

January 31, 2006



## City of Pullman

# Planning Department Newsletter



## Planning and Police Committees Meet

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On January 25, the Planning Commission and Police Advisory Committee met to discuss issues concerning public safety in the community. Members of the two panels talked about several subjects in this regard, but concentrated primarily on these three matters: multiple access routes for subdivisions, retaining walls at corner lots, and cul-de-sac standards.

Police Advisory Committee members asked why new subdivisions are not required to provide more than one access route for the development. Planning Commission members responded that mandating multiple accesses at the outset of a project would effectively stop most residential development because a second roadway would be prohibitively expensive and/or the developer does not own the land over which the second street would need to be constructed. Commission

members pointed out that the city Comprehensive Plan does include a policy to "ensure that new subdivisions are designed to have more than one point of access at full build-out of the subdivision and adjacent area." They explained that when the first in a new series of subdivisions is proposed, city staff presents a master plan to the Planning Commission and City Council that shows the future provision of multiple accesses into the development. At the appropriate phase of a project, a second (and sometimes third and fourth) access is furnished in accordance with city policy.

Police department staff said that, at a few locations, retaining walls at street intersection corners present visibility challenges for motorists. Planning department staff informed the participants that, due to the hilly topography of this town, retaining walls are

specifically exempt from the intersection corner "vision clearance area" requirements of the zoning code. Some in attendance expressed interest in possibly amending these provisions to remove retaining walls from the exempt category.

With regard to cul-de-sacs, two issues were raised by Police Advisory Committee members. First, a request was made to require pedestrian paths at the end of cul-de-sac streets so that connectivity would be maintained, at least for those on foot. Planning Commission members responded that the Pullman Pedestrian/Bicycle Plan already calls for a walkway at many cul-de-sacs. Second, an inquiry was made as to whether the width of cul-de-sac streets was adequate. Planning Commission members indicated that the width of these streets is sufficient to accommodate vehicular traffic, including public safety apparatus.

At the end of the session, members from both committees agreed that they had learned something from the discussion. The two boards will likely meet again as the need arises.

**Your comments,  
questions and  
suggestions are always  
welcome.**



Multiple access routes are provided to subdivisions over time.

## Profile of Assistant City Planner Heidi Sowell

When former assistant planner Jim Kackman resigned back in 2002, the city went without the position for a while due to budget constraints. In 2004, with community growth showing no signs of slowing down, the City Council recognized that the planning department needed assistance to keep up with the workload. So, the Council authorized the re-filling of the assistant city planner position. The person selected for this position, after what she described as a “long, grueling interview,” was Heidi Sowell. She has been a vital member of the planning department ever since.

Heidi was born and raised in Seattle. During her tenure at Roosevelt High School, she participated in several different sports, including basketball, volleyball, and softball. Later, she



would work as a junior varsity softball coach through the Seattle public school system. She attended University of Washington, and graduated with a major in Community and Environmental Planning and minors in Geography and Urban Planning. While performing her studies toward a bachelor's degree, Heidi worked as an environmental/engineering intern at the city of Lynnwood, where she helped with map updates, plan review, environmental education, and grant writing. During her senior year in college, she was fortunate enough to study abroad at a small hill town (Civita di Bagnoregio) in central Italy. She remarked that she enjoyed learning about the Italian culture, although the walk up and down the slope for daily necessities like grocery items was a bit challenging.

Upon completion of college, Heidi was hired by the city of Lynnwood, first as an environmental

technician, and later as an environmental engineering technician/utility systems inspector. In between, she worked as a technical assistant for the city of Shoreline. These positions provided her with a great deal of experience in the areas of engineering and planning. She helped revise city ordinances; reviewed plans and issued various building, planning, and environmental permits; provided customer service; and assisted with environmental education. At Lynnwood, Heidi became certified in “cross connection control” (protection of drinking water supplies from contamination by other sources, such as irrigation systems). She also administered the city's FOG (fats, oils, and grease) program there to prevent accumulation of these substances in the city's utility lines; she says that work, while disgusting at times, was very important in maintaining public health standards.

Heidi's work with the city of Pullman began in July of 2004. As the assistant city planner, she reviews all proposed land use development proposals, responds to citizen questions about zoning and environmental matters, prepares staff reports to city committees, performs research on community planning issues, conducts enforcement activities related to zoning and environmental laws, and administers the city's annual population estimate. For all of these tasks, Heidi has demonstrated her ability to work in a highly competent and friendly manner with members of the public and her fellow employees. She said, “I enjoy the varying work we get. In a small city like this, you're guaranteed a diversity of projects.”

Outside the office, Heidi enjoys relaxation time with her husband, Casey, who is a student in the WSU College of Veterinary Medicine. At home, they provide loving care for their Boston Terrier, Finny, and their frog, Hurley. She enjoys reading, cooking, hiking, skiing, travel, and spectator sports--especially college basketball.

## 2005 Permit Activity Sets Record

The final numbers are in for building permit activity in 2005, and it was a record-setting year for Pullman. Last year, the city issued permits for 103 single family houses, 302 multi-family dwellings, and two manufactured homes. The city also issued 257 permits for new construction or remodels related to commercial or institutional uses, which include retail businesses, restaurants, offices, manufacturing activities, churches, schools, and other public facilities. The total building permit valuation for all these permits was slightly above \$64.3 million.

The 2005 figures for single family homes and building permit valuation were records for the community (the previous highs were 89 houses [1995] and \$53.1 million [2003]). The number of multi-family residences authorized last year, while not a record, was certainly higher than normal. Over the last ten years, the average annual number of multi-family units permitted has been 140.

Also, as discussed in previous editions of this newsletter, the market reacted strongly to the lack of residential lots that existed at the end of 2004. In 2005, real estate developers obtained approval from the Council for 345 residential lots. That is, by far, the largest number of new residential lots established in a single year. The previous high for new parcels created was 102, set in 1994. Over the past 10 years, the average number of lots established annually has been about 83.

Based on information we've received from local and national sources, planning department staff expects this very strong permit activity to subside somewhat in 2006, and we anticipate the number of subdivision proposals in 2006 will decline substantially from last year's count. Nevertheless, all indications are that Pullman will continue to experience strong growth for the next few years, unless there is a shift in some outside force, such as interest rates.

## Wal-Mart Hearing Concludes

Last Thursday, city hearing examiner John Montgomery closed the public hearing on the Wal-Mart store proposed for Bishop Boulevard in Pullman. This hearing was conducted over the course of three separate days (January 13, 20, and 26) to gather evidence regarding two appeals filed by the Pullman Alliance for Responsible Development. One of these appeals challenged the city's Determination of Nonsignificance (DNS) issued for the project under the rules of the State Environmental Policy Act. The other appeal contested the city's conditional approval of a site plan for the proposed development. During the hearing, Mr. Montgomery accepted many hours of testimony and received substantial documentation regarding the case.

Now that the public hearing is closed, the hearing examiner is preparing a written decision on both appeals. By city code, the hearing examiner must issue a decision within 30 calendar days of the conclusion of the hearing unless he finds that "unusual circumstances" warrant a longer review time. For the DNS appeal, the hearing examiner has the options of affirming the decision, remanding the case for further information, or reversing the decision. For the site plan appeal, the hearing examiner may affirm, modify, or reverse the decision. Final decisions made by the hearing examiner are appealable to Whitman County Superior Court.



## Pending Land Use Applications

Displayed below are land use applications submitted to the planning or public works department or city-generated proposals for planning provisions that require a public meeting, public notice, or site plan review in accordance with the city code.

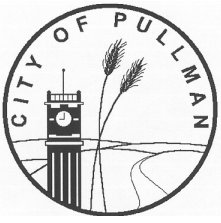
PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	LOCATION	STATUS
Historic Preservation Ordinance	allow special property tax valuation for historic sites	citywide	PC recommended approval on 1/25; CC meeting upcoming
Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code Amendment	create new mixed use zoning district	citywide	staff conducting research and soliciting public input
Fairbanks Annexation	annex 58 acres to city in R2 and C3 pre-zone districts	north of city limits and west of State Route 27 (Palouse Highway)	CC accepted annexation notice; city awaiting petition from applicant
Big Sky Subdivision Preliminary Plat	divide 7.3 acres into 30 lots in R2 district	west of Sunnyside Park and north of Old Wawawai Road	owner filed appeal of staff ruling on wetland report
Sunnyside Heights Subdivision No. 6 Preliminary Plat	divide 11.6 acres into 38 lots in R1 and R2 districts	southeast of intersection of SW Center Street and Itani Drive	PC recommended conditional approval on 12/14; CC meeting scheduled for 1/31
Oak Street Zone Change (Z-05-3)	rezone 18,000 square feet from R2 to R4	400 and 420 NE Oak Street	PC recommended denial on 1/25; CC meeting scheduled for 2/28
Turner Conditional Use Permit (C-06-1)	conduct bed and breakfast establishment in R2 district	210 NW Olsen Street	staff awaiting additional information from applicant
Appeal of Notice of Violation (A-05-4)	appeal of violation notice citing 3 dwellings on 6,500-sq-ft lot in R2 district	645 SE Taylor Street	BOA hearing of 1/30 continued to 2/27 to obtain additional evidence
Wal-Mart Supercenter SEPA determination and site plan	develop 223,000-sq-ft store on a 28-acre site	south of SE Harvest Dr/Bishop Boulevard intersection	appeal hearing concluded 1/26; hearing examiner to render decision within 30 days
City Transit Storm Water Project Substantial Development Permit No. 73	reroute and enlarge storm water outfall pipe	775 Guy Street	staff approved permit on 1/23; permit sent to applicable state agencies
Riverwalk Parking Lot Substantial Development Permit No. 74	construct 77-stall parking lot on 30,350-sq-ft parcel	southeast of 240 NE Kamiaken Street	notice of application distributed; local comment period ends 2/25
Valley Road Apartments site plan (05-18)	develop 7 apartments on a 10,832-sq-ft lot	1245 NE Valley Road	staff requested applicant to revise site plan
North Campus Heights Apartments Expansion site plan (05-19)	develop 42 additional apartments	1540 NE Merman Drive	staff reviewing site plan
State Street Townhomes site plan (05-20)	construct 4 townhouses on a 14,800-square-foot parcel	540 SW State Street	staff reviewing site plan
Courtyard Heights Apartments site plan (05-24)	construct an 8-unit apartment house on 10,424-sq-ft lot with parking on nearby parcel	1020 NE B Street	staff reviewing site plan
River Trail Apartments site plan (05-25)	build a 30-unit apartment building above commercial space on a 30,197-sq-ft lot	1240 SE Latah Street	staff requested applicant to revise site plan
Cedar Pointe Condominiums site plan (05-29)	develop 9 condominiums on a 26,528-sq-ft parcel	2115 NE Westwood Drive	staff requested applicant to revise site plan
Isothermal Systems Research Addition site plan (06-1)	construct a 15,700-sq-ft addition to existing ISR building	1300 NE Henley Court	staff reviewing site plan
Blue Sky Storage Building site plan (06-2)	construct a 900-sq-ft storage building at existing Blue Sky storage facility	2500 S. Grand Avenue	staff reviewing site plan

KEY TO ZONING DISTRICTS: R1 Single Family Residential; RT Residential Transitional; R2 Low Density Multi-Family Residential; R3 Medium Density Multi-Family Residential; R4 High Density Multi-Family Residential; C1 Neighborhood Commercial; C2 Central Business District; C3 General Commercial; I1 Light Industrial; I2 Heavy Industrial; IRP Industrial Research Park; WSU Washington State University

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS: CC: City Council; PC: Planning Commission; BOA: Board of Adjustment; DOE: State Department of Ecology

NOTES: 1) If an applicant fails to act on a pending application for a period of six months, said application will be dropped from the above list. 2) Numbers in parentheses are planning staff's internal file numbers. 3) Site plan review by city staff is generally conducted for proposed construction of developments other than single family homes, duplexes, or manufactured homes; it does not apply to most construction on the WSU campus.





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