

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PLANNING COMMISSION CANDIDATE

CANDIDATE: Michael Slater

PLEASE RESPOND IN WRITING BY: Wednesday, February 5, 2020, at 5 p.m.

PLEASE SEND TO: Lynda Rose
Assistant to Mayor Chuck Bennett
VIA EMAIL: lrose@cityofsalem.net
OR VIA FAX: 503-588-6354

1. Please explain your understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Planning Commission.

My understanding of the Planning Commissions' roles and responsibilities come from:

- A. Salem Revised Code 6.040 – Powers and Duties. The section assigns commissioners the responsibility to provide recommendations and suggestions to the Council on transportation, property setback, plans for regulation of future growth, development and beautification; to study the needs of local industry with the purpose of strengthening industries and stabilizing employment; to fulfill the citizen involvement role as described in state planning goal 1; and to study and propose measures that are in the public interest.
- B. Salem Revised Code 300, which gives authority to the Planning Commission to hear Type III and Type IV land use applications in a quasi-judicial procedures.

In addition, Planning Commissioners may be called on to serve on additional city committees, such as the recent "Our Salem" stakeholders committee. Finally, members of city committees often play a role in educating Salem residents about the processes and policies that guide the decisions of their respective committees.

2. What skills, knowledge and perspectives do you possess that will enable you to be an effective member of the Commission?

I am experienced and skilled at working on complex policy and technical issues within the context of legal and regulatory structures. My experience includes developing and pursuing civil litigation, providing expert advice to legislative and administrative bodies, drafting legislation and administrative rules, and advising elected officials and regulators. Furthermore, my work responsibilities have required me to develop and implement compliance policies and procedures. As a result, I feel I'm well qualified to handle the Planning Commission's responsibility related to land use applications.

I would bring a number of perspectives to the Planning Commission. First, I would bring the perspective of a neighborhood land use chair, in my case, the Faye Wright Neighborhood Association (FWNA). Faye Wright itself is interesting because it represents a mid-century neighborhood of mostly single-family homes. The development pressure comes from infill, sub-dividing lots, and increasing building size or adding ADU's. This is exactly the type of neighborhood most likely to be impacted by Oregon House Bill 2001 and the City's own efforts to implement "missing middle" housing policies. I believe it's important that the Planning Commission include members who, like me, can bring this perspective to its policy discussion.

I would also bring a natural resources perspective and some expertise to the Planning Commission. I have worked on policies and practices over the past several years to improve the City's tree canopy, better care for Bush's Pasture Park, and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

Finally, as someone whose early career included Fair Housing enforcement and whose later career focused on protecting the rights of protected classes, I would bring a well-trained equity lens to the Planning Commission.

3. One of the most common application types you will hear at the Planning Commission is a Comprehensive Plan Change and Zone Change, where an applicant wants to change their zoning to facilitate a development proposal. What is your perspective regarding responding to the current market versus maintaining a long term vision?

I believe we need to give deference to long-term vision over responding to current market needs. This is not to suggest that we never deviate from our long-term vision, but that the applicant needs to present a compelling case to deviate from a long-term vision.

There are several reasons why. The primary reason is that the City's long-term vision is the result of an open, collaborative process that included participation at public meeting by (hopefully) a broad cross-section of the public. The decisions that emerge from that process should not be easy to over-rule. Further, many of the City's plans, such as the transportation plan, implement the long-term vision. Zoning changes to meet immediate market needs push the City's plans out of alignment with the long-term vision. The more changes, the further out-of-alignment the plans become. Finally, it can be the case that making small changes to a plan or vision can cause it to fall disproportionately short of expectations.

For these reasons, I think we should exercise caution as we consider applications that deviate from a long-term vision.

4. What are some examples of how you believe Salem has done a good job of land use and transportation planning? What are some areas for improvement?

The City has done an excellent job in several areas: preserving and revitalizing downtown, establishing a high LOS for parks and acquiring land for parks—especially our well-distributed neighborhood parks, and the City’s recent storm water planning and programs. Given the amount of land covered by parking lots, the City’s newish standards for parking lots, which require significantly more tree canopy coverage, will make a significant contribution to Salem’s livability.

The City has fallen short in the past on connectivity. North-south connectivity is consistently poor, and not just from one edge of the city to another, but also within neighborhoods. The City’s discontinuous network of sidewalks and bike paths discourage walking and biking, which are healthier and lower polluting transportation options. Residential developments from the 1970’s through perhaps the last decade are often disconnected from one another, forcing drivers to take circuitous routes to get to arterial roads. As a result, the city is now trying to “retrofit” connectivity, which is expensive.