

Community Assembly Plan Commission Liaison

Notes on the Role and Its Responsibilities

Greg Francis, PC Liaison 2015-2018

General Description – The CA Liaison to Plan Commission is the official representative of the Community Assembly to Spokane’s Plan Commission. *The CA Liaison is a non-voting member of the Plan Commission who may participate as any commission member in commission business, including participation in deliberations at hearings, except for bringing motions or voting on matters that may be subject to an official decision or recommendation by the commission.** The liaison is nominated by the Community Assembly, confirmed by the mayor, and appointed by the city council. The CA Liaison is expected to attend all regular Plan Commission workshops and hearings and participate on Plan Commission ad hoc subcommittees as time and availability allow. The liaison position is intended to provide the primary conduit of information between the Community Assembly, its constituent neighborhood councils, and the Plan Commission and is expected to provide a written report in each CA agenda packet and a verbal report to the Plan Commission on CA activities relevant to the Plan Commission.

Mission Statement/Purpose (from Plan Commission webpage):

Plan Commission provides advice and makes recommendations on broad planning goals and policies and other matters as requested by the City Council. The minutes from the Plan Commission meetings and their findings and recommendations are available on this website.

The Plan Commission provides opportunities for public participation in City planning by providing through its own membership an informed opinion to complement the work of the City's elected officials and administrative departments. They also solicit public comment on planning issues of citywide importance or of a substantial community concern, evaluating those comments received. Assistance of experts and others with knowledge or ideas to contribute to City planning are secured as well.

Plan Commission holds public hearings and makes recommendations to the City Council regarding the following matters:

Amendments and updates to the City's Comprehensive Plan and the development regulations implementing the Comprehensive Plan

Changes in the corporate limits of the City, including the land use designations and zoning to become effective upon the annexation of any area proposed for annexation or which might reasonably be expected to be annexed by the City at any future time.

* Formulation based on comments to the Plan Commission by city staff attorney in March, 2019.

Authority Granted by City Charter (Sections 127 and 128):

Section 127: General Authority

The city plan commission shall perform such functions and have such powers as may be conferred upon it by the city council by ordinance. The city council may, by a majority vote, direct the plan commission to perform specific actions in relation to potential or pending legislative action of the city council. The council shall have power to appropriate any moneys necessary in its judgment to further the work of the commission, including the employment of necessary clerical assistants and experts, and to provide for the same in its annual budget and tax levy.

Section 128: Specific Powers

In addition to the powers that may be specially conferred upon the plan commission by ordinance, it shall have power to investigate and make recommendations to the city council in relation to all matters pertaining to the living conditions of the City; the betterment of facilities for doing public and private business therein; the elimination of slums; the correction of unhealthful housing conditions; the proper laying out, platting, and naming of streets, squares, and public places, and the numbering of buildings and houses therein; the location, planning, and architectural designing of public buildings; and generally, all things tending to promote the health, convenience, safety, and well-being of the City's population, and to further its growth along consistent, comprehensive and permanent plans.

Plan Commission Regular Meetings – The Plan Commission normally meets the second and fourth Wednesday from 2pm-4pm for workshops and 4pm-5:30pm for hearings, if any hearings are scheduled. Meetings are typically in the City Council chambers or briefing center at city hall but may be located elsewhere if appropriate to the agenda. The Plan Commission also meets with City Council once a quarter at the city council's briefing session on Thursday afternoons. The CA Liaison to Plan Commission should make all efforts to attend all of these meetings.

Plan Commission Meeting Preparation – Agenda packets for Plan Commission meetings are issued late in the week prior to the meeting. The CA Liaison is expected to review the packet and understand the general ramifications on the neighborhoods and residents of the city to the extent that they can actively participate in the Plan Commission workshop or hearing and effectively represent the Community Assembly.

Plan Commission Ad Hoc Subcommittees – The Plan Commission will periodically create ad hoc subcommittees to review specific items in depth and provide a recommendation back to the full Plan Commission. Examples of recent subcommittee topics were on Infill Development and Spokane Falls Blvd Building Heights. These subcommittees frequently have representatives from neighborhoods, businesses, and other organizations, and have a significant influence on final decisions made by the Plan Commission. As such, it is strongly encouraged that the CA Liaison participate in these subcommittees if possible.

Monthly Written Report for CA Packet – The CA Liaison shall write a summary of all PC workshops and hearings that have occurred since the previous CA meeting. If an item requires specific action, the CA Liaison should request time on the CA agenda for presentation and discussion. Ideally, a synopsis of the discussion and suggested action should be included in the written report so that CA representatives have an opportunity to review prior to the CA meeting.

Other Meetings – In addition to attending Plan Commission and Community Assembly meetings, the liaison should regularly attend the CA Land Use Committee and other standing CA committees as appropriate. Plan Commission periodically has open houses that are beneficial to attend as well since they often have residents that might not normally attend neighborhood council meetings in attendance.

Opportunities – As a Plan Commission member, the liaison receives a membership to the American Planning Association, which includes a digital subscription to Planning magazine and access to an online research library for planners. You also have the opportunity to attend local planning trainings, the annual conference for the local chapter of the APA (held for two days at Priest Lake, ID), and the potential for attending the state APA conference. For the most part, you are afforded all of the benefits of Plan Commission membership and the city works to ensure that the commissioners have access to the resources that they need to be effective.

Experience Requirements – While no specific knowledge is required to be the CA Liaison, it is beneficial to have a basic understanding of land use issues, the Comprehensive Plan, and the state's Growth Management Act. Knowledge of these items can come over time though, although there should be an expectation to put in additional research early on to get up to speed on these items. Good communication skills are also very important, including both written and oral communications.

Realistic Expectation of Time Commitment – Being involved on the Plan Commission in any form is a substantial time commitment. Being the CA Liaison can actually require even more time because it includes not only Plan Commission duties, but the added responsibility of writing reports for the CA and attending CA and CA committee meetings. PC packets have been well over a hundred pages long, requiring hours to read and may also require research of existing ordinances and development code to fully understand the changes being proposed. Almost all PC meetings are during the work day, so it requires either a very flexible employer, being retired, or working alternative hours.

References:

Plan Commission Website: <https://my.spokanecity.org/bcc/commissions/plan-commission/>

Spokane City Charter: <https://my.spokanecity.org/opendata/charter/>

SMC for Plan Commission: <https://my.spokanecity.org/smc/?Chapter=04.12>

Comprehensive Plan: <https://my.spokanecity.org/shapingspokane/comprehensive-plan/>

Greg Francis may be contacted by email at gfrancis1965@yahoo.com