

To: Columbia City Council

From: Lisa Gardi, Columbia Vision Commission Chair

Regarding: New Ordinance

I am very proud and excited to present to you a proposal for a revision of the Vision Commission creation ordinance. I have attached a specific crosswalk of the old and new sections, but I would like to highlight the significant changes here. If you recall, when we completed our last review and presented our report to the Council, we explained that, in the spirit of our creation, the Commission had essentially completed its work but saw a purpose for the continued existence of a citizen commission that serves as an intermediary between the Council and the citizens. As Councilman Trapp said, the responsibility of city government is “to explain the city to the people, and the people to the city.” You challenged us to go back and vision our own future. We did, and the ordinance we propose highlights the following.

1. First, we considered a new name, but rejected the notion, and for that reason included a revised definition of “visioning.”

 (i) began as a concerted effort to seek public input for implementation of “Imagine Columbia’s Future,” and (ii) continues with efforts to continually provide planning alignment and public dialogue between and among city leaders, agencies and the public. Visioning is a continuing and ongoing process where new information and public input is integrated with the work of agencies, paid consultants and the business community.
2. As discussed, the Commission’s first duty is to explain the city to the public. In the spirit of its creation, it shall do that by monitoring vision alignment across the city. The Commission shall, annually, review the city strategic plan and relevant reports, reviews, rankings or other assessments and report back to Council, and the public, about progress, misalignment or other notable issues.
3. And second, the Commission shall seek public input by holding at least four public hearings annually. These hearings might be on specific segments of plans, issues of current public interest or they may become standardized as the process solidifies. Based on current events, the Commission might review plans and seek input regarding racial bias, housing availability or health insurance and care accessibility and review how city agency plans meet or address public perception of problems.

We believe the Commission will provide a valuable service to the Council and the community through these activities, first, by being a clearinghouse for distilling and disseminating the complex and multi-faceted work of the city into formats and messages the public understands and wants to hear, and then, by feeding back to the city

departments and Council the concerns the public has, in a coordinated fashion, for all involved parties.

To illustrate the potential role our Commission can play, consider a story recounted by an employee of a mayor's office in another city. The office frequently faced the ire of community members who felt their concerns were not considered properly and from city departments who felt internal communication was poor. Interestingly, their biggest internal issue was not crime or transportation, it was trees. Customers would complain about trees, that a branch was broken, seemed to be dying and might fall on their home or whatever the issue might be. Depending on which branch of the city they contacted, the tree would be examined, but the action might differ greatly. The waste management department, utilities, or streets department, parks department or numerous other departments all deal, occasionally, with trees; however, they each see the issue from their own unique perspective.

If the street department got the complaint, they might decide this street was on the list for trimming, so they would give that street higher priority on the list and then trim all the trees. Parks might actually send out an arborist who finds the tree is decaying and cut the tree down. Waste management might take away the fallen branch but not address the rest of the tree. In each case, the citizen is dissatisfied, and the city departments might still get additional complaints, with little communication or resolution.

Our Commission could become – hopefully - not the complaint bureau, but a remedy for consolidating competing visions and expectations, both within the city departments and with the community at-large. By investigating plan alignment, we can help people understand how every department works to address issues such as the tree example given, and then help the city see how they might accomplish better alignment of vision and service delivery or message management to the public, improving perception and showing appreciation for our entire community.

If this fits the Council's view of a productive course of action and direction for the Commission, we are willing to take whatever next steps are needed to bring this plan to fruition. If not, we are open to Council's suggestions. We appreciate the opportunity to serve and your cooperation in this effort. We look forward to hearing your feedback.