

MINUTES

Springfield Planning Commission
Work Session
Springfield City Hall—Jesse Maine Room
225 Fifth Street, Springfield

March 7, 2006
6 p.m.

PRESENT: David Cole, Chair; Frank Cross, Vice Chair; Steve Moe, Greg Shaver, Gayle Decker, members; Bill Grile, Greg Mott, Colin Stephens, Springfield staff; Joe Leahy, City Attorney.

ABSENT: Lee Beyer

1. 300-FOOT MAIL OUT NOTIFICATION DISCUSSION

Commissioner Cole called the meeting to order.

Mr. Stephens Planning Supervisor, joined the commission for a discussion of the 300-foot neighboring property owner notification requirement. He reminded the commission that three of the City's four land use application types required such notification, types II, III, and IV. A code amendment adopted in 2005 had changed the requirement from 100 feet of the subject property to 300 feet. Another code change required the property owner to post a sign noticing the public of the pending application. Mr. Stephens shared an example of the sign with the commission.

Continuing, Mr. Stephens said staff had mailed thousands more mailed notices than in the past because of the expanded requirement. However, the requirement had not appeared to stimulate a commensurate level of public input and was an additional work load for clerical staff. In addition, the mailing costs were higher and returned notices were heavy because staff had to work with the information provided by the County Assessor's Office. Those returned mailings must be filed.

Mr. Stephens emphasized the positive feedback the City had received in regard to the posted signs.

Mr. Stephens recommend a return to the State standard of 100 feet in regard to mailed notices.

Commissioners discussed the staff recommendation. Commissioner Cole did not object to reducing the requirement to a lower figure. He was not sure of the appropriate number, however.

Commissioner Carpenter asked about the potential of mailing a postcard instead of a letter. Mr. Stephens indicated staff could look into that. He said that the costs were generated more by the administrative costs associated with the process than the mailed materials or postage.

Commissioner Cross asked how many applications the City had sent mailings for. Mr. Stephens said there were hundreds of applications involved.

Mr. Grile noted that on land use decisions, the City provided notice twice, once to provide notice of the hearing and once to provide information on the final decision. Commissioner Carpenter believed that second notice was restricted only to those who participated in the hearing.

Commissioner Cole suggested that information could be posted on the Web site to provide the public with information about the application and a link provided on the posted sign. Mr. Stephens endorsed that idea.

Mr. Mott indicated that all staff reports regarding applications that were going to the commission and council were posted on the Web site. However, the City was limited in what it could place on the Web in regard to notice to adjacent properties. Mr. Grile noted interest on the part of staff in providing additional information via the Web.

Commissioner Carpenter suggested postcards be mailed to properties located 100 to 300 feet of the subject property and letters mailed as had been to properties within the 100 foot limit.

Mr. Grile questioned whether the City needed to retain the mailings that were not received and instead include an amendment in the code that mailings were assumed to be received and the mailings discarded if returned. Mr. Leahy indicated he would look into that question.

Commissioner Cross asked if more accurate addressing information could be obtained to reduce mailings. Mr. Stephens did not think the City had a more accurate source to look to. Mr. Mott indicated the mailing was to go to the most recent owner of record, and the only source for that information was the Department of Assessment and Taxation. Mr. Leahy added that the department was behind in its work.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Carpenter, Mr. Stephens indicated that rights-of-way were not included in the notice distance. Commissioner Cross asked about large lot sizes. Commissioner Cole feared that reducing the notice in that instance could mean that people across the street from a property with a pending application would not receive notice.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Carpenter, Mr. Stephens indicated the notice was mailed to both property owners and tenants.

Commissioner Decker arrived.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Cross, Mr. Stephens said that signs must be able to be seen clearly from the street, and Planning staff followed up in regard to enforcement of the requirement.

Commissioner Cross wanted to minimize the cost rather than reduce the requirement. Commissioner Carpenter was concerned about the potential that senior citizens living 200 feet from a property with a pending application would never see a posted sign, but the application could have an impact on their property.

Commissioner Cross wanted more information before making a decision.

Commissioner Shaver arrived.

Commissioner Carpenter suggested staff compare the return rates from past years with the current year's experience. He also wanted more experience before making a decision.

Commissioner Shaver preferred more notice rather than less notice. He said the traffic impacts from some developments were generally felt more than 300 feet away.

Commissioner Cross asked staff to look into the legality of mailing a postcard as opposed to a letter.

Mr. Mott noted that the previous week the City received eight applications. That could generate 2,500 notices requiring address labels, envelopes, and the actual notices, and it took a day and a half to complete the task for stuffing and mailing the envelopes. He said the Downtown Refinement Plan amendments required 1,800 notices; 300 to 400 were returned, and the mailing generated only a few calls to staff and little testimony. He questioned the effectiveness of the mailing if they were generating so little response, and suggested that generally, people were more likely to care if a development was occurring next door.

Commissioner Decker believed that if people cared about a proposal, they showed up no matter what the notice requirement was. She pointed out the commission held many public hearings at which no one attended. She

believed that in a time of tight budgets, 100 feet was adequate.

Mr. Leahy suggested that people would have a difficult time distinguishing between two different types of paper notice. He thought if the City were to mail notice, it should mail the same type of notice.

Mr. Leahy indicated he would look into the subject of the returned mailings.

Commissioner Cross suggested that the City mail postcards rather than letters and provide a contact number. Mr. Stephens said the governing statute identified what must be included in the notice, and he would see if it would fit on a postcard.

Mr. Grile said the recommendation was not about keeping people from getting notice, but to address the volume of applications the City was receiving. The City constantly evaluated how it spent its resources; the previous evening the council increased planning fees to recover 75 percent of all costs. The City's fees were among the highest in Oregon and could not go much higher; subsequently, staff had to get the most of the resources it had.

Commissioner Carpenter suggested that staff look into ways to reduce redundant notices.

2. ADJOURN

Commissioner Cole adjourned the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

(Recorded by Kimberly Young)