

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, July 8, 2025

4:30 p.m.

City Hall Council Chambers

415 W. 6th Street | Vancouver, WA

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM

Commission Members Present:

Patrick Adigweme, Nena Cavel, Alyssa Wheeler, John Jay, Sandra Beck, Marjorie Ledell, Zach Pyle

Motion by Commissioner Wheeler, seconded by Commissioner Jay to approve the May 13th and May 27th Meeting Minutes. Motion passes with three abstentions from Commissioner Jay, Ledell, and Vice-Chair Pyle who were absent on May 27th.

Motion carried unanimously.

Staff Present: Rebecca Kennedy, staff liaison, Maricsa Acosta, Support Staff, Becky Rude, staff attorney,

Roll call

Commissioner Jay – present
Commissioner Wheeler – present
Commissioner Beck – present
Commissioner Cavel- present
Commissioner Ledell- present
Vice Chair Pyle – present
Chair Adigweme – present

All present.

Workshop: Comprehensive Plan Update: DEIS Findings – Rebecca Kennedy, Deputy Director, Meredith Herbst, Associate Planner, Community Development Department

Staff presented an overview of the 'Our Vancouver' Comprehensive Plan Update and findings from the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. This included an overview of two Action alternatives that reflect City priorities, State requirements, Community engagement, and existing and anticipated future conditions, as well as a No Action alternative that reflects what would happen if no changes were made beyond self-implementing state requirements.

Members

Patrick Adigweme
Chair

Zach Pyle
Vice Chair

Marjorie Ledell

Nena Cavel

Sandra Beck

Allyssa Wheeler

John Jay

Community Development Department

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All alternatives would be subject to the requirements in current applicable state and City critical lands and shoreline use laws and policies like those found in the City's Critical Areas Ordinance and Shoreline Master Program.

Brief Summary:

Staff reported that the DEIS for the Comprehensive Plan was published on July 8, with a public comment period open through September 8, 2025. The DEIS evaluates proposed land use alternatives against a no-action option. This is a major milestone in Comprehensive Plan update process but not the final step, as work will continue toward a preferred map, final policies and implementation steps, and a final development code. The alternatives reflect over two years of engagement with advisory committees, policymakers, community members, and developers, including a public mapping platform that allows community members to compare the two action alternatives against the no action alternative on a parcel by parcel level that has been live since Nov. of 2024. Staff noted outreach and engagement will continue over the next several months through neighborhood associations, agency partners, community-based organizations, and broad public engagement events (virtual and in-person). Interactive public meetings (drop-in) are scheduled for July 30 from 4pm-7pm at Firstenburg Community Center and August 9 from 11am-2pm at City Hall. Virtual sessions via Zoom (presentation and Q&A) are scheduled for July 22 from 4pm-6pm and August 4 from 11am-1pm.

Staff recapped the planning process leading to the (DEIS), noting early visioning work with policymakers and partners, housing and economic analyses, and extensive community input. The DEIS evaluates land use alternatives for growth through 2045 across housing, jobs, transportation, utilities, and the environment. She emphasized the DEIS is a high-level tool to guide selection of a preferred alternative, which will manage incremental growth over the 20-year planning time horizon.

Key points:

- **Housing:** Alternatives 1 and 2 meet or exceed projected housing needs; growth will occur incrementally. The no action alternative does not.
- **Jobs:** Alternative 1 supports more industrial jobs, Alternative 2 provides more office-based jobs; displacement risks vary. Both exceed City jobs targets.
- **Transportation:** No action shows highest per-household driving; Alternative 2 shows the largest decline in per household trips but overall trips rise as more people live here.
- **Public Services:** All alternatives increase demand on public services. Highest demand for new services is in east Vancouver; older areas will still require infrastructure reinvestment.
- **Environment & Climate:** All alternatives reduce long-term emissions as they are subject to state and local regulations; the action alternatives that result in greater reductions in per household trips will see greater emissions reductions.

Commission discussion and staff responses:

- **Can the plan address neighborhood-level impacts, given that while the DEIS evaluates citywide impacts, residents most directly experience changes within their own neighborhoods?** Staff responded that the DEIS, as a non-project review, cannot provide analysis at that scale. Site-specific impacts are addressed during the development and entitlement process. However, tools such as the online story map allow residents to view parcel-level changes (zoning, building height, and land use) and provide feedback. Staff also noted that upcoming public meetings will provide additional opportunities for neighborhood-level conversations.
- **When preparing the alternatives, were equity lenses and data indices used to help ensure that impacts would be absorbable across all neighborhoods and not disproportionately distributed to more vulnerable ones?** Staff responded that while the DEIS cannot analyze impacts at such a granular level, which occurs later during site-specific development review, this concern is recognized. To support neighborhood-level understanding, the online story map allows residents to view parcel-level information (current and future zoning, building heights, and land

uses) and provide feedback. Staff added that upcoming public meetings will also provide opportunities to discuss neighborhood-specific experiences and concerns. Policies that direct how the City makes capital and programmatic investments will use an equity lens to understand who benefits from different decisions.

- **Was there anything unexpected in the DEIS?** Staff responded they expected job capacity in Alternative 2 to be higher, and the difference between Alternatives 1 and 2 to be larger. They explained they will continue examining this, as it reflects changes in the nature and location of work. Staff also noted they had anticipated higher housing totals in Alternative 2 but were encouraged that the feasibility analysis provided a more realistic picture of actual development potential, showing that not all zoned capacity is likely to be redeveloped. Staff also noted that while the DEIS is not neighborhood-specific, it does break down impacts by three geographic zones—west, central, and east Vancouver—for most environmental topics, offering additional context on how impacts may vary across the City. Upcoming public meetings will further support neighborhood-level conversations.
- **How likely Alt 1 and Alt 2 is to reach housing goals?** Staff explained that the modeling does not capture individual behavior, but did analyze zoned capacity and development feasibility under current and future market conditions. The analysis focused on feasibility rather than only zoned capacity, and applied deduction factors for critical areas, wetlands, public improvements and other geographic constraints to estimate realistic unit numbers. Staff emphasized that housing targets are considered minimums, and achieving them will require flexibility, as market conditions and individual decisions cannot be fully modeled. The approach reflects the best available data and assumptions, while recognizing that human behavior and market dynamics are harder to predict.
- **After the Comp Plan is adopted, will neighborhood or area specific plans be developed, and if yes will they include their own environmental review processes to better analyze specific impacts?** Staff responded that recommendations will identify priority areas for future subarea plans, and these will require more detailed environmental review under the SEPA process. Typically, the scale of these plans is large enough to warrant a full EIS, which allows for more quantitative analysis of impacts. As an example, staff referenced the Planned Action EIS for The Heights, which anticipated a set number of housing units and analyzed associated traffic and environmental impacts. Planned action EISs are often used for area plans because they “front-load” the SEPA review process, providing a more detailed and comprehensive assessment than a standard non-project EIS. This approach offers clearer, more discrete, and interpretable information for the public at a geographically specific level.
- **When calculating transportation emissions, is it possible to also differentiate between overall emissions and per capita emissions, similar to the vehicle miles traveled (VMT) analysis?** For total emissions, it’s not possible to calculate this at the per person or per household level. There is a correlation between VMT and transportation-related emissions though, even if it can’t be fully quantified, it’s reasonable to assume that alternatives with lower per household VMT also have lower per household transportation-related emissions. A more detailed written response can be provided if needed.
- **When evaluating development impacts on public utilities and services, was consideration given to the potential strain on services from a higher population of unhoused people if less housing is built?** Staff noted this was not a specific metric included in the analysis but acknowledged it as an important point that could be considered for inclusion in the final EIS.
- **As community feedback is gathered, some may raise quality-of-life concerns such as increased noise, traffic, density, or environmental impacts, preferring to keep things close to the status quo. How should these concerns be addressed?** Staff responded growth will occur regardless, and the choice is whether to manage it intentionally to achieve community values and quality-of-life goals, or to let it occur unmanaged with less desirable outcomes. While growth brings more people and traffic, it also creates demand for improved transit, more local grocery stores and services, and funding for parks and trails. Higher density can shorten trips and provide

amenities closer to where people live. Staff emphasized that while change is difficult, managed growth can enhance quality of life by aligning with community priorities and ensuring resources are available to support them.

- **Was an EIS completed for the existing Comprehensive Plan, and was it managed effectively?**
Commission noted that this is not new territory—the City has managed EIS processes before, such as with The Heights, where initial resistance was addressed through mitigation. The Heights is viewed as a strong example of how the City has used EISs to understand potential impacts of non-project actions and guide growth toward the future, and the City should not hesitate to highlight this success. Staff agreed, adding that Downtown is another example where past EISs, such as those tied to the Esther Short Redevelopment Plan and the Vancouver City Center Vision Plan, supported redevelopment. While change was challenging, it brought significant investment in public space and improved transit service, including BRT and fixed-route networks. Staff emphasized that the City has successfully managed urbanization and growth in the past, in part because environmental review processes were successfully used to identify and then reduce and mitigate impacts.
- **When we look at the targets, on slide 7, does that capacity align with Ideal Target Vacancy rate?**
Staff responded yes. The housing targets were developed using a target vacancy rate of 7%, which generally indicates a healthy, functioning housing market. This is a range rather than a fixed number, because vacancies affect rents: higher rents encourage more development, which in turn increases supply. The targets are essentially calculated to maintain this desired 7% vacancy.

Final Comments: Staff noted that the public comment period is open through September 8, with opportunities to provide input through in-person meetings, virtual sessions, and online forms. This is the only commission workshop on Draft EIS, though the executive summary and draft document are available online for review. They emphasized using formal channels is required for submitting comments under SEPA, and reminded people to use the online form, voicemail, or email so their comments are included in the DEIS record. After the comment period, staff will work with Council, the Planning Commission, and a variety of other partners to identify a preferred alternative, refine policies and code in the fall, and complete adoption in early 2026.

Community Forum - no one signed up to give comments.

Public Hearing: Downtown Design Guidelines Updates – Jason Nortz, Development Review Division Manager, and Greg Turner, Land Use Program Manager, City of Vancouver Community Development Department; Chris Sensenig, Associate Principal Raimi & Associates and Consultant Project Manager

Staff presented the proposed update to the Downtown Design Guidelines, last updated in 1995. The new guidelines are designed to better reflect current downtown development, promote active and pedestrian-friendly ground floors, require quality materials, and discourage flat façades and parking-dominated street fronts. Updates were refined after feedback from the Council, Planning Commission and a variety of stakeholders to balance design quality with cost, including adjustments to window depth, bird-safe glass, lighting, and material requirements. A new applicant checklist was also added to make reviews clearer and more consistent. Staff asked the Planning Commission to recommend that City Council approve the new design guidelines.

Discussion Questions

- **Commissioners' comments:** Glad to see more flexibility incorporated into the recommendations, which should make things easier for developers and help spur downtown development. Many of these issues have been flagged over the years, and glad to see this work come together with input from those who will be using the guidelines.

- **Were comments from the City Center Redevelopment Authority (CCRA) incorporated into these changes?** Staff responded that they met with CCRA on two occasions, and the current manual reflects their input. They were generally receptive to the proposed update.
- **Do the lighting guidelines (such as street lighting) apply to the public right-of-way, or only to private property?** Staff responded the guidelines only apply to private property. Public right-of-way lighting is not included.
- **How were the guidelines organized before, compared to the new table of contents shown today?** Staff responded the old guidelines were very general—a short 15-page document with outdated photos and little detail. The updated version is much more comprehensive, with clear design direction, updated photos, and stronger ties between the text and visual examples.

Public Testimony: None.

Commission Deliberation:

- Commissioner Beck – Stated support for moving forward with the updated guidelines.
- Commissioner Wheeler – Agreed to move forward, noting there are areas where additional flexibility could be considered but overall felt it was a positive step.
- Commissioner Jay- Expressed support and confirmed he was in favor of moving ahead.
- Commissioner Cavel – Supported moving forward and appreciated that staff had been responsive to developer feedback, particularly on reducing window depth requirements.
- Vice Chair Pyle- Expressed general support but encouraged staff to continue tracking and communicating potential cost impacts alongside other initiatives, such as the green building policy. Also suggested that public infrastructure, especially street lighting, should be held to similar standards as private development.
- Commissioner Ledell – no comments

Motioned by Commissioner Jay, seconded by Commissioner Cavel, to recommend approval of the changes as outlined in the presentation and staff report.

Roll call

Commissioner Jay - yes
 Commissioner Wheeler - yes
 Commissioner Beck - yes
 Commissioner Cavel - yes
 Commissioner Ledell - yes
 Vice Chair Pyle -yes
 Chair Adigweme -yes

Motion passed unanimously.

Public Hearing: Zoning code Amendment/Impact Fee Deferral – Bryan Snodgrass, Principal Planner, Community Development Department; Sam Whitely, Housing Manager, Economic Prosperity and Housing Department.

Staff explained that this proposal is part of ongoing efforts to help get housing projects moving in a challenging development environment. Recent changes have included reducing parking requirements for affordable housing, adjusting review timelines, and deferring certain fees under the Multifamily Tax Exemption program. Despite these efforts, housing production is far below the city's goal of 2,000 units per year. The proposed change would allow developers to defer park and traffic impact fees—normally due at building permit issuance—until a certificate of occupancy is requested. This is intended to reduce upfront costs and make it easier for projects that are “on the edge” to move forward. The deferral would be limited to 36 months, require a lien on the property, and is consistent with similar

programs in other Washington cities. Staff also shared that the proposal aligns with city policies and housing goals, provided rough cost estimates, and outlined the required code changes.

Discussion Questions

- **Comment:** Praised the updated graph showing permits issued vs. units completed.
- **What is the ratio of permits granted vs construction completed? What is the relationship? Success rate?** Staff responded there is a natural timeline between permit issuance and project completion. Most completed projects were permitted in previous years, often one to two years earlier. Historically, most permitted projects are eventually completed. However, economic conditions can affect completion rates; in tighter markets, such as 2008 and 2015, some permitted projects were delayed by months or year or not finished at all. Given the current market, there is a possibility that completion may lag permits issued.
- **What's the difference in incentives for affordable vs. market-rate housing, including per-unit public investment?** Clarified that MFTE applies to both, income-based MFTE targets 80% AMI, construction sales tax deferral also targets 80% AMI. The City's Affordable Housing Fund invests ~\$75,000/unit for deeply affordable units (50% AMI), while CDBG and HOME funds target very low-income tenants with flexible per-unit funding. Local funding typically covers ~10% of project costs and leverages state/federal funds. Deferrals for market-rate units provide less than 1% financial benefit but help structure deals and make projects feasible.
- **With cities that have already implemented this process, is there enough data to hint at the results?** Staff noted that deferral programs are relatively new in other jurisdictions; only two projects in one city had used impact fee deferrals. Historical experience shows small tools like this can help projects move forward in difficult markets, though it's hard to isolate which tool is most effective and its likely that a combination of tools can help only those projects that are already close to being feasible. In other words, this change and others like it will not all the sudden make many more projects feasible in the short term and under current economic conditions.
- **Does the application process for the deferral long or burdensome?** Staff responded that the goal is to make the process simple and easily applied, like current single-family permit deferrals.
- **Does the updated graph reflect year-to-date numbers?** Staff confirmed that 2025 numbers were updated slightly as of mid-year.
- **What is the value of the deferral and its impact?** Staff explained that the deferral provides financial relief to developers, while the city foregoes potential interest revenue in the short term. The total potential impact is relatively small compared to city budgets, and the benefit is helping projects move forward in a challenging development environment.

Public Testimony: None.

Commission Deliberation:

- Commissioner Beck –Supported the proposal and liked its structure.
- Commissioner Wheeler – Strongly supported the proposal and appreciated the City's efforts to advance as many projects as possible.
- Commissioner Jay- Agreed with fellow commissioners, emphasizing that the program provides a strong benefit to developers relative to the modest public cost. Highlighted that construction lending rates are higher than potential City interest, so each dollar deferred leverages a greater impact on housing production. Expressed strong support for initiatives that help increase housing supply.
- Commissioner Cavel –Supported the initiative, noting it is a positive step to encourage housing development.
- Vice Chair Pyle- Noted that this represents an incremental but nonetheless positive change to support housing production. Agreed with Commissioner Jay that the change provides a greater benefit for projects than loss of interest for the City, which is a beneficial tradeoff.

- Commissioner Ledell – Expressed support, praising staff for recognizing housing market and economic dynamics and creating creative solutions to spur development.
- Chair Adigweme - Expressed support and noted that the updated graph is helpful because it makes clear the need for these sorts of changes to support housing development.

Motion by Commissioner Cavel, seconded by Commissioner Jay, to recommend approval of the proposed changes to VMC 20.915 providing for impact fee deferrals, and outlined in the presentation and staff report.

Roll call

Commissioner Jay - yes
 Commissioner Wheeler - yes
 Commissioner Beck - yes
 Commissioner Cavel - yes
 Commissioner Ledell - yes
 Vice Chair Pyle - yes
 Chair Adigweme - yes

Motion passes unanimously.

Commissioner Communications

- Thank you to Kail Hibbs for their outstanding support for the Planning Commission over the last few months during a staff transition, and a warm welcome to Maricsa Acosta, the new Senior Support Specialist who will be facilitating Planning Commission and Transportation and Mobility Commission meetings.

Communications from Staff

- The recently approved biennial budget includes funding for a new Long Range Planning Manager position, which has been vacant for several years. This role will oversee the Long-Range Planning and Equitable Development teams and will engage with the Planning Commission. Staff noted this is an important step for succession planning and long-term team capacity.

The meeting adjourned at 7:22 pm

Patrick Adigweme, Chair