

CITY OF FIRCREST
SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL AND PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2016 **COUNCIL CHAMBERS**
6:00 P.M. **FIRCREST CITY HALL, 115 RAMSDELL STREET**

CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND ROLL CALL

Mayor Matthew Jolibois called the special meeting to order at 6:00 P.M. and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Councilmembers Blake Surina, Shannon Reynolds, Brett Wittner, Denny Waltier and Jason Medley were present. Councilmember Hunter T. George was absent. Commissioners Kathy McVay, Jerry Foss, Karen Patjens, Ken Halgren and Arne Michaelsen were present. George arrived at 6:53 P.M.

NEW BUSINESS

Harvard University seminar regarding retail development and new urbanism

Principal Planner Boers gave an overview of a course he attended at Harvard Graduate School of Design regarding urban retail that was titled "Essential Planning Design and Management Practices." Boers noted that it was exciting to hear that what Fircrest started doing approximately 20 years ago isn't so very different than what is being recommended today. Boers highlighted the following that he gleaned from the course and applied it to the upper and lower Fircrest business districts:

- There is an opportunity in Fircrest to look more closely at any number of design issues and code refinements in terms of taking a closer look at how redevelopment can be regulated with incentives for redevelopment in the commercial areas
- The development community does the heavy lifting but the City makes the opportunities for good things possible
- The upper business area on Regents would be considered a Convenience Center that serves the immediate surrounding neighborhoods within a 1 to 1.5 mile radius
- The upper business area on Regents might be large enough to be treated as a Neighborhood Center that typically serves a larger radius area
- One thing that works against the upper business district, looking at its trade area, is that for a smaller commercial center to work it needs 1,500 to 2,000 households within its trade area, but a large part of that trade area is taken up by the Fircrest Golf Club and the Tacoma Community College
- There is a large enough retail space to be considered a Neighborhood Center, but then you would need 5,000 to 6,000 households to make that work
- The difference between the two centers is that the Neighborhood Center typically would include a grocery store as an anchor, and the smaller Convenience Center would include businesses similar to a pharmacy, a specialty food store or a gymnasium
- When retailers are looking to establish a business or develop a center, they are typically looking at what the market and trade area can support
- Convenience in retail center must be convenient, which basically mean that retail businesses need to be close to and face the street, as well as convenient and on-street parking
- The retail in the upper business area is pushed to the back, and by today's standards is in the worst possible location, hidden by other buildings and seas of asphalt
- Mashpee Commons in Massachusetts, a 1960s shopping center not aging gracefully, was highlighted by the instructors and they showed its successful redevelopment into a vibrant, mixed-use New England style town center
- One of the clever things done at Mashpee was to create retail floor plates and footprints that were roughly 20 feet deep and 60 feet wide, which is a turn from the norm and creates room for parking on one side of the street and parking in the lot behind on the other side

- There is an opportunity in the upper business district on Regents to mimic some of the Mashpee styled development but that would require a complete reconfiguration of the parking lot and might require the main anchor building to be reconfigured as well
- Developers, and in particular good developers, prefer codes with high standards that everyone has to comply with over easy codes that are too flexible
- The X-factor was used repeatedly, and the goal is to preserve or achieve the X-factor in commercial centers. The X-factor was described as the emotional relationship between people and the environment to create messy vitality and public and private spaces to be authentic and unique, and avoidance of the cookie cutter routine designs
- One could argue that the lower business district on Regents has the X-factor, the upper business district has the potential for the X-factor, and the areas on 19th and Mildred are such a mish mash of uses with such a large amount of open space that it could take a long time to achieve the X-factor
- The instructors noted that 75% of retail sales occur after 5:00 p.m., and on Sundays, and the typical office worker will support 25 square feet of retail or restaurant space
- Vertical mixed use with office above retail is ideal from a tax standpoint and in terms of vibrancy creates a win/win
- It seems that the City doesn't look very different than it looked 25 years ago in both the upper and lower business districts, but when economic development is discussed, there is oftentimes concern from nearby residents about an increase in traffic, more noise, and less parking
- Rather than focusing on architectural style and town themes, more attention was paid to building form and the relationship between buildings and streets

Boers concluded by stating it comes down to what are the priorities of the City – what type of commercial centers does the City want, and what type of residential neighborhoods does the City want to have surrounding those centers.

Photographs were circulated that showed a standard streetscape for Mashpee Commons, the configuration of what was originally built in the 1960's, and an architectural drawing showing storefronts with on-street parking and new urbanism development. Comments made by the developer of Mashpee Commons were highlighted.

Discussion continued as follows:

- The passing of Proposition 1 that allows the sale of liquor in the Neighborhood Commercial areas is a good step in adding vitality to certain areas after 5 o'clock
- The Spring Lake Café selling beer and wine might be a quick case study to show that there is a certain vitality that can complement the neighborhood
- There has been a wait and see attitude regarding commercial development of the open spaces on Mildred street
- Commission members and the Council could work with the cities of University Place and Tacoma and Tacoma Community College, to develop some kind of cohesive development ideas to get some kind of level standard of development for all areas around Mildred Street

Design element standards and uniformity in the community, City of Fircrest design and standards committee, walkability, community identity, ‘buy local’, and architype

The following opinions were voiced:

- The Planning Commission and Planning/Building Department should provide greater flexibility with new ideas and desires from commercial developers
- The codes need to be tightened and perhaps a nine-month moratorium on all building permits should be in place until a group can be in place to determine stronger design standards
- Other cities have introduced ideas outside of the box to encourage development – such as what things are being suggested to increase interest from a business incentive standpoint
- The unified group of the City Council and the Planning Commission needs to come up with a Fircrest identity, similar to the Bavarian theme in Leavenworth, Washington
- The mom and pop businesses should be courted to come to Fircrest
- An architect from Fircrest previously felt it would be a good idea to get communications going between Fircrest, University Place, TCC and the corner of Tacoma to come up with something that would work for everyone
- Historical information was provided regarding the first inter-urban streetcar line in the United States that went between two cities, and Fircrest was the first city on that route in 1891
- An overview was provided regarding efforts expended to encourage the use of refurbished streetcars and utilizing the vacant property on Mildred to bring people to and from the US Open
- Accounting decisions are being made instead of economic decisions – decisions aren’t being made that will add growth value to the City in the long term
- Other cities have strong visions and long-term plans that perhaps Fircrest should consider
- We need to figure out where Fircrest wants to be in 2040
- There needs to be a comprehensive understanding of the City’s history, its architype and intent, and putting demands on private citizens and commercial developers comes down to how does the City develop itself
- When the design standards are of a demanding nature, long-term sustainable value is added to communities; and when short-term decisions are made based off of accounting prospects, opportunities are being shortchanged
- Roy Thompson had a quintessential understanding of how to architecturally meet the region
- Fircrest has good parks, good police, is a walkable community, imposes a 25-hour speed limit, and has rolling cascading boulevards that were done on purpose
- Communities change over time; and if this group is going to collectively put forth a vision for the community over a number of years or decades, there needs to be a strong community input, because the key aspect of planning is accounting for what the people want
- The community should be consulted as to what they want for the place that they live in, rather than the Council and Commission setting goals, ideas and visions for the community based on the past
- The issues being discussed might impact commercial development the most, and those developers should be involved, as they are the ones that are in the business to make money, and we shouldn’t come up with something and push it down their throats without their involvement
- There should be a cohesive look for the areas that are undeveloped in the 19th and Mildred area
- Balance the concern for property owners by migrating slowly towards stricter codes
- Design standards should be reflective of what the community wants
- There is a lot of re-development potential in Fircrest, but not much undeveloped properties, and a commonality or common element, and a design scheme or plan such as common textures, roof styles and shapes might be what attracts development and developers to Fircrest

- Major money and investment will be necessary to re-develop some of the existing commercial properties
- The long-term payout is what drives developers and development
- Small and mid-sized businesses will come to Fircrest if they can be provided a good customer base
- Consider deliberately attracting certain small businesses and embracing what we are

PLANNING COMMISSION CLOSING COMMENTS

Foss stated it makes sense to put together a group to spend time brainstorming. He stated things are presently going in the wrong direction and business owners would agree that if something could be crafted that is attractive to them, they would buy in to the concept. Foss stated it is a matter of packaging so that it is appealing to everyone – not easy, but doable.

Halgren stated if he was a business owner he would be more qualified to identify locations that were suitable rather than locations identifying him as a potential client. He suggested looking across the country or across the state for similarly sized cities or cities with similar demographics and approach them and ask what types of businesses are working best in their communities to help target the audience that Fircrest is trying to capture and who might want to be courted if Fircrest wanted to pursue the line of target marketing.

COUNCIL CLOSING COMMENTS

Reynolds stated she liked the comments regarding community engagement. Reynolds stated she felt it would be helpful for the Planning Commissioners to attend some of the free training that is offered regarding city engagement, as well as Councilmembers.

Wittner stated the City needs to have a social media presence to be able to communicate better with the community and to find out what they want. He reported on a recent conversation with an owner of a pizza establishment and suggested they move to Fircrest. Wittner stated the pizza owner felt the alcohol restrictions limiting the hours of operation were too restrictive. Wittner felt at some point the codes could be reviewed and made less restrictive.

George stated he was excited about some of the upcoming communication improvements, noting he was in favor of showcasing, through social media and a new and improved website, the history of what Fircrest is. George noted that communities evolve over time, and one of the biggest challenges for Fircrest is that it is difficult to define, particularly from a design standpoint, who Fircrest is. George noted there is a feeling about Fircrest, but it is difficult to describe what Fircrest looks like. He stated that none of that detracts from Fircrest's charm. George noted that design standards requiring certain facades that evoke small town, mainstream America could be an interesting item for discussion. George stated it ultimately comes down to dollars and if there is an adequate customer base to support a business. George concluded by stating he was encouraging Council to have another conversation about utilizing the hearings examiner process for quasi-judicial land use matters and thanked the Planning Commissioners for their recent efforts processing the Wainwright Intermediate School permit.

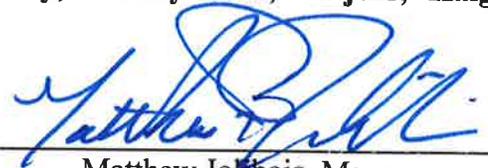
Medley stated it was good to get together, but some allowances might need to be made to help move things along, as well as more meetings with the Council and Commissioners.

Waltier thanked the Planning Commissioners for all that they do. He concluded by stating that the Council and Commission shouldn't lose sight of what the businesses' perspectives are and what they want.

Jolibois thanked the Planning Commission for their efforts. Jolibois shared a story about his involvement with members from the Pike Place Market and efforts to garner interest in the Fircrest Town Center that resulted in comments about the distinctive look of Fircrest, especially Regents Boulevard. Jolibois suggested that a group is formed to brainstorm ideas about Fircrest's distinctive look and New Urbanism with members of Council and the Planning Commission. Jolibois noted that potentially there could be members from the City of University Place City Council in the group as well. Jolibois concluded by stating the media aspect and communications will be key and suggested that additional meetings are conducted by the Council and Commission to brainstorm ideas.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Jolibois, seconded by Reynolds, to adjourn the meeting at 7:40 P.M. Ayes: Surina, Reynolds, Wittner, Jolibois, George, Waltier, Medley, McVay Foss, Patjens, Halgren and Michaelsen. Noes: None. Motion Carried.



Matthew Jolibois, Mayor



Lisa Keely, City Clerk