



REGULAR PLANNING COMMISSION MONDAY, AUGUST 25, 2025 - MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER - The Regular Planning Commission Meeting was called to order by Chair Jeffrey Harlan at 6:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG – Commissioner Rojas led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Present: Chair Jeffrey Harlan, Vice Chair Jon Zich, Commissioner Angely Andrade, Commissioner Robert Dickson, Commissioner Karen Klepack, Commissioner David Martinez, Commissioner Johnny Rojas

Absent: None

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRESENTATIONS: None.

PUBLIC COMMENTS – MATTERS NOT LISTED ON THE AGENDA: None.

Speaker one expressed concern that rooftop patios are being counted as open space in projects, arguing that open space should only include ground-level areas not covered by structures. They also criticized Measure K and related housing policies, stating these efforts will lower property values and diminish residents' quality of life. The speaker urged the City to push back against state mandates and prioritize protecting homeowners.

Cynthia McDonald criticized the city's recent "Neighborhoods Where We All Belong" meeting, stating it lacked genuine engagement, relied on confusing and ineffective sticker exercises, and left many residents frustrated. They noted declining attendance, called for a true town hall format, and expressed concern that the city council and staff appear disconnected from residents. The speaker emphasized that meaningful "visioning" has been missing from the process despite long-standing community requests.

Priscilla Rocco criticized the "Neighborhoods Where We All Belong" rezoning effort, calling it misleading and accusing the City Council of prioritizing developer profits over promised community benefits like parks, open space, and affordable housing. She warned that projects are shrinking green space, replacing it with high-rise rentals and rooftop patios, while poorer residents are relegated to motels or dense developments.

lacking livability. She urged the Planning Commission to take action to require true open space and resident-focused development rather than short-sighted deals that burden the community.

PLANNING COMMISSIONER COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS:

Commissioner Rojas expressed appreciation for the community's participation, noting both the challenges and strengths of Costa Mesa. He highlighted the City's cultural assets, events like the Orange County Fair, and the value of civic engagement. He also welcomed students back to school for the new year.

Commissioner Klepack reported attending the Saturday housing workshop, noting it was well facilitated and included a walking tour that allowed participants to provide real-time feedback on different parts of the city. She encouraged continued participation in future events.

Commissioner Andrade thanked staff for hosting another housing event, noting she attended part of Thursday's session and appreciated that community feedback from earlier workshops was considered. She emphasized the importance of creating town hall opportunities, ensuring walkable and safe streets for students, and reducing pedestrian deaths. Andrade also referenced a 2022 UCI study showing affordable housing reduces violent crime and increases property values, encouraging the community to view housing to strengthen neighborhoods and "decriminalize poverty."

Commissioner Dickson noted he was unable to attend the recent workshops due to work and family commitments but hopes to join future sessions. He requested that staff or consultants explain why a town hall format was not used and whether formal visioning will be part of upcoming meetings. He also echoed concerns about student and e-bike safety around schools, stressing the need for enforcement and collaboration with schools, and expressed appreciation for public engagement.

Commissioner Martinez shared updates on recent and upcoming events. He praised the Westside walking tour, commended Public Works for refreshed pavement and crosswalk improvements, and highlighted the city's ongoing Safe Routes to School Action Plan. He congratulated Costa Mesa Sanitary District Director Arlene Schaefer on her retirement after decades of service. Martinez also announced upcoming events, including the August 31st Historical Society program on the fire department's 100-year history, the September 10th "Neighborhoods Where We All Belong" visioning event for North Costa Mesa, and the September 13th ArtVenture celebration.

Vice Chair Zich thanked the public for attending and emphasized the value of community input in shaping commission recommendations. He acknowledged and took seriously the concerns raised by public commenters. Zick also noted he had requested and received a list of SB-9 projects, explaining the law's allowance for subdivision of single-family lots into multiple units, and shared that most such projects in Costa Mesa have been approved on the Eastside, with one exception on the Westside.

Chair Harlan thanked Public Works and the City Manager's Office for relocating the sculpture Artist Vision to a visible location near the community room. He noted the piece, donated in 2016 as the city's only accepted artwork, has moved around City Hall and is now well placed, potentially as the start of a sculpture garden.

CONSENT CALENDAR:

1. AUGUST 11, 2025 UNOFFICIAL MEETING MINUTES

MOVED/SECOND: MARTINEZ/ DICKSON

MOTION: to approve Consent Calendar.

The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Chair Harlan, Vice Chair Zich, Commissioner Andrade, Commissioner Dickson, Commissioner Klepack, Commissioner Martinez, Commissioner Rojas

Nays: None

Absent: None

Recused: None

Motion carried: 7-0

ACTION:

Planning Commission approved consent calendar items.

-----**END OF CONSENT CALENDAR**-----

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

1. CONTINUED FROM THE JULY 28TH, 2025 PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING. UPDATES TO THE CITY OF COSTA MESA PROCEDURE FOR DETERMINING SHARED PARKING REQUIREMENTS (PCTY-25-0001)

Presentation by Economic Development Administrator Daniel Inloes and Assistant Planner Caitlyn Curley.

Commissioners discussed the proposed shared parking table with staff, seeking clarification on how different uses such as grocery stores, department stores, restaurants, breweries, and residential categories would be applied, and whether the table reflected peak demand or required ratios. Questions were raised regarding the provided case study sites, observed parking surpluses, overlapping categories, and the accuracy of weekday versus weekend data. Commissioners also inquired about the process for unique uses, the role of land use descriptions, and whether police input was considered for alcohol-serving establishments. Staff explained that the methodology relied on ULI and ITE data, emphasized balancing flexibility with accuracy, and noted that surplus parking was observed at case study sites, committing to provide commissioners with location details directly.

Public comments:

Speaker one requested clarification on whether the parking study includes the percentage of compact spaces. They expressed concern that large vehicles often park in compact spots, effectively using two spaces, and suggested eliminating compact parking designations in favor of standard-sized spaces.

Motion Discussion:

Several Commissioners expressed appreciation for staff's work on refining shared parking requirements, noting the flexibility this approach provides compared to rigid ratios. Commissioner Martinez raised concerns about the complexity and cost implications of parking requirements, advocating for greater reductions and even proposing a substitute motion to set all requirements at zero, which did not receive a second. The Commission ultimately supported the main motion, emphasizing efficiency, flexibility, and the benefits of streamlined processes for both applicants and staff.

MOVED/SECOND: ZICH/DICKSON

MOTION: To approve staff recommendation

The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Chair Harlan, Vice Chair Zich, Commissioner Andrade, Commissioner Dickson, Commissioner Klepack, Commissioner Rojas

Nays: Commissioner Martinez

Absent: None

Recused: None

Motion carried: 6-1

ACTION:

The Planning Commission adopted a Resolution recommending that the City Council:

1. Find that the project is Exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Section 15061(b)(3) ("Common Sense Exemption"); and
2. Approve the amendments and adopt a Resolution updating the City of Costa Mesa Procedure for Determining Shared Parking Requirements

The Chair called for a break at 7:04p.m.

The Chair called the meeting back into order at 7:09p.m.

2. FAIRVIEW DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER SPECIFIC PLAN LAND USE PLAN - REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATION

Presentation by Director of Economic and Development Services Department/ Planning Division Carrie Tai and PlaceWorks Karen Gully and Suzanne Schwab

The Commission confirmed its task is to recommend a preferred land use plan to provide a project description to initiate CEQA, with a separate, council-directed track for the "Harbor Frontage" concept. Staff explained that CEQA studies a flexible "envelope," while the future specific plan will set binding limits; any project exceeding what's studied would require supplemental environmental review, and density-bonus scenarios may necessitate amendments. The conceptual map and street cross-sections are illustrative and may shift, maintain roughly 12 acres of open space/parkland, and any secondary access across City property would require a separate process. Housing produced by the State's Department of Development Services (DDS) agency counts toward the City's Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA), tenant selection cannot be restricted by the specific plan, and the school district will provide input during CEQA; current capacity is adequate. For analysis, a 3,800-unit maximum was proposed based on financial feasibility to avoid over-mitigation, with discussion noting costs of potential mitigation, the need to bound assumptions so the EIR remains valid, and that Merrimack is a private road limited to emergency access.

Public comments:

Michael Valentine, urged the Commission to prioritize affordable homeownership in the Fairview project, noting that rentals alone do not provide long-term economic stability. He highlighted the severe housing affordability crisis in Orange County and emphasized the economic and community benefits of expanding homeownership opportunities for low- and moderate-income families and the local workforce.

Steve Desita, emphasized that affordable housing must remain a top priority in the Fairview Development Center (FDC) project, noting that many local families and service providers are being forced to move away due to high housing costs. He stressed that developers will negotiate to their advantage, so the City must do the same to protect its interests, particularly maintaining the 40% minimum for affordable housing, which he said is strongly supported by the community.

Jay Humphrey, expressed concern that setting a high unit cap in the specific plan for EIR purposes could lock the City into higher density than intended, noting the project has already grown from earlier estimates of 1,800–2,300 units to nearly 4,000. He also raised concerns about reduced open space standards and questioned access issues, noting that a roadway from Mesa Verde East already exists.

John Henson, raised concerns about traffic impacts from the proposed housing, estimating 18,000–30,000 additional daily car trips on Harbor Boulevard depending on unit totals. He also urged protection of the golf course, citing its heavy use and economic value, and suggested that, while housing is inevitable, a sports complex for local youth would have been an ideal use of the site.

Robert Abbott, recalled that earlier visioning sessions presented examples of projects scaled to about 2,300 units, which seemed reasonable, and questioned why the

number has since increased to 3,800 based on “financial feasibility.” He expressed concern that the higher number may be tied to state pricing expectations for the land and also asked for clarification on the role and requirements of the DDS portion of the project.

Maria Desita, emphasized the urgent need for affordable housing, noting that 40% of Costa Mesa residents are low or very low income. Drawing on decades of work with working poor families in Santa Ana, she urged that the Fairview project dedicate as many units as possible—ideally 40%—to low- and very low-income households, stressing the life-changing impact this would have for struggling families.

Kathy Esfahani urged the commission to ensure that 40% of all units at the Fairview site—whether 2,300 or 3,800—are reserved for low- and very low-income households. She highlighted the severe affordability gap in Costa Mesa, where nearly half of households are lower income, a third are very low income, and average rents far exceed what families can afford, stressing that higher density is essential to meet community needs and reduce housing stress.

Diane Russell expressed appreciation for Staff and Commissioners, acknowledging the challenges of balancing competing visions for the Fairview site. She urged approval of the resolution to move the process forward, stressing the City’s jobs-housing imbalance and the need to plan for the maximum number of housing units—ideally 2,300 to 3,800—with 40% affordability, along with open space, amenities, and flexible design to meet future needs.

Kirk Bauermeister supported setting the framework for environmental review, describing it as establishing “navigational buoys” for the project. He welcomed elements such as the golf course redesign and encouraged future town hall meetings to engage the community, noting that broad input will strengthen the project and help ensure housing, open space, and recreational amenities are successfully integrated.

Speaker 10 reiterated concerns about potential changes to the golf course, stressing that any environmental assessment should include a clear plan for how the course will be modified. They also urged the City to seriously consider the land swap concept in parallel with the Fairview project, arguing that shifting development toward Harbor Boulevard could reduce isolation and create a better overall plan.

Tim B. Allen, cautioned against overloading the Fairview site with high-density development, warning it could add significant traffic and strain quality of life. While supportive of affordable housing in principle, he stressed that Costa Mesa already has higher density than nearby cities and urged decision-makers to use common sense and carefully weigh the community’s concerns throughout the process.

Jimmy Elrod, urged that any development agreements for the Fairview project include strong labor standards. He emphasized the need for contractors to use local skilled

workers and apprenticeship programs, ensuring the project creates good middle-class jobs while delivering high-quality construction that benefits the entire community.

Cynthia McDonald, objected to labeling the plan as the “preferred option,” arguing it reflects the state’s preference rather than the community’s. She criticized the plan as lacking critical details such as unit types, affordable housing placement, senior living options, required daycare facilities, traffic volumes, and clear definitions for open space and street design. McDonald warned that the vague proposal risks legal challenges, citing Sonoma’s EIR case, and urged the city to provide more specificity and mandatory standards before forwarding the plan to council.

Cesar Rubios, emphasized that the Fairview project is Costa Mesa’s chance to meet its commitment to house working families earning \$100,000 or less, who make up 47% of the City’s population. He urged the City to ensure at least 40% of the units are affordable, stressing that without this, Costa Mesa may fall short of its housing element obligations and would need to find additional land. Rubios called for the EIR to fully analyze affordable family housing to ensure stable, inclusive communities.

Speaker 15 urged the Commission to maximize density at the Fairview site with 3,800 units, ensuring at least 40% are affordable for low and very low-income households. She emphasized prioritizing rental housing over ownership to serve more families, leveraging the state-owned land for funding opportunities, and recognizing affordable housing itself as a vital community amenity.

Speaker 16 thanked Staff and Commissioners for their work but stressed the need for more transparency, town halls, and community discussion. They raised concerns about who reviews developer profitability claims, the projected population impacts of 2,300 vs. 3,800 units, and whether police, fire, and schools have been adequately factored in. They urged thorough environmental review, including impacts on wildlife and the Emergency Operations Center, and asked that all public comments receive clear responses.

Commissioner Rojas left the meeting at 8:45pm

Following public comments, Commissioners asked Staff clarifying questions about how the 200 state-mandated supportive housing units would be provided, noting that DDS is expected to build around 480 units on its 15 acres using its existing housing model, with any unmet supportive housing requirement to be covered by the master developer. Questions were also raised about whether DDS residents could use private Merrimack Road for access, how mitigation measures would vary by project alternatives in the EIR, and how open space requirements would be calculated, with staff explaining that the general plan standard of 4.26 acres per 1,000 residents would apply, though “levers” such as community amenities might adjust the minimum acreage. Commissioners also asked about deed restrictions for affordable units, whether the 480 DDS units are included in the 2,300-unit baseline, and how affordability targets interact with the financial feasibility study. There was discussion of traffic access points,

whether alternatives like Placentia Avenue connections should be studied, and clarifications that the EIR studies impacts while the specific plan will later set final limits.

Motion Discussion:

A motion was made to recommend that the City Council move forward with the scope of environmental review for the FDC specific plan, using the framework in Exhibit A as the study envelope. The motion set housing at a minimum of 2,300 and up to 4,000 units, commercial space between 10,000 and 35,000 square feet, and a minimum of 12 acres of public open space, while excluding specific affordability targets at this stage. An amendment was accepted to include studying an additional access point at Shelley Circle Trail connecting to Placentia Avenue. Supporters emphasized the need to move the process forward, clarify impacts through the EIR, and preserve flexibility for later decisions in the specific plan stage, while acknowledging public concerns about traffic, affordability, and open space. One Commissioner opposed the motion, arguing the process ignored community survey results and relied too heavily on financial feasibility assumptions, while others stressed this step was strictly for environmental review and not a final plan.

MOVED/SECOND: DICKSON/ ANDRADE

MOTION: To approve staff recommendation

The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Chair Harlan, Commissioner Andrade, Commissioner Dickson, Commissioner Klepack, Commissioner Martinez,

Nays: Vice Chair Zich

Absent: Commissioner Rojas

Recused: None

Motion carried: 5-0-1

ACTION:

The Planning Commission adopted a Resolution recommending that the City Council: a scope of environmental study in the form of the Draft Preferred Land Use Plan for the Fairview Developmental Center Specific Plan, without committing the City to a specific course of action on the Specific Plan. Planning Commission comments on the Draft Preferred Land Use Plan will be forwarded to City Council for consideration.

OLD BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS: None.

REPORT - PUBLIC WORKS – None.

REPORT - DEVELOPMENT SERVICES – Director Tai gave a brief report thanking the Planning Commission and the public for participating in the Neighborhoods Where We All Belong events, noting upcoming pop-up outreach at back-to-school nights. The next

scheduled event is set for September 10 from 6–8 p.m. at Fieldwork on 150 Paularino Avenue in North Costa Mesa.

REPORT - ASSISTANT CITY ATTORNEY - None.

ADJOURNMENT AT 10:03 p.m.

Submitted by:

CARRIE TAI, SECRETARY
COSTA MESA PLANNING COMMISSION