



City of Salem Planning Commission

2020 Annual Report

Commissioners

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Overview

The Planning Commission consists of nine members, appointed by the City Council. The Commission acts as an advisory commission to the City Council with a broad scope of concern in promoting the growth and orderly development of the City. Salem Revised Code Chapter 6 states that the Commission shall make and file a report with the City Council of all transactions of the Commission for the preceding year.

In the last year, the Commission has had public hearings on twenty quasi-judicial land use applications including Comprehensive Plan/Zone Changes, Design Reviews, and Appeals. The Commission reviewed the Jory Apartments Tax Increment Financing district proposal for conformance with the Salem Area Comprehensive Plan and forwarded their recommendation (and concerns) to the City Council. They also reviewed the Urban Trails Implementation Plan grant application and voted to provide a letter in support of the grant application.

The Commission also requested a work session on the City's updates to the Stormwater Master Plan. Public Works staff provided training on the City's Stormwater system and updates to the Plan. The Commission has also participated in outreach events for Our Salem, such as community workshops and webinars, has received regular updates on the project and will participate in a joint work session with the City Council on the draft vision this fall.

Legislative Amendments

The Commission has worked on four code amendments over the past year and recommended final amendments to the City Council. They had numerous work sessions and public hearings on a package of amendments to the Unified Development Code (UDC) that, among other things, codified new bicycle parking standards and pedestrian connections.

The Commission has also spent considerable time on amendments related to the design of multi-family development. Significant process improvements, flexibility in design and reductions in parking were achieved with these amendments.

The Commission has also reviewed, and recommended approval of, amendments to the Transportation System Plan to re-align a new Collector street and modifications to the regulations for menu board signs.

Pedestrian Paths

Last fall the newly adopted requirements for pedestrian paths throughout developments were implemented. The regulations require a pedestrian path from the primary entrance of each building to the street(s) and to adjacent bus stops; between buildings on the same site; through parking lots; and to abutting properties when there is a vehicular connection. The intent is to improve pedestrian safety on development sites and provide safe access from the public sidewalk to businesses and throughout shopping centers.

The Planning Commission debated the standards that would apply to the paths and ultimately recommended that at a minimum, paths should be painted throughout a site. However, the City Council determined that paint should only be allowed in parking garages and other methods that help make the path more visible should be required. Developers must provide for the separation of vehicle and pedestrian areas by grade separation (see Figure 1), material changes (see Figure 2) or wheel stops (see Figure 3). Paint is often used to further highlight the path for pedestrians and drivers.



Figure 1: Coastal Farms – A grade separated path.



Figure 2: Department of Motor Vehicles - 955 Lancaster Dr NE - A path constructed of a different material.



Figure 3: Paramount Real Estate Services - 1008 12th St SE - A path that is physically separated by wheel stops.

Bicycle Parking Standards

The code amendments also introduced new, comprehensive bicycle parking standards. The new regulations provide minimum dimensions, specify allowable rack types, access and surfacing standards. The previous standards did not prohibit any specific rack type and had minimal dimension and location standards. An example of a newly installed bicycle rack meeting the new development standards can be seen in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Gilgamesh Brewing: The Woods – 555 9th St NW – Bicycle Parking.

Multi-Family Development

In early 2020 the Planning Commission considered major amendments to the standards for multi-family development. The amendments, which were adopted by the City Council in March, provide greater flexibility in how multifamily design standards can be met and include new design standards for small multifamily housing projects.

Prior to the adoption of the new standards, the Planning Commission reviewed and approved a tri-plex development on 24th and Market Street NE (Figure 5). Small infill development like this is not very common in Salem. This type of development is now permitted through an administrative approval process, in an attempt to remove barriers for new housing.

Figure 5 – Tri-plex - Market St NE / 24th Street NE.



Since the adoption of the multi-family amendments, the Planning Division has approved a handful of multi-family developments administratively. The first development to be approved after the amendments is a small 6-unit infill project on Fairgrounds Rd NE. Construction has not yet begun but the approved design of the proposed triangle shaped building is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Six-unit multi-family development - 1795 Fairground Rd NE.



Design Review Approvals

The Planning Commission has reviewed and approved the design of numerous new buildings in the past year. Design Review is required in specific areas of town that have been designated for mixed-use districts, with a mix of compatible uses in multi-story buildings, and emphasis on active uses on ground floors facing major streets. The scale, bulk and massing of the buildings are meant to invoke an urban environment that is characterized by pedestrian scale developments. The new YMCA building (Figure 7), a new mixed-use building at 990 Broadway St NE (Figure 8) and an expansion of NW Human Services on Edgewater St NW (Figure 9) are examples of building design the Commission approved last year. In early 2019, the Commission also reviewed and approved the design of the new Police Station, the new Union Gospel Mission Shelter and the new Maps Credit Union building in north downtown. All three buildings are currently under construction.

Figure 7 - YMCA – 685 Court St NE (CB Two Architects).





Figure 8: 990 Broadway - 990 Broadway St NE (CB Two Architects).

Figure 9: NW Human Services building - 1233 Edgewater St NE (Lenity Architecture, Inc.).



Future Work

In the coming year the Commission will continue to participate in the Our Salem project as a final Vision and Comprehensive Plan are expected to be adopted in 2021. Implementation of House Bill 2001 is expected to begin in 2021 which will necessitate zoning code updates to address the requirements to allow duplex, triplex and quadplex housing in all zones that allow single family development. Additionally, it is expected that another round of annual Unified Development Code (UDC) updates will be reviewed by the Planning Commission. Items under consideration for the annual amendments include clarifying standards for parking garage drive aisles, landscaping in the mixed use zones, paving of driveways, measuring fence height and bicycle parking applicability; expansion of provisions for urban farm animals; and creation of standards for long-term bicycle parking, among other items. It is also expected that the Commission will continue to hear quasi-judicial land use applications, at an average of two per month.

Figure 10 – Planning Commissioners attending an Our Salem event.

