

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

April 7, 2008
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Degginger, Deputy Mayor Balducci, and Councilmembers Bonincontri, Chelminiak, and Davidson

ABSENT: Councilmembers Lee and Noble

1. Swearing in of new Councilmember

Mayor Degginger called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. All Councilmembers were present with the exception of Mr. Lee and Mr. Noble.

Mr. Degginger introduced Patsy Bonincontri, who would be sworn in as a new Councilmember to fill the unexpired portion of former Councilmember Marshall's term. He reviewed her background and the process used to make the appointment. Judge Brian Gain conducted the swearing in of Ms. Bonincontri.

Mayor Degginger welcomed the new Councilmember and declared a brief recess to provide an opportunity for photos.

2. Executive Session

Mayor Degginger said that following the break, the Council would go into Executive Session for approximately 15 minutes to discuss one item of property disposition.

The meeting resumed at 6:49 p.m. with Mayor Degginger presiding.

3. Study Session

(a) Neighborhood Livability Action Agenda Update & Tree Preservation

City Manager Steve Sarkozy opened discussion regarding the ongoing Neighborhood Livability initiative. Planning Director Dan Stroh introduced Cheryl Kuhn, Neighborhood Outreach Manager, to provide the quarterly update on the Neighborhood Livability Action Agenda.

Ms. Kuhn said the update will focus on the property maintenance and neighborhood character components of the Action Agenda. She recalled an initial survey of the community in 2006 to identify properties reflecting property neglect and deterioration. Since that time, Code Compliance and Neighborhood Outreach staff have been working in the targeted areas sponsoring clean up events and community celebrations. Volunteers have been working to assist residents in maintaining their homes.

The 2007 survey of the community found no cases of extreme neglect, in contrast to the 55 properties of extreme property neglect identified in 2006. Staff will initiate property clean up and maintenance activities in the seventh and final target area this summer. Neighborhood Outreach and City Manager's Office staff are working with Jubilee Services in the Lake Hills area to organize an August 16 event in which volunteers will work with residents on painting, building, and landscaping projects.

In addition to property maintenance activities, staff has been working with the Planning Commission to address neighborhood character issues associated with redevelopment. Residents' concerns include loss of trees and vegetation, loss of light and privacy due to larger scale development, and overall construction impacts. Ms. Kuhn recalled that on December 3, 2007, the City Council adopted regulatory changes addressing these issues. Staff and the Planning Commission are now focused on more complex, Phase Two issues. Staff has convened focus groups, which were effective in developing recommendations during Phase One, involving residents and members of the real estate and building industries.

Mr. Stroh explained that staff is seeking Council direction in addressing the tree retention issue. Phase One neighborhood character code amendments adopted significant changes for properties undergoing redevelopment, including a new 30-percent tree retention standard when single-family lots are redeveloped. This is more stringent than the 15-percent tree retention standard in place for subdivisions.

Mr. Stroh reviewed the benefits of trees in terms of neighborhood character, air quality, storm water runoff, urban heat reduction, and habitat preservation. The City's longstanding approach to single-family lots has been no limit on the number of trees that can be removed. However, a clear and grade permit is required if more than 20 trees are to be removed.

In March 2006, an area-specific approach was adopted for the Bridle Trails Subarea in response to residents' advocacy. Within this area, all significant perimeter trees must be retained within 20 feet of single-family property lines. In addition, 25 percent of interior-lot significant trees must be retained. A permit is required to remove any significant tree. Critical areas regulations adopted in June 2006 state that some single-family expansions and associated tree removals are permitted in the critical area buffer or structure setback, where expansion is not otherwise feasible.

Mr. Stroh said staff is seeking Council direction about whether to examine, as part of the neighborhood character work, the issue of tree preservation for single-family properties citywide,

including properties in which no development or expansion is occurring. The Planning Commission has discussed the issue several times and tends to favor a citywide approach versus neighborhood-specific regulations.

Councilmember Davidson commented on the dilemma of balancing tree preservation with the retention of view properties, which indicates that area-specific approaches are likely more appropriate.

Responding to Councilmember Bonincontri, Mr. Stroh said the new NeighborWoods tree planting program is beginning to be introduced through the Neighborhood Enhancement Program (NEP). Ms. Bonincontri suggested waiting to consider citywide regulations pertaining to trees until a strong community movement on either side of the issue becomes apparent.

Deputy Mayor Balducci expressed an interest in learning more about how other jurisdictions are approaching the tree retention versus view preservation issue. In addition, she suggested this be addressed as part of the Environmental Stewardship Initiative, with a focus on determining the initiative's effectiveness in preserving the tree canopy.

Councilmember Chelminiak said that while Council determined that certain vegetation retention requirements are appropriate for redevelopment, he is not necessarily interested in citywide regulations for all single-family properties. Similarly, while tree preservation requirements were determined to be appropriate for the Bridle Trails area, the same rules might not make sense for other areas. Bridle Trails' residents were in favor of the regulations in order to preserve vegetation on the area's one-acre lots, especially following some instances of what many considered to be excessive tree removal. Mr. Chelminiak noted another complicating factor is that the City is obligated to add housing consistent with the state Growth Management Act, and the loss of trees is closely related to housing development and redevelopment.

Dr. Davidson suggested that urbanization has actually increased the tree canopy as a result of deliberate tree plantings. Over the years he has replaced native blackberry bushes in his yard with trees. He noted that tree coverage within the community varies as trees are planted, die, and/or are removed. The role of neighborhood covenants complicates the issue further.

Mr. Chelminiak concurred with Ms. Balducci's suggestion to first address the issue as part of the Environmental Stewardship Initiative. He is interested in considering alternatives for residents related to removing and replacing vegetation.

Mayor Degginger stated his understanding that the Council is not ready to address the issue of tree preservation on a citywide basis. Council favors further review and data collection as part of the Environmental Stewardship Initiative and tree canopy management activities.

Deputy Mayor Balducci commended staff on the results of the Phase One Neighborhood Livability Action Agenda. She noted she receives compliments from residents about the work of Code Compliance Officer Liz Krzyminski in particular.

(b) Potential Parks and Open Space Voter Initiative

Mr. Sarkozy recalled the March 17 presentation to the Council regarding past voter initiatives in Bellevue and whether to consider a parks and open space voter package.

Parks and Community Services Director Patrick Foran explained that the preliminary voter initiative package is intended to reflect priorities identified by the Council including an emphasis on development projects as well as parks acquisitions. The proposed package of parks projects is funded through the voter initiative, the Parks Capital Investment Program (CIP), and through grants and fundraising. This is consistent with how the parks system has been developed to this point. Projects in the preliminary package are distributed throughout the community.

Doug Sanner, Parks Fiscal and Quality Control Manager, reviewed the fiscal impact of the preliminary package, comparing the differences between a bond versus a levy lid lift in terms of election requirements and financial outcome.

If endorsed by the Council, staff will work with bond counsel to design the ballot measure and funding mechanism. Staff will conduct community outreach and education. Council adoption of a ballot resolution will be requested prior to the August 12 filing deadline.

Staff responded to questions of clarification.

Mayor Degginger noted general Council support of a ballot measure to continue to provide parks and recreation facilities and programs.

Mr. Foran said staff would like to come back before June for further Council direction to staff.

(c) Botanical Garden Master Plan Update

Glenn Kost, Parks Planning Manager, described the Botanical Garden Master Plan Update process. He briefly reviewed the history of the property and its development as a parks facility. Key planning issues in the current master plan update are expansion of the visitor center, parking needs, the Wilburton acquisition, and a maintenance facility. The update process has involved staff, JGM Landscape Architects, the Parks and Community Services Board, and community groups including residents, the Bellevue Botanical Garden Society, and the Wilburton Homeowners Association.

Mr. Kost reviewed graphical depictions of the master plan update. Elements include expansion of the maintenance facility, development of wetland/sun terrace gardens, modifications to the perennial border, the addition of a suspension bridge in the Ravine Garden, street frontage and access improvements, and expansion of the visitor/education center.

Responding to Mayor Degginger, Mr. Kost said the mission of the education center is to provide Garden-specific, hands-on activities. Separate visitor services will provide general patron services while organized educational programs are in session. Youth programs are coordinated

through both public and private schools, as is the case with the Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center.

In further response to Mr. Degginger, Mr. Foran said the two education centers are in response to the demand for each facility's unique programs and educational activities.

Responding to Councilmember Bonincontri, Mr. Kost said the master plan update proposes a minor adjustment to the alignment of the Lake-to-Lake Trail, as well as enhanced trail connections to the adjacent neighborhood.

(d) Transportation Capital Investment Program (CIP) Quarterly Update

[Moved to Regular Session Agenda Item 5(a).]

At 8:01 p.m., Mayor Degginger declared recess to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich
City Clerk

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