



MOVING TOWARD A NEW CODE – UPDATES ON THE NEW PARKING TASK FORCE, P&Z WORK SESSIONS AND THE MAYOR’S TASK FORCE ON INFRASTRUCTURE

THE PARKING TASK FORCE – MEETING 1

Last week, CityWatch reported that a new Parking and Traffic Management Task Force would soon begin work on making recommendations that could have a direct bearing on the newly proposed zoning code for the City of Columbia. The first meeting of that group occurred on Wednesday, July 13. The new Task Force is co-chaired by City Council members Karl Skala and Michael Trapp and consists of 15 additional members representing various stakeholder groups throughout Columbia, and primarily interested in Columbia’s central city. ([A list of members is available here.](#)) All but three of the members were present at the first meeting. The work of the Task Force is expected to take six months, at which time a final report will be issued by the group. However, based on discussions at the first meeting, it is apparent that the group will attempt to issue a preliminary report that deals specifically with downtown parking and modes of transportation before the entire report is completed. In fact, to speed up the process somewhat, the Task Force agreed to meet twice a month rather than the once-a-month schedule that had been announced earlier. Meetings are to be scheduled on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month until the work of the committee is completed. The next meeting is therefore scheduled for July 27, from 4:00 – 5:30 PM at City Hall.

In terms of mission and content, the Task Force will conduct a “review and evaluation of parking requirements and options for parking requirement waivers within the M-DT District of the DRAFT Unified Development Ordinance.” In essence, that means the Task Force will make recommendations for how parking should be addressed in the new zoning code that is currently under consideration and is the subject of ongoing public hearings by the Planning & Zoning Commission. The Task Force will also review parking best practices from other communities and will examine how transportation mode shift programs have been implemented effectively in other communities.

As a basis for their work, the group is using a set of recommendations from Smart Growth America that were the result of a parking audit conducted last year. A copy of the Smart Growth report as well as staff comment is available at the following link:

<http://www.citywatchcolumbia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Supporting-materials-from-Smart-Growth-Audit.pdf>

The group will also use the current wording from the new zoning code proposal to decide if the current policies suggested should be adopted, amended or abandoned. For parking task force recommendations to be able to be reviewed by the Planning and Zoning Commission on a timely basis, the initial report of the Task Force will need to be completed by September 7 which is the last currently scheduled evaluation work session of the P&Z Commission. If the Task Force does NOT complete a preliminary report by that time, additional delays in full consideration of the code could occur. The Planning and Zoning Commission has already advised the City Council that it will need at least two months longer than originally believed to complete its recommendations on the new zoning code.

Although no recommendations were adopted at the first Task Force meeting, some procedural items were discussed. Of note were the following points:

- No subcommittees will be created at this time to study specific parking and transportation impacts.
- Recommendations of Task Force do not need to be unanimous. Although it was suggested that no recommendation go forward unless it had complete consensus, that suggested was not adopted. Councilman Skala did, however, suggest that minority reports could be issued on topics that had significant opposition or differing approaches.
- Councilman Ian Thomas, who is not a member of the Task Force but who did attend the meeting, suggested that some option be created for developers to pay into some sort of fund rather than adhere to strict parking requirements.
- Another individual asked that the Task Force consider that parking demand fluctuates between daytime and nighttime hours and that that should be considered when making rules.
- Another member indicated that there should be additional avenues for public outreach by the Task Force as they conduct their business.

If you have ideas or opinions about the rules governing parking in the downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods or for businesses, apartments and residential areas in other parts of Columbia, feel free to share those ideas with the new Parking Task Force members and staff members. Leah Christian is the city staff person assigned to coordinate the activities of the new task force. Her email address is: leah.christian@como.gov.

PLANNING AND ZONING WORK SESSION 1 – DEALING WITH PUBLIC INPUT

Beginning in May, and continuing through the last P&Z regular meeting in July, the P&Z Commission has allowed public input, both oral and written, regarding the proposed new Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), more commonly known as the new zoning code. During these regular meetings, the Commission has not taken specific positions on any aspects of the code. Instead, the Commission has decided to document the testimony that has been presented, compile that testimony in a spreadsheet format, and will evaluate that testimony and input from city staff during a series of work sessions scheduled to take place each week from now until September 7.

The first of these work sessions took place on July 13. The next is scheduled to take place on July 20 and each Wednesday thereafter at 6:00 PM in City Hall. Although these work sessions ARE open to the public, no public testimony is allowed. They are work sessions only - so discussion is limited to Commissioners and staff who attend.

More than 150 different suggestions and comments have been received so far, with more expected to be added at the July 21 regular meeting of the P&Z Commission. During the work sessions, commissioners give a thumbs up or thumbs down to the various suggestions made by the public. Some issues are fairly simple to deal with and require only minor tweaks in the language or presentation of the new zoning code proposal. Other issues, however, have already begun to evoke more intense debate on policy or the impact of the newly proposed rules. Some issues that have received particular attention by the commission so far include:

- Boundaries of the downtown (M-DT) zoning district
- Permitted uses for new zoning classifications
- Specific elements of the regulating plan
- Elements of the tree preservation rules in the new ordinance
- Powers of the Historic Preservation Commission
- Procedures for establishing overlay districts
- Required parking limits in both the Downtown, fringe residential and commercial districts
- Exemptions for small commercial properties

At this time, the DRAFT Unified Development Ordinance is more than 350 pages in length and has more than 1,100 footnotes and margin notes indicating proposed changes, recommendations and explanations. A copy of the DRAFT Zoning code as well as a spreadsheet with identified issues is available on the city's website at this link: <http://www.como.gov/community-development/planning/development-code-update-project/> To gain a thorough understanding of the new code and its potential implications, it is recommended that citizens review both documents.

The last opportunity for oral public comment on any aspect of the code prior to the unveiling of a revised draft document is at the P&Z Commission meeting on July 21, although written comments may continue to be submitted throughout July and August. There will also be a final P&Z hearing on the revised DRAFT ordinance, but by that time most aspects of the new code proposal are expected to be in nearly final form.

THE MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON INFRASTRUCTURE

The Mayor's Task Force on Infrastructure was established on July 6, 2015 and nine members were appointed to that committee on August 3, 2015. The Task Force was charged with making recommendations for dealing with Columbia's ever growing infrastructure needs and making policy recommendations for how to most equitably and effectively implement such concepts. The members of the Task Force are:

- Chris Kelly, 2706 Bristol Lake Drive, Ward 6 (Replaced by Tracy Greever-Rice in April 2016)
- John Conway, 4902 Thornbrook Ridge, Ward 5
- Gregg Coffin, 417 S. Fifth Street (business), Ward 4
- Jen Hedrick, 2801 Woodard Drive, Suite 103 (business), Boone County
- Cody Darr, 3401 Broadway Business Park Court, Suite 105 (business), Ward 3
- Bill Weitkemper, 3717 Bray Court, Ward 4
- Tony Grove, 902 Range Line Street (business), Ward 4
- Katrina Boles, 1109 Again Street, Ward 1
- Kim Kraus, 2304 Ridgefield Road, Ward 4

The Task Force was authorized for a period of 12 months, so technically, the Task Force should issue its final report on August 3 and then dissolve. However, recent Task Force agendas indicate that the committee will continue to meet on a weekly basis, at least until the end of August. Currently, announced future meetings are set to occur on July 19 and 26 and in August on the 2nd, 9th, 17th, 24th and 30th.

Agenda notes for the July 19 meeting also indicate that the Task Force plans to hold public hearings on its work which may add additional time to the timeline. If true, that would put the issuance of the Task Force's final report past the date set by the P&Z Commission for its final work session on the new zoning code (September 7). This is significant since some recommendations from this task force could have a direct bearing on the content or direction of items contained in the new zoning code proposal.

This mismatch in timelines between the various commissions and task forces may result in further delays in the compilation and consideration of a unified draft zoning document. It may also be necessary for the City Council to authorize the Task Force to continue to meet beyond the time frame originally envisioned by the council.

If you have an opinion regarding any topics relating to the zoning code, parking or infrastructure, it is important that you provide your input earlier rather than later due to the uncertainties relating to timeframes for consideration. CityWatch will continue to update you as recommendations are brought forward from the various Task Forces, Commissions and interest groups.

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