



# Bellevue Planning Commission

ATTACHMENT C

## Planning Commission Standards & Practices

The following standards and practices were approved jointly by the Planning Commission, City Council liaison and staff at the Planning Commission's annual retreat November 16, 2016.

### **What is the Planning Commission's primary role?**

1. The Planning Commission's role is to advise the City Council in matters pertaining to the Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Code. This includes the following:
  - a. Plan Update - The Commission may recommend new policies to Council when a comprehensive plan is developed and will identify the policy implications for Council's consideration.
  - b. Plan Amendments - The Commission may review proposed policy language during a plan amendment and the review is bounded within the scope set by City Council. The review includes consistency of the proposed policy to other policies in the comprehensive plan, identification of policy implications for Council's consideration and possible recommendations for substitute language.
  - c. Code Amendments - The Commission reviews proposed land use code amendments for consistency with other policies in the comprehensive plan, notes policy implications for Council's considerations and may recommend changes to the proposed code amendments consistent with those findings.
  - d. Council Special Requests - The Commission reviews special requests by Council only within the scope of that request and does not engage in policy debate or recommend underlying policy changes, unless requested by Council to do so.
2. The City Council is the body charged with setting and adopting policy for the City, and Council highly values the roles and contributions of the Planning Commission which are advisory in nature. .
3. The Commission cites findings to support their conclusions and decisions and those findings are related to the comprehensive plan. The public record clearly reflects this so the public and Council fully understand the recommendations made and the reasons.
4. Each Commissioner brings individual perspectives to the discussion often based on experiences from the neighborhoods in which they live or the interactions of everyday life. The goal of the Planning Commission is to be impartial and take a city-wide view without representing a constituency or being political.
5. The Commission identifies the scope of policy areas in the plan that are applicable to the matter being considered and the amount and type of data required to adequately conduct their review. Ideally, it is desired that this should be scoped with Staff at the beginning of a project, prior to a Staff report and recommendation coming before the Commission.
6. The Planning Commission reviews the record before them, including staff's recommendations and deliberates upon it based on the policy perspectives provided by the Comprehensive Plan.
7. The Commission takes into account how site-specific considerations influence broader citywide policy.
8. The Planning Commission always strives for equity and balance in the decisions carefully weighing the effect on comprehensive plan policies.

**What are the Staff's and City Council's roles in relationship to the Planning Commission?**

9. Staff provides support to the Planning Commission. This includes research, reports and Staff recommendations (reflecting equity and balance in the analysis, such as showing the pros and cons) to support the Planning Commission work program, and carrying out any legal requirements for public notification. Support also includes meeting logistics and staff support services.
10. Staff's work program and resources are determined and directed by City Council. If the Commission desires to amend the work program or requires additional resources, the Commission will seek Council's approval first.
11. The officers of the Planning Commission are encouraged to meet with the City Manager and City Council liaison anytime the Commission believes there is a real or perceived breach of trust. The officers will contact the City Council liaison first to discuss questions, comments and concerns. The City Council liaison may have the discretion to apprise the Planning Commission Chair on matters of City business that are confidential if that matter has potential impact on an ongoing Planning Commission matter. To ensure there is no inadvertent waiver of any privileges or protections afforded by Washington law, the City Council liaison will consult with the City Attorney's Office before sharing such confidential matters.
12. City Council is the legislative authority. Council looks to the Planning Commission to provide planning recommendations (written and verbal) that are objective, backed with facts and findings, and related to comprehensive plan policy to support the conclusion.
13. In forwarding an item to the Commission, the City Council will often include specificity about scope and policy direction. To be of best value in its advisory role, the Council's expectation is that the Commission strives to stay within this prescribed scope and policy direction. "Think outside the box but color within the lines."

**How should the public be engaged in Planning Commission proceedings?**

14. Public comment and testimony is critical to Planning Commission deliberation and action. As a neutral party, the Commission does not represent any neighborhood, citizens' group or interested party. While being impartial, Commissioners do bring forth a body of knowledge and expertise from their perspectives as citizens.
15. Public testimony is important to the planning process, and the Commission reviews it objectively and examines its relationship to the overall policy issues at hand.
16. Public comment standards in the Planning Commission's By-Laws should be reviewed regularly to ensure they continue to fulfill their intent and purpose. Based on current observations, consider revising the By-Laws and establish that public comment should be 3 minutes per person. Consider having it after each study session, and having one overall general comment period at the end of the meeting. POSTPONED FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION.<sup>1</sup>
17. The Planning Commission understands that often factual claims are made without supporting evidence during public testimony and the Commission is very careful about what is considered as credible evidence.
18. The Commission understands it is not prudent to address public engagement as town-hall democracy.
19. The Planning Commission recognizes that the By-Laws provide consistency for rules of order. Testimony from persons supporting or protesting proposed actions are addressed to the Chair.

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<sup>1</sup> This issue was addressed in the most recent update of the Planning Commission's by-laws (approved September 27, 2018).

Commission members address their statements to the Chair and directly question persons on the floor only with the expressed permission of the Chairperson.

**What are the operational expectations for the Planning Commission and Staff?**

20. The Planning Commission does not act as its own subject matter expert because it can be misleading, detract from the Commission's objectivity and create conflicts of interest. The City provides its boards and commissions subject matter experts, as needed. Staff will be the primary to coordinate technical and subject matter experts presenting or providing data to the Planning Commission. Planning Commissioners may suggest resources to present or provide data based on their professional knowledge areas. Planning Commissioners shall coordinate this with Staff in advance of any presentation.
21. Staff and Commissioners are always respectful and tolerant of each other and the right to disagree with each other. Everyone understands that open, thoughtful and honest communication is essential for good working relationships.
22. Council communicates clearly the scope, time and schedule for special requests of the Planning Commission. Staff and Planning Commission will adaptively manage the request, work diligently to meet the request and report back to Council if circumstances change.
23. The Planning Commission expects the staff to prepare materials and present findings (written and oral) that are clear, concise and include impactful graphics. The use of data and technology can be helpful. The focus is on policy, relevant, supporting data and recommendation. 'Relevant' refers to data that is closely connected or appropriate to the work of the matter of hand, before the Planning Commission.
24. Planning Commission orders their work and agendas with the mandated responsibilities as the highest priority.
25. Commissioners are prepared and read the packet materials in advance of the meeting to operate efficiently. Staff strives to make all information given to the Planning Commission to be user friendly and manageable.
26. Commissioners who miss meetings request a briefing on issues covered at the last meeting and don't revisit issues already addressed at the previous meeting.
27. It is Council's prerogative to decide when its Boards and Commissions meet with each other. The Planning Commission may request such a meeting with reason and value identified. The Liaison will discuss with the City Manager.