



Memorandum

DATE: July 8, 2010

TO: Shoreline Planning Commission

FROM: Steven Cohn, Senior Planner
Jessica Simulcik Smith, Planning Commission Clerk

RE: Follow-up on discussion about condensing Planning Commission minutes

On June 17 staff brought forth a recommendation to condense Planning Commission minutes for items other than public hearings and asked the Planning Commission for its feedback.

The Commission discussed the pros and cons of the proposal and was generally open to the idea of condensing the minutes for study meetings. The Commission agreed it would be helpful to have examples of what a condensed version would look like and would then invite the public to comment on the change. In addition, one of the Commissioners suggested putting a timestamp in the minutes of where in the audio that discussion could be found.

Since minute writing styles vary depending on the person transcribing them, we thought it was best to provide examples from our current minute writer that she's done for other jurisdictions. The following are links to examples of how study session minutes can be condensed:

- Joint meeting with the Edmonds Planning Board and Economic Development Commission, Dec. 9, 2009
http://www.ci.edmonds.wa.us/CityDepartments/PlanningDept/EconDevComm/Minutes/091209_JtPlanningBrdEconDevCommPresentation.pdf
- Edmonds Citizen Economic Development Commission, Aug. 13, 2009
http://www.ci.edmonds.wa.us/CityDepartments/PlanningDept/EconDevComm/Minutes/090813_Minutes.pdf
- Edmonds Port Commission Study Session, Mar. 5, 2009
http://www.portofedmonds.org/docs/com_minutes/2009/030509.pdf

Agenda Item 10.a

To further help the Commission and public understand how a condensed version would differ from what you've reviewed over the last few years, our minutes taker suggests that the following things change:

- Information presented by staff that is contained in the staff report would be summarized and not reported in detail.
- Individual comments made by Commissioners would be summarized and not attributed to specific Commissioners.
- Discussions on specific topics that occur more than once during a meeting will be combined and condensed.
- If a question is repeated more than once at different time during a meeting, the question and answer will be combined and transcribed only once.
- Unnecessary talking points will be left out. For example, if a Commissioner asks a question that was misinterpreted by staff and the Commission follows up with a question that asks the question in another way, only the second response would be reported.

It would be possible to condense minutes even more. For example, additional changes could include:

- Commissioner comments summarized as bullet points.
- Minutes that describe an exercise or an example given at a meeting (an animated PowerPoint slideshow, design charrette, etc.) would be summarized briefly or left out entirely.

Staff requests that the Commission agree to try out “summary minutes for study session items” for six months and review this decision at the end of the trial period to see if it is a workable strategy. The summary minutes would include timestamps to delineate a topic change so that the public could go to the City website or City Hall to hear the entire discussion.

Attachment

Public Comments received to-date

Public Comment from June 17 Meeting

Arthur Peach, Shoreline, said he has seen many changes in the development of Shoreline over the past 10 years. Some of the recent decisions have been the largest ever taken on by the City, and there is an expectation for lengthy minutes. He observed that over his short time of becoming involved in the City, he has learned that difficult decisions do not come easy, but the amount of energy spent thinking about the decision is crucial for the residents of Shoreline. It is important for the citizens to have a clear understanding of how these decisions were made. He cautioned that limiting discussion minutes to summary only can end up changing the meaning of what was said or implied. While the staff report indicates the City would save money by limiting staff time and minute taker dollars, he expressed his belief that the change would undermine the citizens' ability to understand why certain decisions are made. He suggested that providing full minutes of Planning Commission discussions is essential for transparency and accountability. He noted that the Commission is one of the first opportunities for public participation, and they have a real voice to the City Council. He advised against the Commission accepting the staff's recommendation.

Debbie Kellogg asked if anyone has considered using voice software to transcribe the audio recording into minutes. She noted that the City Council has reduced their minutes, but they also provide access to the video recording to augment the record. As far as staff time, that's part of their job and how government works. There have been no layoffs and furloughs in the City of Shoreline as opposed to other jurisdictions.

Comment Emails/Letters Received

Sigrid Strom, June 17, 2010

It has come to my attention that there is a recommendation afoot to limit the content of the written minutes of study sessions to a summary of the discussions among the commissioners. While it might save some time on the part of the staff and some money for the city to do this, it's a bad idea. The study sessions are when important issues often surface, and the discussions among the commissioners relevant to these issues are important sources of information for the residents of the city. Although the minutes would still be available in an audio version of such meetings, most people cannot afford to buy a CD for every planning commission meeting in which they are interested.

In a city where there are definite trust issues between the city and the residents, reducing transparency, no matter how pure the motive, is not a good road to go down. I'm sure that there must be a more sophisticated way to record and then transcribe the minutes -- has anyone checked this possibility? If there isn't a better method available, I believe we must acknowledge that some of the messiness of operating in a democracy includes the extra time to make sure everyone has access to the most complete information possible.

If anyone doubts that there are trust issues, I would be happy to discuss the results of my canvassing the neighborhood during my stint on the CAC for the S.E. neighborhoods

Item 10.a - Attachment 1

subarea plan. I came to this committee a newly transplanted resident, with no previous history with the city, no knowledge of this previous history, and no connections with any people living in Shoreline. What I learned in getting to know my neighborhood is that there is a considerable communication issue between residents and the city. Let's not aggravate this situation further.