



The city is examining code changes to allow more housing density.

Housing: More sessions coming in May

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During the listening session Thursday night at the Holiday Inn Express & Suites, city staff listened to public concerns and suggestions and previewed some options that will go before the Planning Commission.

“At the end of the day, we’re balancing conflicting needs,” said Alex Murphy, a city planner who facilitated the discussion.

“We’re here to hear what people have to say and to try and respond to them in a way that hopefully addresses those concerns and start seeing more housing opportunities present themselves,” he said.

About two dozen people participated in the discussion. Some common concerns included regulatory barriers and maintaining the character of neighborhoods.

Some people said the development process is too

costly and that the city’s building permit process needs to be streamlined.

“Contractors in general, inside the area and outside the area, don’t — won’t — work in the city of Astoria,” Jay Rosen, a furniture restorer and owner of North Coast Fix, said. “They know the regulatory hurdles. It’s difficult, you need liaisons and you actually need a meeting for contractors just like this.

“It’s basically a discussion about if you want housing, somebody has to do it. If somebody’s going to do it, you have to make it straightforward, easier and a way so they can make money.”

Murphy said the city is aware there are some challenges. “And so we’re going to try to streamline processes as much as we can,” he said.

Murphy said the city is also proposing to revise

bulk standards, which govern things like minimum lot area, setbacks and floor-area ratio. However, he said the city has no plans to change height standards.

“We’re looking to expand opportunities,” Murphy said. “We have to allow the duplexes, but we can also use this opportunity to allow more types of housing projects.”

He pointed to triplexes, fourplexes, cottage clusters, townhouses, single-room occupancy, group housing and boarding houses in places where they make sense.

There will be discussion about ways to encourage more housing downtown on the upper floors of existing buildings.

The city will also review parking standards.

A recent state analysis of regional housing needs estimated Astoria will need about 1,400 additional units

over the next two decades, an increase of about 28%.

The state has required the city to analyze housing needs for current and future residents every six or eight years, which must be completed by the end of 2024.

The city’s projection may differ from the regional analysis, but in the end, the city must adopt a housing production strategy to ensure the needs are addressed.

Two listening sessions are planned for May 4 at the Barbey Maritime Center and Astoria Middle School.

A session is also scheduled for May 14 at the Barbey Maritime Center.

Probe: ‘We need to put this behind us ... I want to put this baby to bed’

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to move forward with the investigation.

Newton has repeatedly said that he thought the move would save money for both the city and Big River.

“I wanted a win-win and it sure as hell didn’t turn out that way,” he said.

Newton previously stated that he was considering whether to ask the Ethics Commission to investigate in order to exonerate himself after attention and issues of flooding surrounded the infill, but he never did.

An ethics complaint was submitted earlier this year by a city police detective.

The complaint alleged that the infill was an improper gift and raised questions about whether Newton used his position to get preferential treatment in regard to permits and sanctions, Susan Myers, an investigator with the Ethics Commission, said during the April 8 meeting.

Based on information in the preliminary review, it does not appear that Newton engaged in a prohibited use of office or used his position to get special treatment, Myers said.

However, under state law, no public official may receive any gift more than \$50 from a single source that could have a legis-

lative or administrative interest. During the meeting this month, Newton confirmed to the Ethics Commission that the infill far exceeded the \$50 limit.

Civil penalties can range up to \$5,000 per violation. The Ethics Commission is instead offering Newton a settlement, which would include a letter of education rather than a financial penalty.

If Newton accepts the settlement in the next few weeks, it will go for approval before the Ethics Commission in May.

Newton has cooperated with the investigation and said he plans to accept the settlement.

“We need to put this behind us ... I want to put this baby to bed,” he said.

After the initial attention around the infill, several of Newton’s fellow commissioners urged him to resign, arguing that his behavior was disruptive and problematic. Newton was again asked to resign this month after he lashed out at Mayor Henry Balensifer in a meeting. During his time in front of the Ethics Commission, Newton made more accusations about Balensifer.

“It has been very apparent that I have been under continued attack by the mayor for the last year ...

I very well believe this is just a part of that thing because he would like me to quit,” Newton told the Ethics Commission.

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