



Planning Commission Meeting Agenda

January 27, 2026
4:30 PM

City Hall Aspen Conference Room

415 W. 6th Street | Vancouver, WA

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Dial: +1 347-941-5324

Meeting ID: 212 780 694 307 21

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

2. Approval of Minutes

Adoption of Minutes — January 13, 2026

3. Workshop

Overview of Planning Commission Bylaws, Open Public Meetings Act, Conflict of Interest and disclosure/recusal requirements | Becky Rude, Deputy City Attorney, City Attorney's Office

4. Break 6:00 – 6:30 pm

5. Community Forum

To provide public testimony, please see instructions below.

6. Workshop

Overview of Washington State Growth Management Act | Bryan Snodgrass, Principal Planner, Community Development Department

7. Workshop

Workshop: Overview of Development Review Process | Greg Turner, Land Use Manager, Community Development Department

8. Staff and Chair Communications

Members

Patrick Adigweme
Chair

Zach Pyle
Vice Chair

Nena Cavel

Sandra Beck

John Jay

Alyssa Wheeler

Kate Castenson

Community Development Department

415 W. 6th Street
P.O. Box 1995
Vancouver, WA 98668
360-487-7800
Relay: 711
cityofvancouver.us

Adjournment

Community Forum Instructions

The public is invited to speak regarding any issue. Members of the public testifying are asked to limit testimony to three minutes. There are three ways to provide comments:

1. Writing: Public comments can be submitted in writing (name, address, contact information and comments) via email to PlanningCommission@cityofvancouver.us by noon on the day of the meeting.
2. Remotely: Complete the [online form](#) before noon the day of the meeting and join via phone or Teams (details on each agenda). Staff will call on you to speak when it's your turn.
3. In Person: Complete the [online form](#) before noon the day of the meeting or a speaker request form in person prior to the start of the Community Forum portion of the meeting.

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To request accommodation or other formats, please contact:

Community Development Department | 360-487-7813 | Relay: 711 | PlanningCommission@cityofvancouver.us

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, January 13, 2026

5:00 p.m.

City Hall Aspen Room

415 W. 6th Street | Vancouver, WA

The meeting was called to order at 5:20 pm

Commission Members Present: Patrick Adigweme, Nena Cavel, Alyssa Wheeler, John Jay, Sandra Beck, Zach Pyle, Kate Castenson

Staff Present: Rebecca Kennedy, staff liaison; Becky Rude, staff attorney; Marisa Acosta, support staff; Dominique Martinelli and Mark Person, presenters

Motion by Commissioner Jay, seconded by Commissioner Cavel to approve December 9, 2025, meeting minutes. Motion carried unanimously.

Workshop: Comprehensive Plan Update: Draft Land Use, Housing and Economic Opportunity Chapters

Presenters: Rebecca Kennedy, Deputy Director; Dominique Martinelli, Senior Long-Range Planner, Community Development Department

Staff provided an overview of the first three draft chapters of the Comprehensive Plan, which was reviewed by City Council the previous evening, generating feedback that will be integrated as the process continues. Staff noted that the review sequence differs between the Plan chapters and the development code, with Council reviewing chapters first followed by the Planning Commission, and the Planning Commission reviewing the code first followed by the City Council. Staff will summarize, share and incorporate feedback from both bodies throughout the process.

The legal framework, including the Growth Management Act, relevant Revised Code of Washington (RCW) sections, and Washington Administrative Code (WAC) sections, were outlined, noting requirements for internal consistency, data-supported assumptions, and capacity to accommodate projected growth through 2045. Recent state legislation related to housing and climate, as well as the city's historical inclusion of the optional Economic Opportunity chapter, were also highlighted.

Members

Patrick Adigweme
Chair

Zach Pyle
Vice Chair

Nena Cavel

Sandra Beck

Alyssa Wheeler

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The Comprehensive Plan is guided by an overarching vision statement developed in 2023 through engagement with roughly 1,000 community members. This statement, located in the Introduction chapter, serves as the “north star” for the plan, framing goals and policies across all chapters. Each chapter including Land Use, Housing, and Economic Opportunity also has its own supporting vision statement to guide strategies and actions. The vision statements provide the foundation for all plan decisions and ensure alignment with community-desired outcomes.

Key chapter highlights include: the Land Use chapter, which focuses on connected and accessible neighborhoods, preserving employment lands, reducing emissions, and promoting infill; the growth concept, which provides a 20-year framework for centers and employment areas; the Housing chapter, addressing housing production, diversity, affordability, and displacement; and the Economic Opportunity chapter, which aligns with the city’s economic strategy and supports workforce development, small businesses, and sustainable growth.

Staff outlined next steps in the Comprehensive Plan update process, including upcoming workshops in February on remaining chapters, parallel review of development code updates, and an anticipated recommendation from the Commission in May.

Commissioner Discussion and Staff Responses

Commissioner Wheeler

Offered positive feedback on the Economic Opportunity chapter, noting appreciation for its focus on future residents. She suggested that a similar forward-looking perspective could be incorporated into the Land Use and Housing chapters and expressed that the materials were clear, well written, and moving in a positive direction.

Commissioner Jay

Asked whether the Economic Opportunity chapter could further explore Vancouver’s position within the regional economy, particularly in relation to Portland. He noted that a significant portion of Vancouver residents work outside the city and requested additional analysis of potential risks and opportunities associated with Portland’s current economic challenges, as well as how Vancouver might adapt or attract more workers and jobs locally. Staff acknowledged the request and stated they would investigate the issue.

Commissioner Castenson

Expressed appreciation for the clear organization of the chapters and for the consistent integration of equity and climate considerations.

Q: What is the process for developing the key actions associated with each goal? Staff explained that key actions are informed by community engagement feedback, subject-matter experts, and best practices research. Actions are organized by implementation timeframe, including a mid-range period aligned with six-year strategic and capital planning horizons, and longer-term actions extending 7 to 20 years. Staff noted that early actions focus on foundational updates to plans, codes, infrastructure systems and additional implementation chapter will present actions in a detailed table format.

Commissioner Cavel

Q: How does the Comprehensive Plan distinguish between managing growth and limiting growth within the Growth Concept framework? Staff explained that growth is managed by directing development to appropriate areas while limiting growth in environmentally sensitive or resource areas through existing regulations, such as critical areas protections. Broader growth management strategies focus on concentrating growth within cities and urban growth areas, with environmental protection policies addressed further in the Parks and Climate chapters.

Vice Chair Pyle

Q: Is staff seeking feedback on the Growth Concept graphic itself, the overall concept, or both? Staff stated that feedback on both the graphic and the overall concept is welcomed.

Q: Does the housing needs table assume all required units will be newly constructed, or can existing units become affordable through filtering? Staff explained that affordability targets can be met through a combination of new construction, income-restricted housing, and naturally occurring affordable housing created through filtering. Staff noted that deeply affordable housing generally requires public subsidy but filtering will remain an important component of meeting workforce housing needs, generally considered housing affordable to those making between 80 and 120 percent of the average median income (AMI).

Vice Chair Pyle recommended including a policy for voluntary, periodic City review self-imposed regulations that may impact housing affordability. He also suggested that major freight routes, including I-5, I-205, and SR 500, be more clearly depicted on the Growth Concept map and that city boundaries be easier to identify. Staff agreed to review the graphic for clarity and consider highlighting key freight routes.

Chair Adigweme

Requested additional clarity on how the Growth Concept reflects existing infrastructure versus future development and how the plan accounts for what is realistically achievable across the city. He suggested including a temporal element to show current conditions, potential 10-year changes, and long-term growth outcomes to help visualize how areas like Downtown and Vancouver Mall may evolve.

Staff explained that the Growth Concept reflects what is realistically achievable over the next 20 years based on existing land use patterns, infrastructure, and anticipated investments. Staff noted that growth cannot be evenly distributed across the city due to historical development patterns and that more detailed visualization and subarea planning will occur through future code updates and targeted planning efforts.

Commissioner Beck

Raised concerns about the use of “industrial” terminology along corridors such as Fourth Plain, noting a preference for terminology that better reflects pedestrian-oriented or mixed-use employment areas. She also noted confusion regarding the grouping and labeling of manufactured home zoning districts and suggested clearer differentiation. Staff acknowledged the issue and stated that the zoning district color scheme would be revised to avoid confusion.

Q: How do Comprehensive Plan designations relate to zoning districts, particularly within residential areas? Staff clarified that Comprehensive Plan designations are broad categories that guide more specific zoning districts, which must nest within the plan designations. Staff acknowledged that some graphics may require refinement for clarity.

Community Forum Testimony

Speaker: Mary Keltz - Shared both specific and general feedback regarding the Comprehensive Plan and the preferred alternative. She asked for clarification on the definition of a “parcel,” including how much land is required to accommodate six housing units, and whether there are minimum or maximum parcel sizes. She expressed concern that the proposed 45-foot height limit in low scale neighborhoods could overwhelm existing single and two story homes. More broadly, Ms. Keltz commented on recent trends in apartment development, noting large buildings with little landscaping or shared space, and asked how the City plans to preserve the natural environment and livability while increasing housing supply. She also inquired about where hard copies of the chapters could be accessed. Staff indicated they would follow up with Ms. Keltz to provide hard copies of the chapters.

Workshop: Comprehensive Plan Update: Code Details Pt. 1

Presenters: Rebecca Kennedy, Deputy Director; Mark Person, Senior Land Use Planner, Community Development Department

Staff introduced the session and explained that the discussion would focus on the draft Comprehensive Plan code framework, including base districts, overlays, building types, and zoning distribution across the city. Commissioners received the first draft of the new code as part of their meeting packet.

Key Points:

- The Comprehensive Plan aims to accommodate projected growth while achieving policy objectives and Vancouver’s 20-year vision.
- The code is designed to be more user-friendly, with more graphics and reduced use of footnotes, and to support connected, accessible neighborhoods.
- The city is shifting from primarily single-family zoning to mixed-use and middle housing options to meet projected housing needs without expanding the urban growth area.
- Key goals for the code include focusing on building form and street relationships, reducing nonconformities, and allowing market-driven density and parking.
- Zoning changes include minimum density standards, adjusted maximum building heights, and reduced parking requirements.
- Base districts consolidate development standards (height, density, allowed uses) while additional standards move to building types (placement, landscaping, open space, transparency).
- Special overlays include downtown Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Light Rail Transit (LRT) station areas, industrial holding, noise, airport, and historic areas.
- The Plan establishes four new Comprehensive Plan designations (Residential Neighborhood, Urban Mixed-Use, Employment and Industry, and Open Space), which base zoning districts are nested under. Mobile home parks are specifically designated to preserve naturally affordable housing and are nested under the Residential Neighborhood Comprehensive Plan designation.
- Recent updates to the proposed draft code based on community and technical feedback include removing minimum building heights for most zones due to feasibility concerns raised by developers, and removal of maximum building heights in the institutional campus zone (e.g., Clark College, PeaceHealth) to provide greater flexibility.
- Mixed-use neighborhoods will allow a variety of residential and commercial uses, excluding exclusively single-family detached housing in higher-density zones.

Commissioner's Comments & Questions

Commissioner Cavel

Q: What will the setback requirements be, and how will they balance livability with site efficiency?

Staff explained that setbacks will be contextual based on building type and zoning. Low and medium scale residential areas will generally have 5-foot side and rear setbacks, with allowances for fire ratings and window placement. Front setbacks will typically range from 5–10 feet to accommodate landscaping, utilities, and solid waste storage. Staff noted that these standards represent external setbacks that apply to the full site, not internal setbacks within the site. Regional activity centers downtown are expected to build to the street and will have no setbacks. Staff emphasized the goal of balancing efficient land use with livability and infrastructure needs.

Commissioner Cavel noted that most residents do not use their front yards extensively and expressed concern about imposing unnecessary setbacks. Staff agreed, noting that setbacks serve multiple functions, including landscaping, courtyards, and space for utilities and solid waste management, which support livability in middle housing developments.

Vice Chair Pyle

Q: Is the active ground floor use-ready overlay adding undue complexity or cost to buildings? Staff acknowledged the concern, noting that while the overlay is intended for long-term benefit, converting residential to commercial use involves costs, including differing floor height requirements. To address this, the active ground floor ready overlay, with few exceptions, is located in the Mixed Use Neighborhood and Regional Activity Center zoning districts, where density minimums will drive toward building and construction types that more easily facilitate this conversion.

Q: How will minimum densities apply to mixed-use buildings, particularly when a portion of the building is commercial? Staff explained that mixed use buildings where commercial space exceeds 25% of total square footage would not be subject to minimum residential density requirements. For residential units, a separate density ratio that places a higher “density value” on units with more bedrooms will ensure a mix of unit sizes (1–3 bedrooms) allow development to meet overall minimum density requirements without forcing smaller units exclusively.

Commissioner Beck

Q: How can Neighborhood Centers be created through the code, particularly in areas with added housing, to provide local employment and commercial opportunities? How do building types, setbacks, and street placement support this goal? Staff stated the code’s primary role is to remove barriers to desired development, particularly by allowing more commercial uses in residential areas. This opens the possibility for Neighborhood Centers to form naturally where the market supports it. The active ground floor use-ready overlay is intended to facilitate conversion to commercial uses in larger buildings, even if the market does not initially provide it. Staff emphasized additional strategies, such as direct investment, sub-area planning, and property acquisition, may be necessary to achieve Neighborhood Centers in areas where the market alone will not.

Commissioner Beck suggested that case studies or examples demonstrating how code changes will lead to Neighborhood Centers would be useful, including on the east side and Heights neighborhoods. Staff noted that plan policies can guide public interventions and support creation of Neighborhood Centers in areas lacking market-driven development.

Commissioner Wheeler

Q: To what extent are setbacks relied upon to provide space for fire access, utilities, trees, and solid waste, versus other codes or mechanisms? Staff explained that street frontage and setbacks are coordinated across fire, transportation, building, utilities, and solid waste requirements. Front setbacks are crucial for accommodating utilities, fire access, on-street parking, and solid waste collection.

Q: How do setbacks function in middle housing development, particularly for external versus internal setbacks? Staff clarified that external setbacks provide separation and comfort for neighbors and space for access and utilities, while internal setbacks in middle housing are determined by building code requirements. Middle housing can include zero lot-line attached units with no internal setbacks.

Q: How much do setbacks and other building requirements limit developer flexibility? Staff explained that while these requirements do place some constraints on development, they are necessary to achieve livability and compliance with infrastructure and safety needs, balancing flexibility with essential site requirements.

Q: Are there details on where parking maximums will be applied? The current code does not include maximum off street parking requirements. This is in alignment with the philosophy that development best understands the needs of its target market and should determine the amount of off street parking that is built. This is consistent with proposed code changes to eliminate minimum off street parking requirements as well as maximums. Development outcomes will be reviewed annually to understand if the new code is leading to intended outcomes, and updates can be made if adjustments are needed.

Commissioner Jay

Q: How does the code balance the goal of creating unique and authentic places with the need to provide affordable housing and meet other housing-related policies, such as universal design and housing choice? Could pursuing distinctive building aesthetics create additional costs or barriers to development? Staff explained the focus is on flexibility to allow a variety of building types within market constraints, maximizing land use while recognizing the realities of high material, labor, and financing costs. The code encourages unique public spaces such as streets, parks, and pedestrian infrastructure rather than prescribing private design standards. Universal design measures are applied to public infrastructure where feasible, including tactile signage and accessible pathways, to ensure inclusivity without imposing additional costs on private developments.

Commissioner Castenson - No questions or comments on this section.

Workshop (continued) - Building Types Details

Staff provided an overview of the draft building type table, showing which building typologies are allowed across base districts, from low-scale neighborhoods to heavy industrial areas. Overall, the hybrid form-based approach balances developer flexibility with clear standards for street engagement and livability. Key points included:

- Middle Housing: Allowed in low- and medium-scale neighborhoods, not included in regional activity centers except in master plan areas where a mix of building types can meet the density minimum of 64 units per acre.
- Single-Family Housing: Primarily in low-scale neighborhoods, generally excluded from higher-density or institutional areas unless part of a master plan.

- Institutional Campus: Open to commercial, industrial flex buildings, and residential, with a lot of flexibility in development requirement and use allowances. Maximum height limits are removed in these districts.
- Heavy Industrial: Mostly unchanged; minor stakeholder feedback addressed.
- Townhouse/Rowhouse: Now allowed in mixed-use districts at 32 units per acre after developer feedback and real estate review confirmed feasibility with new density calculation.

Form-Based Approach:

- Emphasis on relationship to the street (build-to lines) and efficient land use.
- Setbacks reduced; maximum impervious surface standards replace lot coverage rules.
- Parking, transparency, and blank wall requirements apply mainly to public-facing sides.

Key Building Types:

- Townhouse/Rowhouse: Front building build-to lines 5–15 feet from street, side street 5–10 feet; rear/side parking allowed; transparency and blank wall requirements only toward public realm.
- Mixed-Use Residential: Reduced setbacks, no minimum/maximum lot size, increased weather protection, transparency and blank wall standards for public-facing sides, parking to rear/side.
- Commercial Block: Primarily but not exclusively one story, generally built to street; some flexibility for outdoor seating or character features; internal parking to rear/side.

Commissioner’s Comments & Questions

Commissioner Adigweme

Q: Will the new code ensure that buildings, including large retail, prioritize entrances facing the street rather than parking lots? Staff confirmed that the code emphasizes street-facing design but acknowledged that some corridors and large retail buildings will still have entrances oriented towards parking due to existing development patterns and vehicle access. Full street-oriented entrances may require future subarea planning and public investment to redevelop large surface parking areas.

Commissioner Wheeler

Q: Do facade modulation requirements for building types present a significant barrier for developers, particularly for middle housing, and how does this affect flexibility? Staff explained that the goal is to break up larger buildings into scales compatible with existing neighborhoods, such as stacked flats or three-story walk-ups, while still allowing pedestrian-oriented designs with shorter block lengths. This approach balances building scale, neighborhood context, and walkability.

Staff added that the team has worked to balance flexibility with creating high-quality, accessible places and noted that creative designs, even unconventional projects, are welcome, and the code aims to provide guidance without overly restricting development.

Commissioner Beck – No questions

Commissioner Jay - No question, thank you.

Commissioner Castenson - No questions for the section thanks.

Commissioner Cavel - No questions.

Vice Chair Pyle

Q: For townhomes and other lower-scale, non-storefront building types, has the 15% ground floor transparency requirement been cross-checked to ensure feasibility? On secondary streets, smaller windows like bathrooms may make this difficult could this standard create challenges for these typologies? Staff noted that townhomes will be heavily relied upon in the near-term implementation and committed to reviewing transparency standards to ensure they are workable for these building types.

Workshop (continued) – Overlay Details

Staff presented updates on overlay districts, including active ground floor use, active ground floor use ready, Light Rail/BRT Station Areas, and industrial holding zones. Key points:

- **Active Ground Floor Use Required:** Certain areas will require roughly 50% of ground floor space to be in commercial or activity-generating uses (e.g., personal services, medical, salons, banks), focused on high-visibility sites and anchor locations. This is a reduction from current corridor-wide requirements to increase flexibility.
- **Active Ground Floor Use Ready:** Includes minimum floor-to-ceiling height and baseline transparency, allowing future conversion to commercial.
- **Light Rail and BRT Station Areas:** Increased heights and requirements showing that new surface parking is redevelopable within a quarter mile of BRT and LRT stations; this replaces the former Transit Overlay District.
- **Industrial Holding Zones:** Apply to existing light and heavy industrial areas in Columbia Business Center, supporting phased redevelopment over decades while protecting existing tenants.
- **Historic Overlay:** Existing two historic overlays integrated into new code. New overlay for the Historic Reserve, transferring provisions in the Central Park Plan District that are going away into this section and providing additional local protection given uncertainty in federal posture.
- **Overlays Not Continuing:** Hough Neighborhood, Surface Mining, Transit, Fourth Plain, Evergreen and Grand, and Vision Overlays will be retired; lessons from these (e.g., flexibility, mix of uses) are incorporated into the new code.
- **Draft Maps:** Required areas highlighted in fuchsia (50% ground floor commercial), while “active use ready” areas (brown/red/yellow) emphasize floor-to-ceiling height and transparency. Focus of the latter is on mixed-use and regional activity center districts.

Staff emphasized flexibility, careful targeting of required areas, and building off existing nodes and street environments to encourage future commercial activity.

Other Key Code Components & Process Updates

- **Buffers & Step-Downs:** Staff are considering new step-downs between base districts to moderate impacts of different development scales on new and existing buildings and uses. Feedback from the Commission and developers will guide final standards.
- **Master Plans:** Developments ≥ 10 acres in Regional Activity Centers and Mixed Use Neighborhoods require an administrative master plan with open space dedication. Larger projects (≥ 25 acres) continue Planning Commission/City Council review; smaller projects may opt in.

- **Land Use Review & Notifications:** Type I and II applications remain mostly administrative. Housing developments ≤200 units may bypass full SEPA review to speed approvals and all projects eligible for SEPA exemptions are proposed to be reviewed through a Type I process. Staff plan to improve on-site signage and digital notifications while maintaining some hard copy mailing requirements.
- **Density & Housing Mix:** Minimum density standards remain; no maximum density. New approach supports family-sized units and mixed townhouse/rowhouse projects in mixed-use zones.
- **Overall Goal:** Streamline approvals, increase flexibility, balance neighborhood compatibility, and support housing production.

Commissioner's Comments & Questions

Chair Adigweme

Noted that the map on slide 31 appears shifted relative to slide 30, making it difficult to track hard to follow how additional layers were applied. Can future presentations ensure a consistent base image when showing layered maps? Staff acknowledged feedback and agreed it would help improve clarity in future iterations.

Commissioner Cavell

Provided feedback on buffer zones, stating philosophical disagreement. She believes property owners should not restrict what their neighbors can build within the allowed zone and feels that excessive buffer requirements go against the pro-growth intent of the Comprehensive Plan.

Vice Chair Pyle

Agrees with Commissioner Cavell on the balance between property rights and zoning; supports using 50% of frontage instead of 50% of ground floor for commercial requirements. He also appreciated staff's point about commercial activity emerging on secondary streets, noting successful Portland examples and suggesting similar opportunities in Vancouver's north-south streets. Overall, praised the hybrid form-based code as clear and easy to comment on. Regarding master plan requirements, he suggested considering thresholds based on building mass or gross square footage, not just 25-acre site size, to ensure meaningful public input for projects with significant vertical development.

Commissioner Beck

Q: Are buffers and step-downs necessary when there is a large change in zoning, such as from single-family neighborhoods to mixed-use developments, particularly when heights increase from 30–40 feet to 75 feet? Staff noted that buffers and step-downs help mitigate abrupt transitions in height and density, especially where lower-density neighborhoods border taller or denser developments.

Q: How does the master plan process work regarding City Council review? Do projects smaller than 25 acres also go to City Council? Staff explained projects smaller than 25 acres first go to the hearings examiner and then to City Council; projects 25 acres or larger go to Planning Commission and then City Council.

Commissioner Beck supports modest buffers or step-backs in areas with significant zoning changes to reduce neighbor impacts but believes they should not be excessive. She noted that Planning Commission review can serve as a stopgap for City Council on certain projects and expressed support for by-right development, emphasizing that SEPA exemptions for projects of 200 units or fewer provide adequate

environmental safeguards. She also fully supports the proposed density calculation and finds the code format clear and easy to understand.

Commissioner Wheeler

Strongly supports by-right development to streamline processes, emphasizing that bureaucratic requirements should reflect current development impacts and contexts. She echoes Commissioner Cavel's skepticism about buffers, noting that many buffer requirements regulate aesthetics rather than health, safety, or environmental concerns. Feels buffers should be scrutinized and limited. Overall, she viewed the updated code as a major improvement over existing regulations.

Commissioner Jay

Q: Regarding buffers and step-downs, if they are implemented, should they affect the lower-density area rather than the higher-density area? Staff noted that buffers are generally intended to manage transitions in height and density, not to disadvantage one area over another.

Q: Do you know if the 25-acre threshold for City Council review is required by state law, or what the rationale is behind that cutoff? Staff said they did not believe this was based on a state requirement, and that their understanding is that the number was chosen as a proxy for large impacts that warrant discretionary land use review by City Council rather than an administrative or quasi-judicial review. Staff agreed to revisit the rationale to ensure it makes sense.

Commissioner Jay agrees with Commissioners Cavel and Wheeler that any buffer or step-down should ideally come at the expense of upzoning the lower-density area rather than limiting higher-density development. He also finds the 25-acre cutoff seems arbitrary and wants assurance there was thoughtful reasoning behind it, while emphasizing support for by-right development and minimizing unnecessary Planning Commission or City Council review.

Commissioner Castenson

Expressed interest in seeing how step-downs could apply spatially and in learning more about infrastructure uses as the code is further developed.

Q: Regarding step-downs, can we better understand where low-scale and mixed-use districts are adjacent on the new map, and how much area would actually be impacted if step-downs were implemented? Staff acknowledged the question and noted they would need to analyze the map to identify these areas and quantify where step-downs might be necessary.

Q: Regarding the draft code materials include a new infrastructure use for data centers. Can you clarify whether data centers are intended to be allowed in the city, and what standards or approvals might apply? Staff clarified that data centers are not intended to be allowed in the city. Any references in the draft code were an error or leftover from the draft formatting and will be corrected in future revisions.

Chair Adigweme

Applauded the clarity and readability of the draft code, noting it is a significant improvement over past material. Highlighted the effort that went into producing a technical document that is precise and accessible for review.

Staff provided an overview of the upcoming schedule for Planning Commission workshops and meetings:

- February 10 & March 10: Two workshops at each meeting, with the first focused on chapters and the second focused on code.
- April 14: Anticipated meeting to review changes made to the published draft based on feedback from the Planning Commission, City Council, community, and internal subject matter experts, followed by moving toward adoption.
- April 28 or May 12: Public Hearing on Adoption of Plan, Code and Map, and Planning Commission recommendation to Council.

Staff & Commissioner Communications

- Staff welcomed new Commissioner Kate Castenson, acknowledging her prior knowledge of the Comprehensive Plan and thanking her for joining the Commission.
- Commission would be in Aspen for a short while and acknowledged the limitations of the meeting room setup. Staff asked commissioners to report any issues that are significantly problematic.

Chair Adigweme

Requested an update on the warehouse moratorium, including outcomes, requirements for new warehouses, and implications for fulfillment centers in the context of the Climate Action Framework. Staff explained that the location restrictions for large fulfillment centers from prior Council direction would continue in the new code. No significant changes are expected in where warehouses can be located. Most large warehouses already in the pipeline are vested; the region is currently saturated, so few new large facilities are anticipated. Staff will follow up regarding specific development standards and green building policies recently reviewed by Council.

Adjournment

With no further business, the January 13, 2026, meeting of the Vancouver Planning Commission was adjourned at 8:25 pm

Patrick Adigweme, Chair

Date

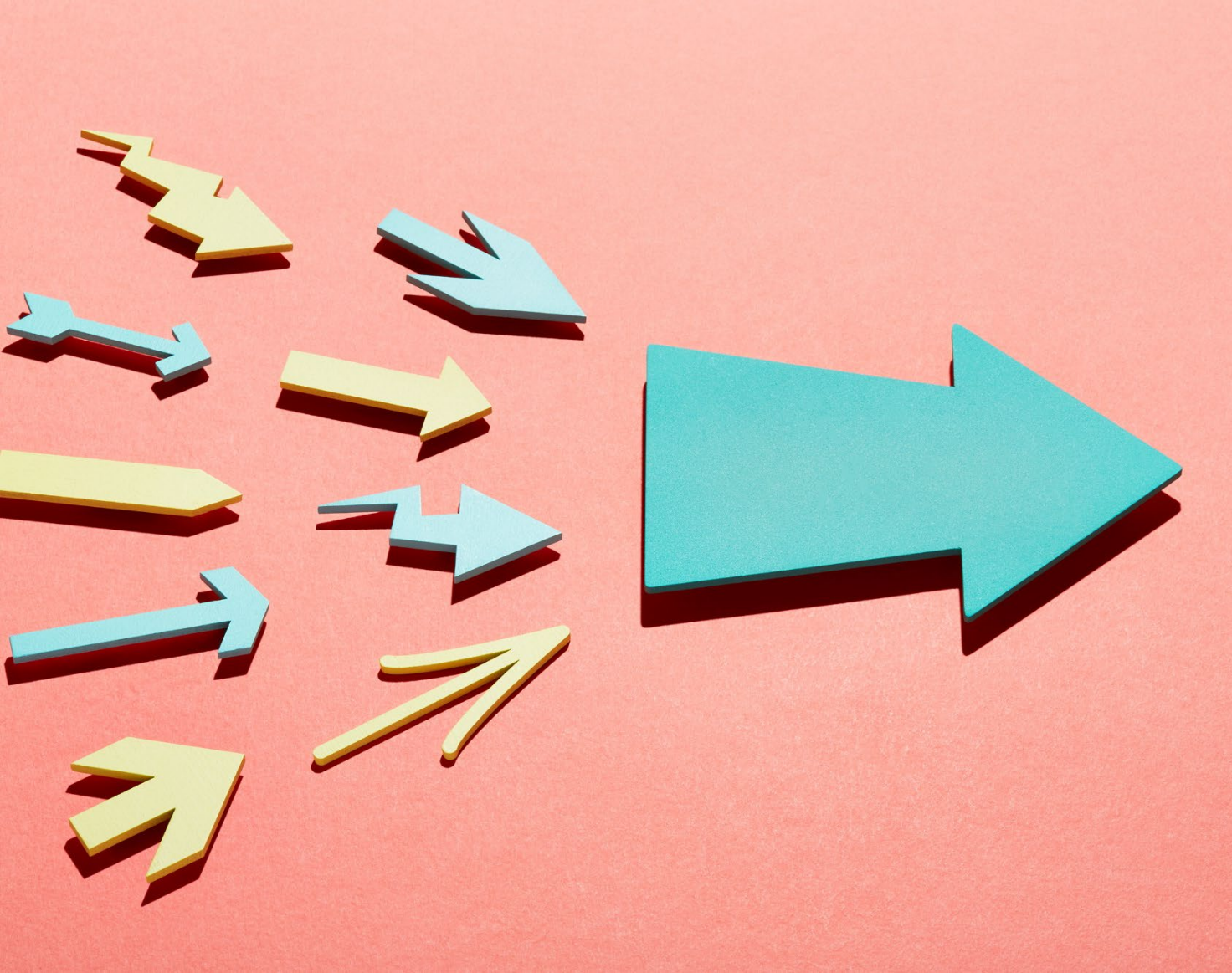


CITY OF
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Planning Commission Procedural Training

Becky Rude

Deputy City Attorney
City Attorney's Office
January 27, 2026



PC Procedures

- Local Guidance
- Appearance of Fairness & Conflicts
- Open Public Meeting Act
- Public Records Act
- Resources ([MRSC - Planning Commissions](#))



Planning Commission Local Rules

Operational Guidance

- **City Charter Section 8.02**, Planning Commission – Creation and purpose of Planning Commission
- **City Council Policy 100-06** – Appointments to Boards and Commissions
- **VMC Chapter 20.220**, Review Bodies –Section 20.220.010 establishes Planning Commission and sets parameters for Commission membership, authority, and responsibilities
 - **NOTE:** [VMC 20.220.010\(D\)](#) will be amended to limit service to two terms per Council policy
- **Planning Commission Bylaws** – Operating rules
- **VMC 20.285**, Text and Map Amendments – review process and substantive criteria for changes to maps or text of the Comprehensive Plan



Role of Planning Commission

- Comprehensive Plan and zoning map changes
- Land use and development regulation code changes
- Development Agreements, Planned Developments, and Master Plans





PC Bylaws

- Adopted by the PC
- Must align with the VMC and Council Policy
- Guidance includes:
 - Officer Appointment & Function
 - Meetings & Order of Business
 - Quorum & Voting
 - Attendance





Washington Open Government Laws



Appearance of Fairness Doctrine

Chapter 42.36 RCW



Open Public Meetings Act

Chapter 42.30 RCW

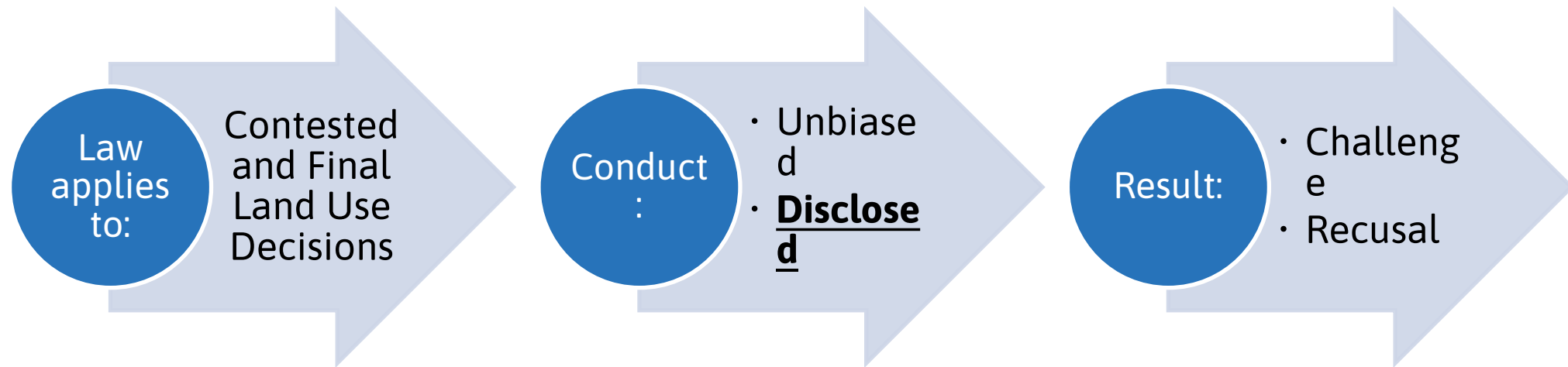


Public Records Act

Chapter 42.56 RCW

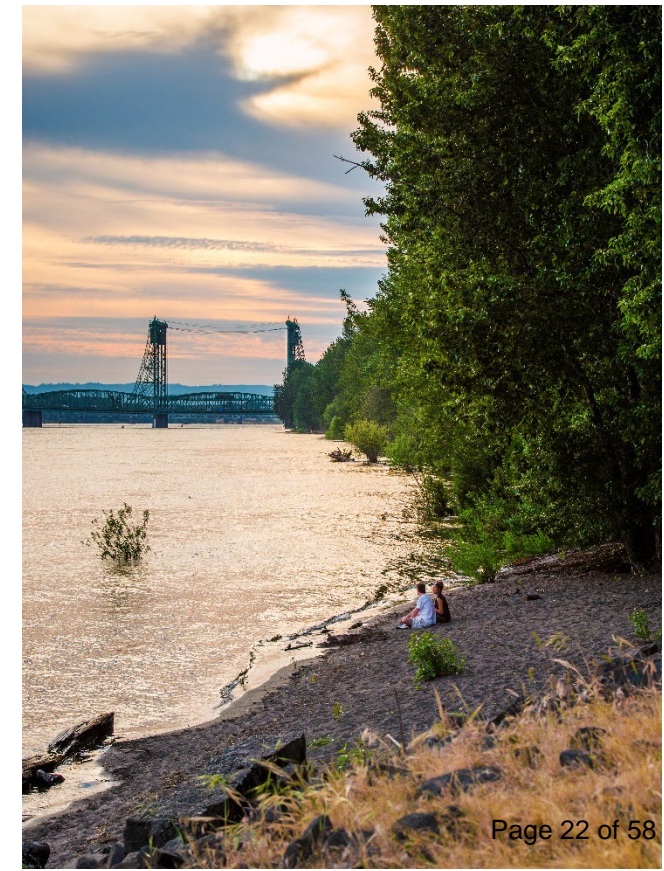
Appearance of Fairness Doctrine

Chapter 42.36 RCW



Quasi-Judicial Acts

- Site-specific rezones
- Conditional uses and variances
- Subdivision plat approvals
- Land use permits
- Final determinations on SEPA appeals
- Discrete zoning changes affecting specific parties



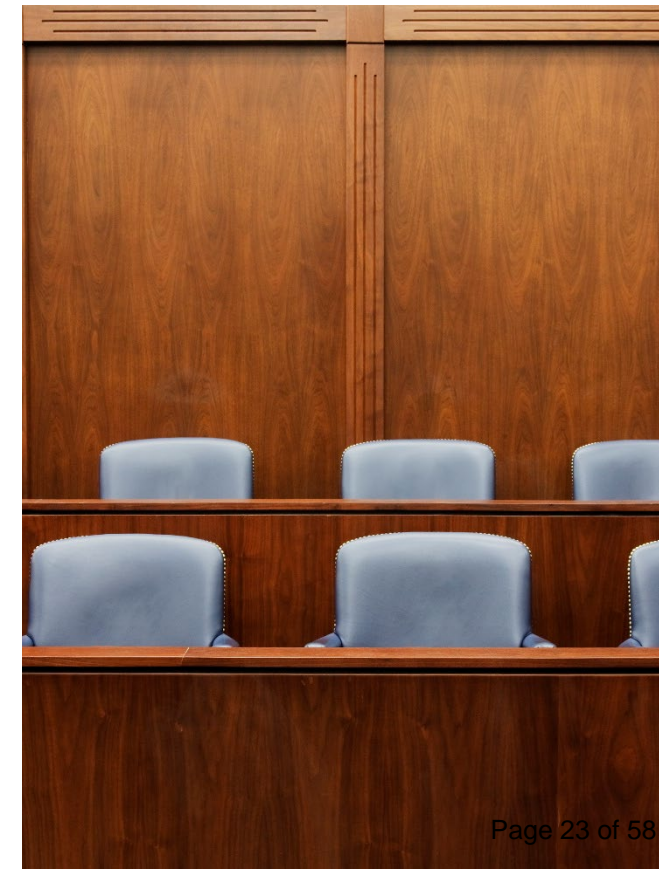
Prohibitions and Exceptions

Ex Parte Communications

- Discussions of a pending matter outside formal proceedings

Doctrine of Necessity

- Member required for quorum may participate *if* timely disclosed





Conflicts of Interest – Code of Ethics (RCW 42.23.070)

- Use of position to secure privileges or receive outside compensation
- Engaging in activity that would induce disclosure of confidential information
- Disclosing confidential information







Open Public Meetings Act

- What is OPMA?
- Training Requirements
- Definitions
- Notice Obligations
- Prohibitions
- Reducing OPMA Risk





Open Public Meetings Act

- Purpose: Conduct public business openly
- Intent: Invite and incorporate public comment
- Applicability: Public agency governing body meetings

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OPMA Requirements

Chapter 42.30 RCW

90 Days

Newly appointed members must complete OPMA training

Four Years

Members must renew training

Meeting

Governing body conducting official business

Notice

Advance public notice of time, place, and agenda required

Open

Meetings must be open and accessible to everyone

Quorum

Majority of members present; intent to conduct business

Business

Discussion, deliberation, receipt of public testimony, evaluation, or voting

No Secrets

Secret ballots not allowed





OPMA Risks & Tips

- Avoid creating “serial” meetings
- Exceptions to OPMA exist, but are limited
- Violations void any action taken
- Members may incur financial penalties
- Establish communication best practices





Public Records Act

Chapter 42.56 RCW

Protects and promotes the public interest in, and insistence on, remaining fully informed





What is a public record?

- Any “writing”
- Containing information relating to the conduct of government
- Prepared, owned, used, or retained by any state or local agency
- Regardless of physical form



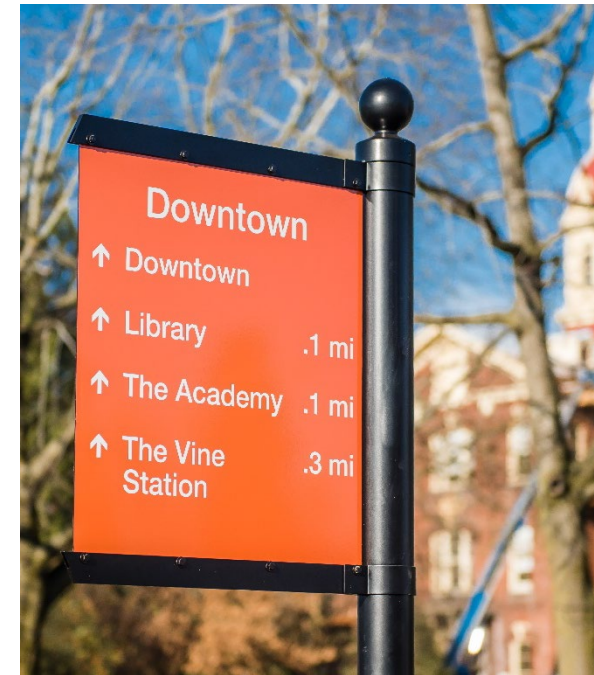
What is a public record writing?

RCW 42.56.010(4)



PRA Requirements

- Records must be made available
- No prescribed format for valid request
- Response may seek clarification but must be quick – five business days
- Limited exceptions for redacting or withholding





PRA Risks

- Burden on agency to prove exemption
- Violations incur monetary penalties
- Personal platforms can become public records if used for public business
- “If you don’t want to read it on the front page of the paper . . .”





Resources

- [City Charter Section 8.02](#)
- [City Council Policy 100-06](#), Council Appointment of Community Members to Boards, Commissions)
- [VMC 20.220.010](#), Planning Commission
- [Chapter 42.36 RCW](#), Appearance of Fairness
- [Chapter 42.23 RCW](#), Code of Ethics
- [Chapter 42.30 RCW](#), OPMA
- [Chapter 42.56 RCW](#), PRA





Growth Management Act (GMA) Overview

Planning Commission Workshop
January 27, 2026

Bryan Snodgrass, Principal Planner, Community Development Department

Baseline GMA Goals

GMA requires 18 fastest growing counties and their cities to adopt Comprehensive Plans and implement regulations to further 14 aspirational goals:

- Concentrated urban growth
- Sprawl reduction
- Regional transportation
- Affordable housing
- Economic development
- Property rights
- Permit processing
- Natural resource industries
- Open space and recreation
- Environmental protection
- Early and continuous public participation
- Public facilities and services
- Historic preservation
- Shoreline management



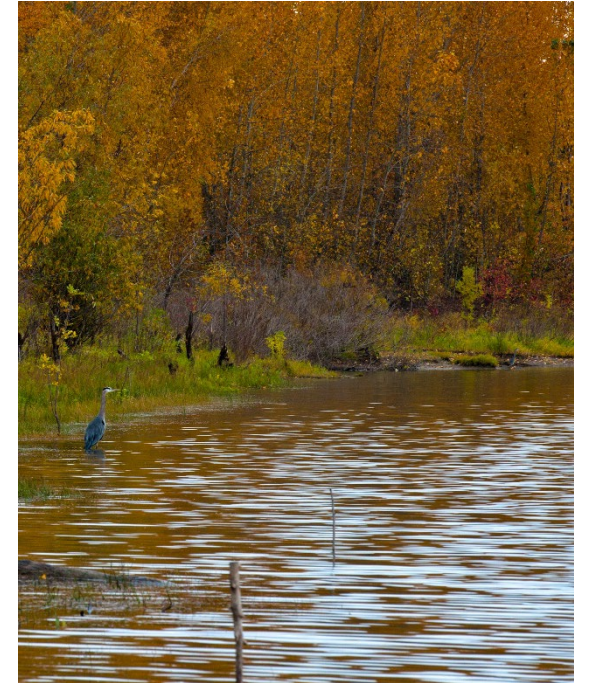
Overarching Required Components

- Include **Comprehensive Plan Elements (Chapters)**: Land Use, Housing, Capital Facilities, Utilities, Transportation, Economic Development, Parks, and Climate
- Implement through **specific development regulations** (zoning code)
- Include **Comprehensive Plan map** and implementing **zoning map** covering all properties citywide



Key Requirements

- Plan for and accommodate **preset number of housing units affordable in various income categories**, including emergency housing, and **address racially disparate impacts**
- Ensure **capital facilities plan** and transportation plans are consistent with land use plans and growth targets; identify existing facilities, future needs, and a financing plan covering at least six years
- **Designate and protect critical areas** using “best available science” to preserve critical area functions and value – wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas (CARAs), fish and wildlife habitat, flood areas, geologically hazardous areas



Key Requirements - UGAs

- Establish **Urban Growth Area (UGA) boundaries** with sufficient, but not excess, amount and density of land to accommodate adopted population and employment growth targets for 20 years
- UGA sufficiency must be demonstrated by **land capacity analysis**
- Countywide growth targets, UGA growth allocations, and UGA boundaries **adopted by counties** in consultation with cities
- Countywide population forecast must be **within high/medium/low range** provided by state Office of Financial Management



Key Requirements – UGAs (cont.)

- Cities generally considered provider of urban services, counties provider of regional services
- Counties, in coordination with cities, adopt Countywide Planning Policies governing regional management issues
- UGAs anticipated to annex to cities
- With limited exception, no urban services or urban densities outside of UGAs
- Counties have no land use jurisdiction inside city limits



Key Requirements - Amendments

- Comprehensive Plans and development regulations presumed valid upon adoption; may be appealed to State Growth Management Hearings Board
- Minor Comprehensive Plan updates allowed generally no more than once per year, while zoning changes can occur at any time. Changes proposed by outside parties need to be considered annually
- Full review and update of Comprehensive Plan at least every ten years, including forecasts and UGAs



Key New Requirements

- Plan for and accommodate **preset number of housing units affordable in various income categories**, including emergency housing, and **address racially disparate impacts**.
- Allow **middle housing in single family zoning** districts, with regulations no more stringent than those applying to single family homes
- Allow **two ADUs** per lot
- Include **climate** element
- Allow **increased density** and require **no minimum off-street parking facilities** within $\frac{1}{4}$ of BRT and LRT stations



Thank You





CITY OF
Vancouver
WASHINGTON

Development Process Overview

Planning Commission Workshop
January 27, 2026

Greg Turner, Land Use Manager,
Community Development Department



Agenda

- Development Review
- Development Codes
- Applications/Review Stages
- Land Use Application Types
- Site Plan Review Process



Development Review

Development Review is made up of land use planning, engineering and building. The goal of development review is to:

- Facilitate development
- Ensure proposed land uses, infrastructure and building structures meet community standards, minimize impacts
- Coordinate requirements between disciplines and other agencies
- Provide for public notice and input as required by City Council
- Ensure project is built as approved



Development Codes

The following are the development codes used when reviewing development projects

- City of Vancouver Land Use and Development Code (VMC Title 20)
- Engineering
 - Transportation (VMC Title 11)
 - Water (VMC Title 14.04)
 - Sewer (VMC Title 14.06)
 - Stormwater (VMC Title 14.25)
- Fire (VMC Title 16)
- Building (VMC Title 17)



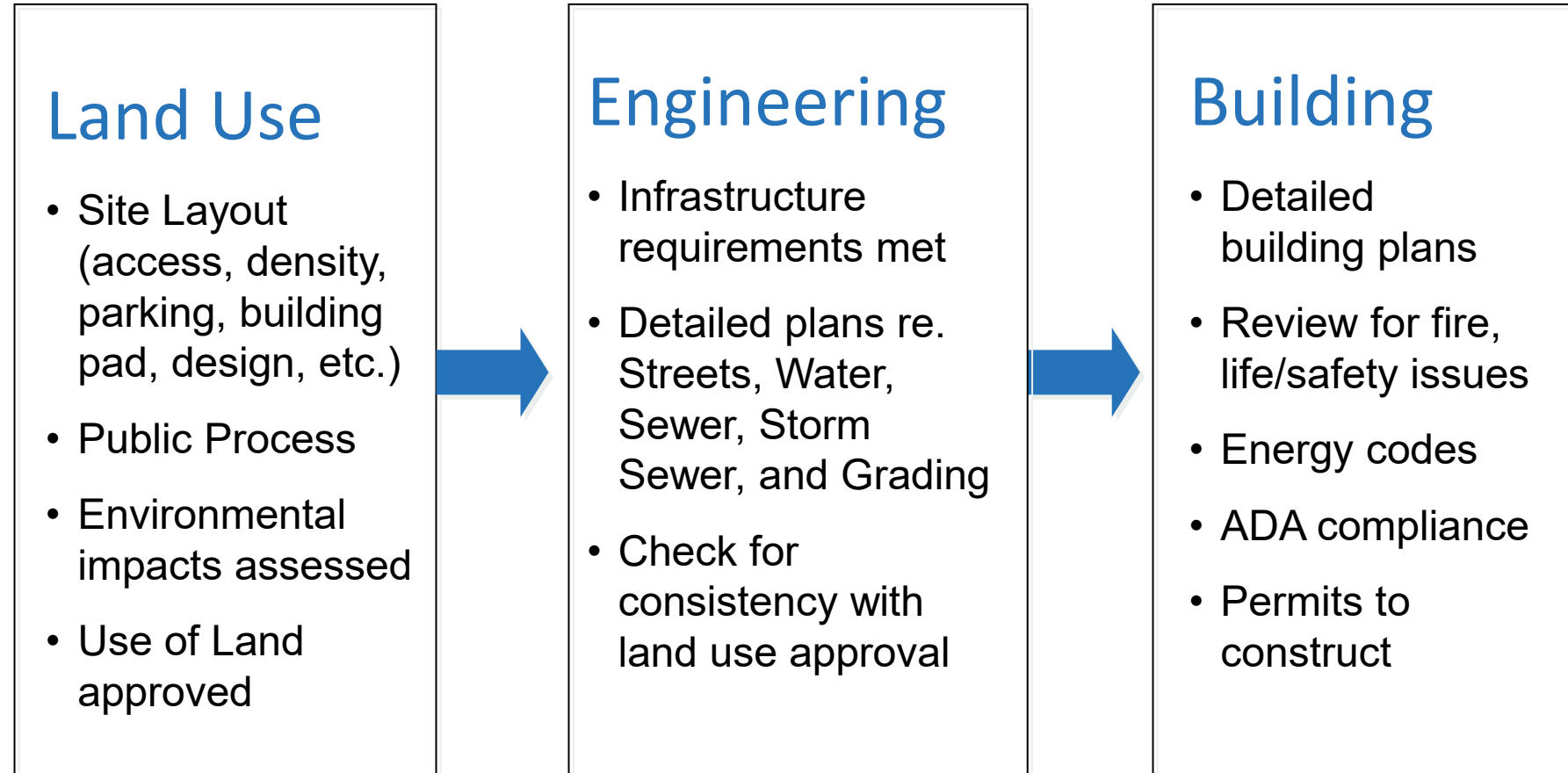
Review Procedures

The review procedures for development projects is contained in VMC 20.210

- Classifies various land use applications (Exempt, Type I, Type II, Type III and Type IV)
- Outlines the public notification and comment period requirements
- Minimum and maximum timelines for review
- Hearing and appeal procedures



Three main stages of review



Types of Development Applications

VMC 20.225 contains a listing of development review applications:

- Site Plan Reviews
- Conditional Use Permits
- Subdivisions and Short Plats
- Planned Developments
- Shoreline Permits
- Design Review (Downtown only)
- Critical Areas Permits
- Public facility master plans
- Mixed Use Master Plans
- Variances
- Tree removal permits
- Rezones or Zoning Code Text Amendments
- Minor land use permits (decks, sheds, pools, etc.)

*Note that the Comprehensive Plan 2045 update process will refine/update some of these



Procedural Classification of Applications

VMC 20.210 contains five types of development applications

Exempt Actions

- Minimal discretion, staff decision
- No public notice or comment period; No “completeness” step, no time limits
- Examples: minor building improvements, tenant improvements, single family residences, sign permits, sheds/decks/fences, parking lots < 10 spaces

Type 1 Actions

- Minimal discretion, staff decision, no public notice or comment
- Staff checks for completeness, decision issued 28 days from completeness
- Examples: Less than 20 multi-family units, commercial/industrial less than 12,000 s.f., minor additions, parking lots 10-39 spaces, changes in use without significant traffic, accessory dwelling units, espresso stands

Note: Upcoming code changes will revise what is currently a Type I process; i.e. align Type I with SEPA exemptions (up to 200 units/commercial and industrial less than 30,000 s.f. become Type I)



Types of Development Applications (cont.)

Type 2 Actions

- Some discretion in determining compliance - staff level decision
- Check for completeness
- Public notice and 14-day public comment period, no public hearing
- Staff makes the decision; appeals heard by Hearing Examiner
- Maximum 100-day review (90-day for short subdivisions); goal is 78 days
- Examples: site plan reviews for larger projects, subdivisions of fewer than 10 lots, minor variances

Type 3 Actions

- More discretion in determining compliance; public hearing
- Hearing Examiner is decision-maker; appeals heard by City Council
- Check for completeness
- Public notice and 30-day comment period, public hearing



Types of Development Applications (cont.)

- Max. 170-day review (90-day for subdivisions per state law); Internal goal is 90 days
- Examples: conditional use permits, subdivisions, master plans, major variances, shoreline permits; human service facility siting applications

Type 4 Actions

- Quasi-judicial and/or legislative in nature, involve more discretion in determining compliance
- Staff makes recommendation to Hearings Examiner or Planning Commission who makes a recommendation to City Council (two hearings)
- Public notice, 30-day comment period and public hearings
- Examples: planned developments, rezones, code amendments



Example: Type II Site Plan review process

- Applicant submits a preapplication request; development review staff reviews and prepares a preapp report; report contains code requirements for the development, application submittal requirements, process and fees. Applicant can then submit their site plan application
- Applicant submits the site plan application, plans and documents for review and development review staff (planning, public works, building, fire, urban forestry, etc) check the application for completeness
- Once the application is complete, a public notice including the initial SEPA determination is sent out for a 14 day comment period to agencies and the public about the proposed project



Example: Type II Site Plan review process

- Planner reviews the development for compliance with the zoning code and the city engineers review the plans to ensure adequacy of infrastructure to serve the project
- City review team drafts staff report which shows how the project meets the code requirements and places conditions on the development to ensure the project is built in accordance with the codes; staff also addresses any comments received during the comment period
- Staff report issued approving, approving with conditions or denying the application including issuing a final SEPA determination
- Decision may be appealed
- If not appealed, public process ends and final building plans submitted to show compliance with conditions
- Building/site work permits may then be issued



Thank You

