

CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE, AND ROLL CALL

Mayor Nikki Bufford called the special meeting to order at 6:00 P.M. and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Councilmembers David M. Viafore and Hunter T. George were present. Planning Commissioners Kathy L. McVay, Eric Lane, Andreas Schonger, and Ben Ferguson were present. Councilmember Shannon Reynolds joined the meeting virtually.

Councilmembers Brett L. Wittner, Karen Mauer-Smith, and Joe Barrentine were absent and excused. Planning Commissioner Shirley Schultz was absent and excused.

INTRODUCTIONS

City Councilmembers and Planning Commissioners introduced themselves.

2026 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT/STEP HOUSING

Kim Gunderson from Mahoney Planning provided an overview of the 2026 Comprehensive Plan Amendment regarding STEP housing (Shelters, Transitional Housing, Emergency Housing, and Permanent Supportive Housing). Mrs. Gunderson stated that the 2024 Comprehensive Plan periodic update identified a housing deficiency. She reported that the project has two components: amending the zoning code to allow and regulate STEP housing types and updating the land capacity analysis. Staff have been working with the Planning Commission and anticipate bringing forward draft code amendments in March. Proposed changes also include zoning amendments affecting residential and lodging districts, operational standards, potential parking adjustments near transit corridors, updated definitions, and the removal of the definition of “family” from the code. There was a brief discussion regarding the Administrative Use Permit – Type 2C process, density planning in the Mildred Street/19th Street corner under form-based code, and pending state legislation.

WHITTIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL REPLACEMENT PROJECT

Lindsey Sehmel, ETHOS PNW, provided a brief update on the Whittier Elementary School Replacement Project and reported that the applicant submitted one Conditional Use Permit (CUP) and two major variances, with the CUP scheduled for a quasi-judicial hearing examiner hearing in early March. Ms. Sehmel reported on the project’s constraints, including constructing a new school on the existing site while the current school remains operational, the need for variances, and stated that the proposal aligns with the City’s street and design standards. Discussions included concerns about vehicle stacking and neighborhood impacts, site constraints, potential “choke” points, pedestrian access, parent drop-off planning, parking counts, and EV-ready requirements. Further discussions included landscaping maintenance expectations, the project notification list, whether the hearing examiner would be in person or virtual, and the use of the adjacent park fields.

DESIGN REVIEW

Planning Commissioner Ferguson stated that the Planning Commission would like Council direction and feedback regarding the adoption of design standards following the implementation of missing middle housing requirements. The intent would be to ensure new development reflects Fircrest’s character through consistency. Councilmember Reynolds expressed concern regarding current budget constraints and competing priorities. Discussions included identifying lower-cost approaches, leveraging existing resources, and reaching out to South Sound Affordable Housing (SSHA³P) for technical assistance.

TRAFFIC CALMING MEASURES

Planning Commissioner Lane reported that traffic and pedestrian safety are areas of concern and encouraged consideration of traffic calming strategies. Discussions included Council policy considerations and the need for a comprehensive pedestrian safety plan. Mayor Bufford reported on her proposal to develop a Council committee focused on pedestrian safety to work with staff and Department Directors on a comprehensive plan, including public input.

Further discussions included supporting road infrastructure with education and enforcement, resident acceptance of certain measures, the community's walkable/bikeable character, and community outreach.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilmember George MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 7:38 P.M., seconded by Commissioner Ferguson.

The Motion Carried (4-0).



Nikki Bufford, Mayor



Arlette Burkhardt, City Clerk