

Portland Planning Commission

June 24, 2025

5:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Planning Commissioners Present: Wade Lange, Mary-Rain O'Meara, Steph Routh, Brian Ames, Michael Alexander, [1 open position]

Planning Commissioners Virtual: None

Planning Commissioners Absent: Michael Pouncil, Erica Thompson, Eli Spevak

City Staff Presenting: Patricia Diefenderfer and Sandra Wood, Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS)

Documents and Presentations

Call to Order

Chair Routh called the meeting to order at 5:07 p.m.

Items of Interest from Commissioners

- Code Alignment Project (USB) Amendment transmittal letter to City Council confirmation
- Tomorrow evening the Transportation System Plan (TSP) Advisory Committee kicks off, and Chair Routh will be attending as the representative of the Planning Commission.

Director's Report

Principal Planner Sandra Wood gave the Director's Report:

- This is the last meeting of this sitting commission.
- BPS staff will be presenting at the Climate, Resilience, and Land Use Committee on Thursday morning 6/26/25 for the appointments of the new planning commissioners with the full council meeting to be scheduled following.

Consent Agenda

Consideration of Minutes from the June 10, 2025, meeting.

Commissioner Lange made the motion to approve the Consent Agenda. *Commissioner Alexander* seconded the motion.

Y5 – Wade Lange, Mary-Rain O'Meara, Steph Routh, Brian Ames, Michael Alexander

Planning Commission Two Years in Review

Briefing

Presentation

Briefing

The briefing provided an overview of the work completed by this commission between 2023-2025. Details are outlined below.

- 38 meetings were held
- 1,197+ commissioner hours in meetings
- 27 briefs were presented
- 20 hearings occurred
- 450+ testifiers shared input
- 21 recommendations were made to City Council
- Major themes of the last two years included housing, area planning, TIF districts and responsive code changes.
- This commission also developed and implemented new bylaws and best practices procedures for this advisory body.
- The briefing included time to share gratitude for the three members whose terms are ending: Michael Pouncil, Mike Alexander and Wade Lange as well as the former Planning Commission Coordinator, Julie Ocken, who has moved to a new role within the City of Portland.

Discussion

Vice Chair O'Meara: Really enjoyed serving as chair for two years. Harnessed the collective wisdom. Alexander brought assurance with the long lists of testifiers and a lot of wisdom. Commissioner Lange, you were always so complimentary and supportive. Commissioner Pouncil brought such curiosity and creativity to his perspectives, especially on environmental issues. Julie, so much appreciation for you. We've looked to you for so much guidance and we thank you so much.

Commissioner Ames: This advisory body can be intimidating, especially as the newest member. Thank you to the departing members for all the preparation you did ahead of meetings. Julie, you made me feel really welcome. Thank you.

Chair Routh: It is easy when someone is so competent is easy but in reality, it is anything but easy. I hope we collaborate in your new role and thank you so much for all you do. We are seeing in our society an attack on public service at all levels of government and I think it is so critical to do this public service, which so many of our community members rely on. Commissioner Pouncil brings so much heart and a breadth of experience. He has an incredible capacity for innovation, and we have been so lucky to have him on this body these last couple of

years. Commissioner Alexander, I've fan-girled on you for a really long time and I had to calm down once you joined. You have been so integral to the Albina Vision Trust, and your work on with the Port of Portland is so valuable. Commissioner Lange, so nice to have another East Portlander on this commission with me. Your development experience, particularly around Lloyd Center, has been really great. I hope that you will stay in touch.

Commissioner Alexander: Our first gathering as commissioners stands out, and as I looked at the composition of the commission, I felt like an imposter. The areas of expertise that this body brings to this work are really impressive. The City staff who we work with are also impressive. We feel like first responders as we grapple with issues that face the city. I really appreciate being in the room for these challenging conversations so that we can build bridges, not burn them. I can say that this work has direct bearing on the quality of life of Portlanders, even if they don't know what we're doing related to land use and zoning. I am so grateful and humbled by this commission.

Commissioner Lange: Patricia, you were handed a bunch of novices right out of the gate, and you really made our work so much easier. And thank you Sandra for all the work you did to educate us was so critical, and I really couldn't have done it without you all. I moved to Salem a couple of weeks ago, so my departure from the commission aligns with my departure from Portland. Our work has big impacts beyond our circle and beyond our generation, and we should be proud of that. I feel like I've increased my circle of friends here who I can reach out to and connect with. This is such an insightful group, and I've learned so much from you all. It's been such a joy.

Vice Chair O'Meara: I want to hear your advice. Do you have any advice for us or our oncoming members?

Commissioner Alexander: There has to be a recognition that the lenses we bring are really important. I'm a big fan of starting a story in the beginning, not in the middle. We can ask good questions because we were given a deeper understanding through the training we were provided. A little direction goes a long way.

Commissioner Lange: Chris Smith used to sit on the commission, and he came to testify once. He spoke about a decision he made that he regretted and that impacted us in east county with the construction of a large warehouse transit center off 122nd. It was, in part, through some decisions made through the Planning Commission that the decision came to be and he regretted that and told us so when he testified. It gets back to the impacts made from the decisions here and they carry on for a long, long time. I tried to think about that with each project you handed us, as in what impacts will happen 25 years from now. Our decisions have consequences which carry on for a long time. The other thing I want to mention is that the testimony we received, both written and in person, is so vital to our decision-making processes and was really impactful.

Chair Routh: How have you learned? What helped you learn the subject matter? How have you come to understand the work?

Commissioner Lange: It was really helpful when you provided the printed version of the 2035 Plan. I constantly went back to that as my initial guide. I also found it really helpful to reach out to people in the community to educate myself. Testimony was a big part of my learning as well.

Commissioner Alexander: I really had to listen deeply. I had to dig in, and what helped was public testimony. The greatest insights are from the places with the greatest impact or pain. It had to start with really listening deeply.

Vice Chair O'Meara: I see one of my obligations as a planning commissioner to be challenged. I want to hear what challenges me. That's my spark. Testimony is so important. I learn most when I don't understand something straight out of the gate. I have tried to seek out information that was less readily available so that I can get out of my own day-to-day experience.

Chair Routh: Regarding testimony, I'm often thinking about who I haven't heard from. Bringing the work of this commission to the community has been a joy. We are a conduit between the city's land use and community.

Commissioner Ames: We know what the agenda items are in advance, but I've used those as an opportunity to talk to friends and coworkers and all kinds of different people. Although it is not public testimony, these conversations have really brought a lot of insight as well. I try to seek people out from people in the community, especially on projects where I don't have a strong opinion.

Commissioner Lange: We came in on the cusp of the restructuring of government. I'm curious now, have things actually changed, and how will this commission navigate this new form of government? Is communication different? Has that been an open discussion?

Commissioner Alexander: This handoff is not something that happens automatically. Are folks still learning what we as a commission bring, or are they still learning what we bring?

Sandra Wood: There has been a big learning curve with this new form of government over the last six months. We haven't taken a legislative project to the commission yet, but the first one will be the Code Alignment Project that you just heard at the last meeting. One of the biggest changes in this form of government is that we now have committees and that our recommendations will first go to committees for a public hearing and then that committee will make its recommendation to the full City Council. We are still working through what that looks like. In one way it looks like more community involvement—opportunities now exist for the public to testify at this commission, at committee, and then at the full council. This Code Alignment Project will be the first opportunity for us to have these conversations about how this is unfolding from a procedural standpoint.

Patricia Diefenderfer: From the perspective of the legal authority of the Planning Commission, nothing has changed. The commission's powers and duties are the same and are enshrined in code and state law. What is different is the way projects advance to council. Those procedures are still being fleshed out.

Commissioner Alexander: At times we've had to struggle with parallel truths. It is not yes or no it is let me answer today's question today but I can't answer next month's question today. But I need to keep in mind that there are concentric circles of impact that expand over time. I feel like

this body has navigated these parallel truths very tactfully and wisely. There are codes that we revisit in 5 years but the point of relief needs to be now. It is wise because it allows us to not get trapped in a binary that leaves us with just a yes or no. I found that to be refreshing and frankly needed in a lot of other rooms.

Commissioner Lange: On the presentation there were notes about the time we commissioners put in on meetings etc. You didn't put in there how many times we unanimously voted on something. As I think back over the years there are very few times in which we were split on decisions. I think the depth of the conversations and understanding of things took care of that to a large degree. The respect we all had for each other and each other's opinions helped to keep us aligned in our votes. I don't follow this commission as a hobby, so I don't know if that's typical, but I've thought about that often and it has been nice to be a part of.

Chair Routh: I'm so glad you mentioned that because often when I see unanimous after unanimous votes I think, "did we go far enough? Did we engage sufficiently enough? Did we have the depth of conversation we didn't to?" What I have really appreciated about this body is that we struggle together and learn together and when it has not been unanimous, we respect each other and each other's beliefs. I do that that having a minority report as part of our transmittal letters is a good norm to characterize the depth of struggle that we have engaged with. One thing I have observed is that we have the capacity of time and focus in this commission, especially community members, which isn't always available at full council or at committee because there is so much happening there. Our commission can offer that time and I hope we can provide a welcoming space for community to have these deep conversations.

Adjournment

Chair Routh adjourned the meeting at 6:16 pm.

Submitted by Autumn Buckridge