



Bureau of Planning and Sustainability
Innovation. Collaboration. Practical Solutions.

Deconstruction Advisory Group

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: Wednesday, May 20, 2015

Time: 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Committee Members present: Bryce Jacobson, Shane Endicott, Joe Connell, Scott Yelton, Preston Browning, Barbara Kerr, Jordan Jordan, Maryhelen Kincaid, Nancy Thorington, Kristin Cooper, Matthew Robinson

Absent: James Ray Arnold, Caroline Dao, Alando Simpson, Jeff Fish, Kristin Wells, Ben Gates

Staff: Shawn Wood, Alisa Kane, Madeline Kovacs

Guests: Heather Robinson (phone), Kehrnan Shaw, Sara Long, Janet Jump, Jim Gorter, Jeff Hilber, Rachel Loftin, Ken Forcier, Barbara Strank, Dave Warrington, Merrilee Spence, Steve Keller, Alessandra Novak, Marty Treece, Dawn Kasebaum, Eric Thompson, Jack Bookwater, Katherine Kirkpatrick, Jim Brown, Bob Schatz

Welcome and Introductions

Shawn Wood began the meeting with an overview of the Deconstruction Advisory Group (DAG's) purpose, timeline & updates, including plans to present a resolution to City Council on June 3rd. He also reviewed rules, procedures, and expectations for the large number of neighborhood and industry guests in attendance should they desire to participate. Shawn then shared the approach being pursued: to offer a financial incentive-based program with \$50,000 in seed funds from the Solid Waste Management Fund Reserve, to be released this fall. DAG members and guests then engaged in a discussion of the program proposal and resolution.

Next Steps

BPS will present a resolution to City Council at the hearing scheduled for June 3rd. The resolution calls for the establishment of a voluntary incentive-based deconstruction program. The program will be used as a pilot in order to inform future program phases that could include requirements for minimum salvage/reuse. The pilot would also include deconstruction training, technical assistance, and project/program promotion in order to expand upon and grow the deconstruction industry.



Bureau of Planning and Sustainability
Innovation. Collaboration. Practical Solutions.

Concurrent projects to the Deconstruction Advisory Group include a deconstruction training for City contractors, preparing them to successfully bid on and complete the removal of city-owned structures. The first training is scheduled for September 18th & 19th.

Summary of DAG Purpose

The Deconstruction Advisory Group has been charged with advising Bureau of Planning & Sustainability (BPS) on options to increase deconstruction activities, to provide BPS with diverse input from a range of stakeholders, and to share any expertise critical to making deconstruction a success in Portland.

Summary of Discussion

Main points from the discussion are summarized below, according to topic. Comments are not attributed to specific Advisory Group members or guests.

Clarifying DAG purview, resolution, and information

- The Deconstruction Advisory Group was convened to develop recommendations regarding specific instances if/when a house will be demolished, not whether or not a removal of the existing house is necessary
- This program is targeted towards what is referred to as “wild” demolitions, or cases where demolitions are conducted to replace one privately owned structure (house) with another
 - Most PDC grants are directed at large-scale commercial development
 - However some PDC projects do take down homes
- Rate of SFR demolitions citywide is not anticipated to increase this year: About 400 were demolished last year, and so far we are not on a course to exceed that amount
- The Resolution does not specify vehicles, it rather is agnostic on whether spending goes to training & certification, incentives, technical work, research, or anything else
 - Option remains to solicit a range of projects
 - Could choose to make education, training and certification the focus
- The City does not generally publish lists of contractors
- Could we utilize a Portland chapter of a national organization? (Discussed previously by DAG, see minutes from meetings 1 & 2)

Incentive approach

- Representatives from United Neighbors for Reform read a statement sharing reservations, and inability to fully endorse the approach being taken so far



Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

Innovation. Collaboration. Practical Solutions.

- Concerns include the recent “epidemic” of demolitions, loss of affordable housing, involuntary exposure to toxins, and use of natural resources
- As a green city, we should make deconstruction mandatory, and not be afraid to lead
- Support for efforts made and being discussed so far to analyze landfill diversion
 - Chart of landfill vs. re-use is very helpful
 - “Recycling” is problematic/ doesn’t always actually indicate landfill diversion
 - Much material classified as recycling is incinerated, and that information was hidden/not easily accessible or digestible
- Current deconstruction industry would be supportive of a mandatory rather than incentive approach, however have realized the necessity of meeting in the middle
- Is there the option for this group to send current recommendations to Council, but also encourage the Mayor to become a champion for transitioning soon to a mandatory approach?
 - Value in allowing some time to ramp up, moving forward but not getting derailed
 - Many people still don’t know deconstruction is an option: Get it in front of them
 - Even simply combatting misinformation may yield very good results
 - Once we get this resolution in place, and do more research, the Mayor et al will have a much stronger mandate to help us move this forward
- We have an opportunity, now, to get out ahead and shape the message
 - Could incentives become less necessary if we do this effectively?
- Are financial incentives really necessary at all in a market where developing is so profitable?
 - Not always so profitable: Land values/purchase prices are higher, often a wash
 - If deconstruction were comparable to typical demolition in cost, likely many more would be choosing deconstruction
 - Asbestos abatement used to be incredibly expensive, but has come down
- Is it more effective to focus on putting money into education and training, supporting the industry experts already doing good work, or to leverage funds to convert businesses not already engaged?
 - Somehow, those who have been doing deconstruction for 18 years without incentives should be rewarded/recognized
 - 18 years also proves that deconstruction is a viable business option already
 - Should be less worried about alienating the people who will complain: When you pay someone to do something, you are implying that it’s a losing proposition
 - Incentives may be needed for those not motivated by the same love & dedication



Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

Innovation. Collaboration. Practical Solutions.

- Seattle projects demonstrated that costs of deconstruction may come down quickly with just a few more contracts under contractors' belts (see DAG meeting 1 minutes for details)
- One major consideration of a mandatory program out of the gate would be the lift needed by the City to coordinate. City also needs time to prepare and learn from pilots so that a larger system can come online smoothly
 - Mayor supports an approach that will let us learn locally, while setting up monitoring and compliance. This will be followed by increasing buy-in as costs come down
- Incentives at the permit counter may be useful to developers, something like the FIR program through BDS (see DAG meeting 4 notes)
 - This might be a free way to accomplish an incentives program
 - Neighborhood notification needs to be accounted for

Options for consideration

- Support from neighborhood guests was expressed for the City to maintain or direct people to a list of home builders that practice deconstruction
 - People who are interested in doing the right thing should be easily able to access the right builders
- Qualitative grant-based approach to reward innovation, gather information, and advance equity, safety, environmental and other benefits
- Refer to studies already conducted that may better inform our ongoing program:
 - HUD study under Clinton Administration
 - Metro's study (weight)
 - Environmental benefits studied at length by other countries
 - Study the work and best practices of those deconstructors already doing the work now, running successful businesses with no incentive
- Refer back to the City's expressed goals: Deconstruction meets four, typical demolition meets none. If a current policy doesn't reflect the City's goals, it should be revised.
- Consider whether larger and commercial-scale projects should be included in future
- If the City is directing money towards a development project involving demolitions of any kind, then homes should be deconstructed whenever possible
 - City makes its decisions based on multiple factors/scales, like MWESB, training, wages, cost/spending taxpayer money, that go into project scoring



Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

Innovation. Collaboration. Practical Solutions.

- City recently updated green building policy for City buildings, establishing a hierarchy mandating that adaptive reuse, relocation, and deconstruction be considered before demolition
- The City has conducted deconstruction projects in the past and has learned from these experiences and future projects will benefit
- Can Metro accept debris at differential rates to help balance costs?
 - The price difference would not be huge: likely in the hundreds of dollars
- Can a disincentive be paired with an incentive? We have heard that even a \$5-8,000 incentive may not currently close the gap so other measures should be considered, and we can't just rely on people to do the right thing

Larger context and other main points

- With regard to affordable housing, keep in mind:
 - Are we inadvertently accelerating gentrification?
 - Are we putting replacement housing, which requires a demolition, at an advantage over greenfield infill?
 - Not likely, as there is a different set of requirements
 - Part of demolition delay rationale is to allow neighbors the time to try and save the existing structure
- Consider whether the industry has the capacity to meet the potential market
 - One industry member noted their business is expanding by 100%/year
 - (Also reference DAG minutes for meetings 1-3)
- Building is getting more expensive: Builders don't care where the cost savings come from, but as long as prices of land, labor, etc go up, so will the cost of building & selling houses
- We will never completely be able to convince all companies to go above and beyond
 - Need to consider those companies who will always do just the minimum