’?” Is there a way to design zoning to encompass both levels of use?

In addition, two written comments were received either at the meeting or via letter, both from people who attended. Some of the written comments received overlapped discussion during the meeting.

- Commentator wants the land to remain commercial zoning that would promote use of the whole block, but beyond that is not clear on what the best zoning designation should be.
- This was the only area where a large shopping center could be placed in West Longview when the area’s designation was changed ten years ago, and that has not changed now. Eliminating the designation would virtually guarantee the area would never have a major shopping area, which would be of value to people from miles around.
- There is a need to change the designation to allow for smaller commercial on the south side of Ocean Beach Highway. At the same time, this would cause traffic congestion and left turn issues. By contrast a larger shopping area would have limited access and would not pose the same issues.
- The current comp plan “holds” the area for specific uses, and ten years is a relatively short time to realize the intended level of development. It would be short-sighted to change the designation. The current Regional Commercial designation is the correct designation and ultimately the correct use for the area. Commentator opposed any changes at this time.