

Anacortes Planning Commission Minutes - October 9, 2024

Roll Call

Chairperson Linda Martin called to order the Anacortes Planning Commission meeting of October 9, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. Commissioners Jim Stoneman, Frank Jeretzky, and Mike Mills were present. Commissioners Paul Ryan and William McCombs participated in the meeting remotely via Zoom. Commissioner Luke Currier was absent (excused).

Minutes

Minutes of 08/14/2024 were submitted for approval.

Linda Martin requested that these be carried over to next meeting as they were unavailable for the commissioners to review until today. The commissioners agreed.

Public Comment

No public comment taken.

Public Hearings

Other Business

2025 Comprehensive Plan Update - Presentation and discussion of preliminary Transportation Element goal and policy amendments

Andy Rheume introduced Chris Comeau from Transpo Group. He's the project manager for the Transportation element of the Comprehensive Plan update. Transpo is also working on a broader review of our transportation system. They will be building a Transportation Master Plan for Anacortes.

Chris Comeau said we are updating the Transportation element of Comprehensive Plan and the Transportation Master Plan for the entire city. The memo has links to legislation that drove changes in the requirements. He reviewed the discussion items for tonight. Transportation effects and is affected by the Land Use element, so we will review some of that too. A new concept and terminology is "active transportation", which replaced the word "non-motorized transportation". Multi-modal levels of service is new too. Cities don't control transit, so you have to work with those providers. We review driving, walking, biking, etc. The City of Anacortes is in good shape for goals and policies, but there are a few changes being brought forward to provide clarity and update language.

Mr. Comeau reviewed the public engagement activities that have happened. There were many comments provided at those activities. There's also a survey online. It just closed, so the results are still being compiled. He gave examples from the online survey. There's consistency between what people say they like and what they want to see prioritized for improvement. He reviewed some upcoming opportunities for public input. He pointed out that Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG) is also reviewing transportation at the regional level.

Chris Comeau moved on to the Growth Management Act (GMA) and RCW changes. We have to make sure there are ways for people to get around as development occurs. Streets need to be designed so that everyone can use them and they are safe. Concurrency is a big consideration. This balances growth with impacts and making sure infrastructure is adequate. Local jurisdictions need to determine what's adequate for them. The focus should be the community priorities. Transportation needs to be designed to the land use and the goals of the local agency. An agency cannot deny development if they agree to put in active transportation facilities or transportation demand management. Transportation impact fee (TIF) regulations also changed to include sidewalks and bikeways on the project list for TIF's.

Mr. Comeau reviewed the transportation demand management, which is trying to reduce the single occupancy vehicle use. Single occupancy vehicles are not efficient for moving people around. He moved on to RCW's for state highways. One new concept is that any project that costs \$500,000 or more and near

population centers must be reviewed with the lens of complete streets. If there is a need that's been identified, the State needs to figure out how to make that happen. Department of Transportation also needs to work with cities, to put levels of traffic stress type 1 or 2 on the highway. An example could be protection along the state highway for bicycles and pedestrians. He showed the map from DOT for Skagit for population centers, which clarified that it's not always cities or UGA's. In urban areas, complete streets includes pedestrians, bicycles, public transit, commercial & freight, high occupancy vehicles, and single occupancy vehicles. The emphasis is moving away from vehicles and focusing on protecting all modes of transportation.

Chris Comeau moved on to the COA street system and transit system maps. They've been working with Skagit Transit as they just updated their program. He showed the sidewalk inventory map, multi-use trails map and the bike lane map. He pointed out that there is a large interest in seeing trail connectivity. Trails need to be designed for ADA accessibility when possible. Land use and transportation are integrated and was taken into account when reviewing the transportation plan. He referenced the 2016 Walks & Bike document and built off that for the draft active transportation plan. Primary is the core routes; the secondary routes are lower volume streets that get you to a destination, such as neighborhoods. Regarding SR20, it's the state's responsibility to make sure those improvements are completed. The city makes recommendations to the state. There were some connections that we recommend removing as they are not feasible. The network needs to be established to see where the gaps are. He showed the map, stating that the red and orange lines need to be reviewed and addressed if possible. The standards will be tracked, monitored and published yearly. COA will look at the projects completed annually to see what transportation elements were connected. Then that information will be used to make informed decisions on where projects need focus. One of the Transportation element requirements is to show the state how those will be achieved while taking into account needs and funding. He reviewed some lower cost projects as well. He reviewed the proposed policies. Anacortes is bronze-level certified bike friendly community. Regarding transit, the City needs to work with Skagit Transit for ADA connectivity so that both agencies benefit.

Jim Stoneman referenced the survey, summarizing that the highest thing people didn't like was pavement. He asked if there is more information on that.

Chris Comeau clarified that many people said the streets need to be repaved, which is what that captured. Mike Mills said Anacortes has a federal bike route. He wondered if that should be added.

Mr. Comeau stated that can be added.

Linda Martin had a few comments about the policies, but most are wordsmithing. She recommended removing the acronyms when possible. Please link to the concurrency report and city safety action plan. Chris Comeau pointed out that a glossary of acronyms can be added so that they are well defined. He clarified that the concurrency report is not done. That will happen after the Comprehensive Plan process. This differs from the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). This is a 6-year plan that is rolling and informed by the Comprehensive Plan updates.

Mr. Mills said there are some words that need clarification: (1) transit, which is used many places. He asked that we clarify that this is public transit; (2) street, which is used many times to include the right-of-way and ROW corridor, not just the actual pavement; (3) rollers/pedestrians/bikes/non-motorized/etc needs to be clarified. He suggests using multi-modal instead to add clarity. We have a transportation network, but we reference it as a transportation system.

Chris Comeau agreed and commented that there is a legal requirement to call it a transportation system. For mitigation impact fees, it has to be identified as a system improvement. It needs to be on a list, part of a system and shown to be needed to accommodate growth. System and network are used interchangeably. Linda Martin referenced policy T1.9C which mentions grade separated intersections along SR20. She asked for clarification.

Mr. Comeau gave a hypothetical example of SR20 entering town and where the side streets come into SR20, grade separating would have one of the roads going up and over the other road, similar to an overpass. Grade separating is a safety measure to remove those conflicts, but it's expensive. This language is from the existing plan, we are just consolidating.

John Pope, Anacortes resident and co-chair of Anacortes Bikes, said this language may be in reference to the side roads, not SR20. The intent was to protect bicyclists and pedestrians.

Chris Comeau clarified that this is specifically about roads, not bike improvements. The proposal is to consolidate 7 policies into one. He agreed that we want to protect the bike lanes.

Frank Jeretzky asked if it would be less confusing to say overpasses.

Chris Comeau stated that can be changed. We just brought this over "as is" and consolidated goals & policies from several places into one place.

Mike Mills wondered how commissioners could provide grammatical corrections and suggestions to Transpo Group.

Libby Grage said commissioners could send them to her and she will forward them to Transpo Group.

Jim Stoneman asked if there is a better way to word Goal T2 as it seems redundant.

Dr. Martin moved on to T2.3 that mentions equity analysis and safety action plan.

Mr. Comeau clarified that plan is not ready but is in process. When this plan is done, it can use the safety action plan and recommendations to support some of this. The equity analysis is required by DOT.

Andy Rheame pointed out that the safety action plan looks at more than just transportation. The ADA transition plan is going to City Council next week. That will help us identify where we need to make improvements to our system. We received grants for both of those plans. For example, there are 125 barriers to disabled people on Commercial Ave that have been identified that we are working on.

Mr. Stoneman asked for clarification as to why motorcycle was deleted in this section.

Chris Comeau stated that a motorcycle is a motorized vehicle and would use a vehicle travel lane. Calling it out separately seemed redundant.

Mike Mills pointed out that motorcycle riders are more vulnerable than in a vehicle.

Chris Comeau agreed, but in terms of design of streets and how they use the street is in line with vehicles.

Keep in mind this is a recommendation.

Mike Mills pointed out that battery operated motorcycles exist and will likely increase. He suggested including them now.

Mr. Comeau said the commissioners can recommend keeping it. This is how the city looks at streets from a design standpoint.

Andy Rheame clarified that we aren't wanting to create facilities for motorcycles. We want to see how they can be incorporated into our system.

Jim Stoneman said he understands why it was removed but it doesn't hurt to keep it in there.

Paul Ryan commented that motorcycle awareness is important to Anacortes. We have events around them! He recommends keeping obstructions, such as landscaping, out of the way so that we are keeping motorcycles safe.

Linda Martin moved on to T2.22 which talks about transit, vehicle miles and greenhouse gas emissions. There may be quite a few policies already that would relate to the Climate element; this would be one of them. She wondered if transit vehicles are diesel powered.

Chris Comeau clarified that most are currently diesel, but many are changing to electric, so this needs to be included. He asked if the Commission is wanting to cross reference this section to the Climate element. This is specifically called out in State law & GMA. The Comprehensive Plan needs to be internally consistent and complete integrated, so there is lots of overlap. We will cross reference climate issues whenever possible. The intent is to take the demand off the roads.

Mike Mills moved on to T2.23, the inventory of ideas that the city can sponsor to encourage modes of transportation. He wonders if we could encourage partnerships with bike organizations in the area. He moved on to T3.7, freight rail safety, asking if this applies to anything within city limits.

Libby Grage clarified it is in the UGA, not city limits.

Mr. Comeau commented that this is current language and can be removed. He moved on to current policy T3.10. Transpo is wondering if "should" needs to be changed as that language is not strong. We suggest rewording or removing.

John Coleman stated that LTI uses our shipping terminal. There is an agreement on how that is managed,

where they can drive/transport those items.

Chris Comeau suggested re-wording this policy to reference that agreement. It needs to be reworded so that the concern is clear and there is something being done to manage the situation.

Mr. Mills expressed concern that there's language in this regarding the airport, but that is owned by the Port. Some of this suggests proactive language on those properties, but they are not city property.

John Coleman said there is an agreement between the City and the Port about the airport that has been codified.

Mike Mills said we need to make sure that the language we use in this document is consistent with that agreement.

Ms. Grage clarified that those policies are all not proposed to change.

Mike Mills expressed concern including it in this document when the airport is not in the city's purview.

Chris Comeau stated that the GMA requires cities to inventory transportation elements such as air, marine, freight, rail, etc. These are trying to get at the overall vision of the city and what they are trying to accomplish. He reached out to the Port and Skagit Regional Airport and they provided input.

Linda Martin moved on to T4.16. She asked if this is outdated as the plan is going to Council. She recommended using "most current".

Mike Mills wondered how battery powered wheelchairs and scooters should be referenced.

Mr. Comeau clarified that wheelchairs, whether powered or not, are treated as non-motorized for accessibility. They are part of the pedestrian realm, especially from a vulnerability standpoint. It's not possible to call out every single type of non-motorized transportation. There's a wide variety of electric bikes. They are bikes, but the higher powered / higher classes are not allowed on the sidewalks. There are regulations, but hard to enforce.

Mike Mills said since the plan is looking 20 years into the future, we will likely see an increase in these types of transportation. He suggested including definitions.

Paul Ryan asked if this should be included in the ACFL conversation too. He agrees that definitions are needed.

John Coleman stated that the ACFL has user rules and a board that reviews those, so that's separate. In the Comprehensive Plan goals, we are making sure that people that are using non-vehicle options, making sure there is a place for them. The higher speed / power bikes are governed by the state and federal regulations, so he's not sure we need to include those details.

Mike Mills said he just wants to define what we mean by non-motorized and give examples.

Chris Comeau clarified they will come up with language; such as, the city should continue look into the evolving needs for transportation. He will provide additional language.

2025 Comprehensive Plan Update - Continued discussion of Land Use and Housing Element goal and policy amendments (time-permitting)

Libby Grage pointed out that the Commission left off mid-housing element. She suggested starting there. She pointed out that she has not had the opportunity to address the questions that the Commissioners had about Land Use policies and Housing.

Linda Martin started with section H-2. In H2.1 she recommends defining "over time" because it is too vague. The intent is good but needs to be clarified.

Libby Grage said she will work with Makers on changes.

Paul Ryan suggested changing to "between the planning period of the Comprehensive Plan".

Linda Martin moved on to H3.5 stating that "high opportunity areas" needs to be defined.

Libby Grage pointed out that is a term used by various agencies, all defined differently. She will bring this back to the Commission. It relates to neighborhoods that have good access to amenities for residents; such as, schools, parks, etc.

Linda Martin said in H3.6 she prefers "consider", instead of "explore". She asked staff to consider taking out the last sentence in H3.7.

Libby Grage clarified this is pointing to HAP as something to consider as part of the process of looking at a

multi-family tax exempt program. It is not requiring that we use those recommendations.

Mike Mills suggested ending the sentence after HAP.

Frank Jeretzky wondered if the County has to approve if we want to have tax exemption for multi-family.

John Coleman clarified that the multi-family tax exemptions programs are passed at the city level. The county collects a certain amount of tax regardless. If the multi-family tax exemption program is passed, the amount that is not paid by the developer, the balance is passed on to the community members. That would be discussed during the tax exemption process.

Linda Martin said that H3.9 is poorly worded. She suggested starting with "prioritize affordable housing". In H3.10 she suggests ending the last sentence after "families". We've addressed the RDI in many other places.

In H4.6 she suggests deleting "throughout Anacortes".

Frank Jeretzky and Paul Ryan agreed.

Linda Martin moved on to policy H6.1. She recommended taking out the proposed changes and keeping the original policy. The HAP is a menu of ideas and there is not an intent to enact all of them.

Libby Grage said she will be working on the staff recommendations for HAP items that Commissioners are working in teams. She's hoping to have that completed on October 21st and brought to you on October 30th.

John Coleman commented that staff is still working on the remaining portions of the Land Use element.

Planning Department Update

Updated PC Tentative Schedule for 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

John Coleman reminded the Commissioners that there is no meeting next week. Then we will have the open house on October 23rd. He reviewed the rest of the schedule.

October 23rd Open House for the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

Libby Grage said there will be more information about the Climate element updated on the website! We're formulating the plan for the open house, but there will be stations where public can interact with staff and consultants.

Mike Mills asked if there is a role for the Planning Commission at the open house.

John Coleman suggested being present and interact.

Adjournment

Linda Martin adjourned the meeting at 8:04 p.m.