

Slipper's Soliloquies

By Fred Slipper

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I have been a member of the Sedro-Woolley Planning Commission for a couple of years now, and find it interesting. When I was appointed by Mayor Walley I didn't know too much about the purpose of the commission but have been learning gradually. I am also working my way up in the "pecking order," as I am now number four in the seniority listing of the group.

Jim Loop, chairman, Dan Sims and Bill Stiles III were on the board when I joined. There are seven members in all, and Dan McLennan, Dan Robertson and Pat Hayden have filled vacancies that have occurred since I was appointed.

As I understand it, the planning commission does a lot of the paper work which otherwise would have to be done by the city council. This takes a lot of preliminary work from the council agenda, as the council has plenty of other things to work on.

On some items the planning commission makes recommendations to the city council and on other items the council has delegated decision-making authority to the planning commission but retains authority to hear appeals.

Usually the council agrees with our findings, but of course they have the authority to change our decisions if they wish to do so.

Among the things we act on are requests for conditional use permits, which require a public hearing. This means all of the neighbors in the immediate vicinity of a citizen requesting a permit for, say, a beauty salon in their home, are notified. These neighbors may then attend the commission meeting and speak either for or against the request.

Another item often on our agenda is a request for dividing property up into separate lots, and this is called a "short plat" if four or less lots are involved.

Among the things considered in a short plat request are access to the property, are there any drainage problems, how near is the closest fire hydrant, will there be sewage problems, etc.?

By no means are all requests automatically approved. Not too long ago we had a request for approval of an auto body shop to be operated in the owners' garage in one of our better neighborhoods. The applicant said this was not to be a commercial business, as he was interested in restoring cars as a hobby.

However, many of the neighbors appeared at the meeting and spoke against the venture, citing noise and fumes as their reason for opposition. After hearing both sides, the commission denied the request.

In a case like this, the applicant has the privilege of appearing before the city council to pursue his request.

The commission doesn't always just review permit applications. It also helps to formulate plans for land use, streets, parks and aspects of future growth, as well as any revisions to our planning-related ordinances that are necessary. These, too, are all subject to public hearings.

City Planner Steve Ladd attends all of our meetings, held the fourth Tuesday of each month. Ladd has studied the various items before they appear on our agenda, and he usually lists his opinion, both for or against the request, and this gives us somewhat of a guideline to follow.

The meeting is held formally and all discussion is taken down on tape, should there be any questions that may come up at a later date that should be clarified. Marge Davis is the secretary, and she records proceedings and keeps official minutes.

The public is invited to our meetings, held at 7:30 p.m. in the City Council room in City Hall. Come on out and see what happens!

DAVID WAELBY

