

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

January 13, 2016
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Hilhorst, Commissioners Carlson, Barksdale, deVadoss, Walter

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Laing, Morisseau

STAFF PRESENT: Mike Kattermann, Pattie Wilma, Emil King, Scott MacDonald, and Bradley Calvert, Planning and Community Development Department; Liz Stead, Development Services Department

COUNCIL LIAISON: Mayor Stokes

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:39 p.m. by Chair Hilhorst who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Laing and Morisseau, both of whom were excused.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Barksdale. The motion was seconded by Commissioner deVadoss and the motion carried unanimously.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Jonathan Kagle, PO Box 312, spoke as president of the Vuecrest Community Association. He noted that the Association was founded in 1947, six years before the city of Bellevue was incorporated. The Association represents more than 200 homes that border the northwest part of the downtown. The vast majority of the homes are limited by covenant to a single story no taller than 20 feet. The covenants were established to encourage a low profile look and to preserve views. Vuecrest members greeted the Downtown Livability Initiative with enthusiasm given its focus on making the downtown more walkable, improving amenities, and updating policies to reflect the increased density and changing demographics. However, toward the end of the process there was a shift toward increasing height limits in the areas that border the Vuecrest neighborhood. As envisioned, the change will create an abrupt transition from single story homes to six- or seven-story apartments and condominiums up to 70 feet tall, with additional height for mechanical and architectural features. The neighborhood is served by NE 100th Street, which is not a wide road. If approved, there will be tall buildings literally 70 feet away from many

backyards. The impacts will extend beyond the aesthetics to include loss of privacy and reduced sunlight. While it is possible to design taller buildings in ways that minimize impacts on surrounding properties, the recommendation does not consider any of that, leaving the neighboring communities little or no say in the configuration and design of the new developments. Revising the wedding cake concept would disrupt the transition between the neighborhood and the downtown and would have a negative impact on lifestyles and property values. Accordingly, the Vuecrest Community Association has voted to oppose the changes.

Commissioner Carlson asked if the Association has a counter proposal. Mr. Kagle said one option would be to retain the existing heights and developing a process that ensures more neighborhood involvement.

Ms. Betsi Hummer, 14541 SE 26th Street, noted that she was speaking as a private citizen rather than a member of the East Bellevue Community Council (EBCC), which has jurisdiction over certain land use actions in the Lake Hills area. A conditional use permit submitted by Puget Sound Energy was recently disapproved by the EBCC. Puget Sound Energy countered by suing the EBCC. At the court hearing on December 14, 2015, the judge came down on the side of the EBCC. Puget Sound Energy has appealed that ruling, and the EBCC will respond. A core criterion not met by the application was the violation of codes relating to the urban boulevards of NE 8th Street and 148th Avenue SE. Lake Hills is noted for its parks and parkways, and any other permits Puget Sound Energy submits will be fully researched with an eye on keeping Lake Hills as green and peaceful as major thoroughfares can be in accord with the urban boulevards program and the Environmental Stewardship Initiative. At its most recent meeting, the EBCC held a courtesy public hearing regarding a straight forward lot subdivision. The matter was brought to the EBCC by Development Services Department senior planner Carol Hamlin, even though the EBCC did not have authority over the permit; it gave the adjacent neighbors and others a chance to understand city processes, the application of zoning laws, and an opportunity to express their opinions. It was gratifying to hear the property owner intends to implement some low-impact development systems in the project.

5. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCILS, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Mayor Stokes noted that he intended to continue serving as liaison to the Planning Commission. He said as mayor he hoped to take a hard look at how decisions are made and how issues are worked through. Bellevue has traditionally done a great job in those areas, but things have changed a lot over the last few years and will continue to change in the coming years. The Commission has played and will continue to play a huge role going forward. He praised the Commissioners for choosing to be engaged with other boards and commissions.

6. STAFF REPORTS

Senior Planner Mike Kattermann reported that a new comprehensive planning manager has been hired and will be on board prior to the Commission's next meeting on January 27.

A. Quarterly Check-in on Progress, Procedures and Support

Mr. Kattermann noted that one idea that came out of the Commission's annual retreat in the fall of 2015 was to conduct regular check-ins. To that end he called attention to the memo included on page 47 of the packet.

Strategic Planning Manager Emil King said one idea the Commission had at its retreat was to

produce a graphic depicting topics and projects being worked on by the Commission. He shared with the Commissioners an emerging tool intended to whet their appetites relative to story mapping. One tool took the Comprehensive Plan and broke it down into short sections based on the various elements. Each section included a picture or graphic, text with a brief outline, and a link to the full Comprehensive Plan element. Another was more map-based and showed all startup companies in the city, with links to click on to identify each company and gain some information about them. A third model was focused on annexations over time, starting in the Old Bellevue portion of the city and growing outward from there. The Commissioners were informed that each of the story maps can be accessed through the city's website.

Chair Hilhorst commented that after the Commission discussed early wins in December there was an understanding that some revisions to the documents would be forwarded to the Chair and Vice Chair for review before sending it on to the City Council. Mr. King said staff is working to conclude its work on the amendments as well as the transmittal document. The documents will be forwarded to the Chair and Vice Chair soon. The matter is not yet scheduled for a review by the Council.

Chair Hilhorst asked for follow-up on the single room rental ordinance. Mr. Kattermann said the issue is slated to go before the Hearing Examiner in February. An update will be provided to the Commission, hopefully in March.

Chair Hilhorst said she recently had discussions with Commissioners Barksdale and Walter about making more use of data. She said both have agreed to liaison with the staff and report back at a future Commission meeting.

Chair Hilhorst said she will be talking soon to a Commissioner about getting the speaker series going again, adding that she would like to be involved in the process. She added that she and Commissioner deVadoss continue to focus on Smart Cities issues. The intent is to schedule some follow-up discussions on how to take the workshop discussions and roll the ideas into downtown livability.

Commissioner Barksdale voiced a desire to see adaptive management discussed by the Commission. He noted that data is being collected and adjustments are being made based on it, but ways should be found to empower communities to own the creative direction for their neighborhoods to a practical extent. He allowed that the topic could possibly be folded into the data component.

Commissioner deVadoss congratulated staff for being selected to participate in the "What Works Cities" initiative. He suggested the Commission should support that work. The data work will in some way link in.

With regard to televising the Commission meetings, Commissioner deVadoss observed that there are a number of low-cost options in terms of telecasting. It could also be possible to telecast the Council meetings for less money. Mayor Stokes commented that public outreach could be enhanced by having the public see and hear the Commission's conversations and presentations. The Planning Commission is the obvious choice for launching such a program. So far it is just an idea that will need to be fleshed out.

Chair Hilhorst asked if the conversation could come sooner rather than later so the meetings could be telecast as soon as possible. She noted that there are a number of very important topics that will be addressed by the Commission in 2016 that will be of great interest to the public, including subarea planning.

With regard to the subarea planning work, Chair Hilhorst asked Mayor Stokes if he would be interested in receiving feedback from the Commission regarding which neighborhoods should be addressed first. Mayor Stokes allowed that he would.

Mayor Stokes announced that on Friday, January 15, there would be a Seahawks rally in Downtown Park. The Councilmembers will raise the 12th Man flag.

7. DRAFT MINUTES REVIEW

A. December 9, 2015

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Commissioner Walter. The motion was seconded by Commissioner deVadoss and the motion carried unanimously.

8. STUDY SESSION

A. Downtown Livability

Mr. King provided a brief outline of the process to date, noting that the recommendations from the Citizen Advisory Committee were forwarded to and reviewed by the Council. A joint Commission/Council workshop focused on incentive zoning, the outcomes of which are scheduled to be before the Council on January 19 to formalize the principles that will help guide the Commission's work on the incentives. With regard to the A Design District that was highlighted by the Vuecrest representative, the CAC recommended allowing building height of up to 70 feet, but the Council gave direction to look at the height issue from the perspective of the surrounding neighborhoods.

Continuing, Mr. King said the Commission focused first on the identified early win issues. The recommendations will be on the Council's agenda early in the year. A number of meaty topics will be addressed by the Commission. Ultimately a large body of work comprised of both code language and design guidelines will be transmitted to the Council to consider for adoption. He recommended dedicating the first Commission meeting of each month to the livability topic so the public will know when to attend.

Urban Design Planning Manager Liz Stead said her group has charge of conducting all design reviews for the downtown and will be the group responsible for implementing the code being drafted. She explained that the development standards are mandatory requirements. They include permitted uses, dimensional standards and landscaping requirements, all of which are black and white. The design guidelines talk about quality and impacts, and while they show clear intent, there is some flexibility allowed in how they are achieved by individual developments. The incentive zoning system gives developers a menu of amenities to choose from for which they can gain a bigger building or additional floor area.

Commissioner deVadoss asked if the design guidelines apply to the bonus amenities. Ms. Stead said they do in some situations. For instance, an open space created as an amenity would be required to follow the design guidelines.

Ms. Stead explained the steps involved in the design review process. The first interaction for a large project in the downtown involves a pre-application meeting. At that meeting, proposals are brought in and reviewed. The pre-application meeting leads to pre-development services where staff work closely with the applicant to make sure the proposal meets all code and design

guidelines requirements. The applicant then is directed to apply for design review, and the application is made in conjunction with a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review. Projects are reviewed for compliance with the Comprehensive Plan, all applicable development codes, design guidelines, and SEPA requirements. The applications are all noticed in accord with the code requirements, which includes the posting of large white notice boards and mailings to all properties within 500 feet of a proposed project. An official public comment period is initiated, and public meetings are held for all downtown projects. The more interaction with the public, the more successful projects are.

Commissioner Carlson asked how long the process takes on average. Ms. Stead said the pre-application conference is relatively short, usually requiring no more than a couple of weeks to review the drawings and a couple more weeks to yield a determination. The design review process typically takes anywhere from six to nine months depending on the complexity of the project. There is a point in the design review after the public meeting and the revision cycle that everyone appears to be on the same page, and at that point the recommendation is made for the applicant to apply for construction permits; that is usually done before the design review process is completed and a combined notice of decision for both the SEPA and land use actions is issued. There is a 14-day appeal period that follows issuance of the notice of decision, and any appeal is heard by the Hearing Examiner.

Ms. Stead said when projects come in for a pre-application meeting, one of the first things done is a review of the dimensional standards chart to determine the project requirements. In the downtown O-1 district, the residential line item is looked at very closely. All required setbacks and stepbacks will be determined, along with the maximum building floor area per floor, the maximum lot coverage, the building height and the FAR. The maximum floor plate size changes for the higher floors to avoid buildings that are blocky all the way up, with reductions above 40 feet and above 80 feet. The basic building height is 200 feet, but there is an allowance to go up to 450 feet through the provision of certain amenities.

Questions are often asked about floor area ratio (FAR). An FAR of 1.0 means a site can be filled with one level of construction, or half the site with two levels, a quarter of the site with four levels. There are also questions asked about the difference between a setback and the stepback. A setback is a requirement to locate a building footprint from the sidewalk or property line. In most of the downtown, the required setback is zero feet. However, in Perimeter District A there is a 20-foot setback requirement to create a larger space between buildings. A stepback occurs at higher elevations and they are in place to prevent creating a canyon effect at the ground level; the first stepback is at 40 feet for buildings over 75 feet in height.

Commissioner Walter asked if there are specific requirements for each side of a building. Ms. Stead said that depends on the location of the building. In Old Bellevue there is a specific requirement for buildings facing Main Street. The requirements generally relate to front, side or rear property lines.

Ms. Stead explained that the review staff look first at the ground plane and determine what setbacks if any apply, and where through-block connections will be located. The maximum podium height is determined next, followed by the maximum floor plate size for the zone and the building height. Below grade parking is reviewed along with access points. The finer details follow next, including street tree species, sidewalk widths, the relationship between the sidewalk and the building, building articulation, building materials, rooftop mechanical screening, and the pedestrian scale. Beyond that, the review includes contextual relationships with surrounding sites. The side code, while separate from land use, is also looked at in the reviews.

Chair Hilhorst asked about the maximum building height and Ms. Stead said it is 450 feet. No allowance is made for mechanical equipment to extend beyond that height. The two Bellevue Towers and the Westin tower were built to the maximum allowed height.

Assistant Planner Scott MacDonald said walkability is a core theme the CAC final report identified. It is a prime element for achieving a viable, memorable and livable downtown. Walkability components include sidewalks, through-block connections, plazas, parks and open space, street crossings and mid-block crossings. Building façades serve as strong boundaries for one side of the pedestrian realm, and street trees help to identify the other. There are three zones that comprise the sidewalk space: buffer, through and frontage. The frontage zone is the area that is directly adjacent to a building façade and allows for window shopping, café and restaurant seating. The through zone is kept clear of obstructions in order to facilitate pedestrian mobility. The buffer zone is adjacent to the curb and can include elements such as tree wells, planter strips, utility poles, public art and bike racks.

Chair Hilhorst asked if café seating is required to have a railing separating it from the through zone of the sidewalk. Mr. MacDonald said the only rules that apply to café seating have to do with alcohol. If alcohol is served, there traditionally has been a requirement for a fence, though in a recent ruling it was determined that a mere painted line on the sidewalk is allowed. Chair Hilhorst asked how cafés and restaurants can be kept from allowing their tables to occupy part of the through zone of the sidewalk absent a fence. Mr. MacDonald said that is certainly the challenge. According to national standards for the different sidewalk zones, a sidewalk that is 12 feet wide does not have enough room to accommodate café or restaurant seating and still maintain the through zone. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, a through zone must be a minimum of five feet wide.

Community Development Program Manager Bradley Calvert said tower spacing is an important element in that it influences how much sunlight reaches the pedestrian areas. Scale is important in creating a comfort level for pedestrians. The determining factors for tower separation are the International Building Code (IBC) and additional local tower separation requirements. The IBC calls for 40-feet of separation. Bellevue's stepback requirement essentially serves to increase the separation between towers. Many cities, including Vancouver, Toronto and San Francisco, have chosen to require 80 feet of separation. Given an equal FAR, the towers are taller.

Floor plate size also has an impact on the pedestrian realm in terms of the scale, bulk and mass of towers that loom over the pedestrian environment. If floor plate sizes are restricted too much, projects are not economically feasible, particularly in the case of office. Floor plates that are too large are bulkier and cast additional shade and shadows on the pedestrian environment. The determining factors are the maximum allowed floor plates, and floor plate exceptions which allow for slightly larger floor plates on buildings that are under 70 feet tall.

Chair Hilhorst sought an explanation of what was meant by the connecting floor plate provisions. Mr. Calvert said the intent is to allow a connection in a W-shaped and donut-shaped floor plan in order to yield a lesser number of exiting requirements for stairs and elevators, making a building more efficient. Additional square footage is allowed, but the results have not necessarily been conducive with the pedestrian environment.

Mr. Calvert allowed that shade and shadow is a huge issue when it comes to impacting public sidewalks and plazas, as well as adjacent developments. The determining factors are orientation, spacing, placement and tower form. Where façades are oriented toward the north and south, much larger shadows are cast.

Chair Hilhorst noted that property owners undoubtedly will want to design and orient their buildings to maximize views for their tenants; she suggested the Commission will want to address that issue going forward.

Commissioner Carlson asked what requirements or incentives would get more developers to adopt designs that minimize shade and shadow. Mr. Calvert said things have not progressed to that degree. It will be necessary to look at all relevant elements and whether or not good outcomes can be achieved through less impactful guidelines or requirements.

Commissioner deVadoss asked if building spacing could contribute to using less energy as well as reduce shade and shadow at the street level. Mr. Calvert allowed that to the degree buildings are oriented to receive more sunlight, energy consumption could certainly be positively impacted. Commissioner deVadoss asked if it would be fair to assume that a north-south orientation would result in more sunlight on a building. Mr. Calvert said that potentially could be the case. Of course, when it comes to energy usage, much would depend on the building materials and the systems that are installed.

There was agreement to further evaluate implications for sustainability and building performance. Mr. King agreed to do that.

With regard to wind, Mr. Calvert observed that like shade and shadow it can diminish the quality of public spaces. In Bellevue, the prevailing winds primarily come from the south and southwest, so orientations to minimize shade and shadow will also minimize wind impacts. The primary issues associated with wind are downdrafts, tunneling and accelerated winds, all of which are impacted by orientation and stepback requirements. By incorporating a series of stepbacks as well as a more narrow façade, building surface areas can be lessened, allowing the wind above the pedestrian area to shoot off and not be much of an impact. Circulation between buildings is another issue, but the impacts there can also be mitigated through application of appropriate stepback. Green roofs mitigate winds as well by interrupting the flow. Tunneling occurs where buildings with straight line façades are constructed. Stepbacks, canopies and arcades all can help in stopping the wind from impacting the pedestrian environment.

Mr. Calvert said building form and design can impact the pedestrian realm. At the same time, it can create an emotional and aesthetic response. Quality designs with unique and fluid forms of appropriate scale are pleasing and memorable. Designs with a base, middle and top allows the eye to travel up a diminishing scale that is both comfortable and predictable. At the same time it creates a landmark.

Mr. MacDonald informed the Commission that staff have been working on an analysis of protecting public views toward Mount Rainier from the City Hall concourse. The work is focused on preserving views of iconic natural resources that make Bellevue the amazing place it is. Views from public spaces reinforce the notion of Bellevue as a city in a park, and preserving the views gives residents, visitors and workers equal access to the resources.

Commissioner Carlson asked what the guiding standard is when it comes to protecting views, particularly what guarantees a person living in a tower in the downtown has that another building will not go up and block their view. Mr. MacDonald said the analysis done by staff was focused solely on views from public spaces. There is nothing in place currently that protects private views. Staff found there are some views of Mount Rainier from Downtown Park that are fairly obstructed by existing developments. The views of Mount Rainier that exist in other parks are almost completely obstructed as well. The view from City Hall is one of the few remaining views of the mountain from a public space in Bellevue.

Commissioner Walter commented that she has an excellent view of the Cascades from her medical office tower next to the hospital, but when the Spring District gets developed those views will go away. She said she remembered talking about protecting public views when working to update the Comprehensive Plan, but did not recall taking such specific steps to preserve the views from City Hall. She said to protect views from one place and nowhere else seems like preferential treatment.

Mr. Kattermann said the issue had come up during the discussions regarding the East Main station area because the redevelopment area to the east of 112th Avenue SE is within the view corridor. The information was shared with the Council on January 11 as part of an update regarding the East Main station area study. He clarified, however, that the work is not focused on protecting views for city employees or for everyone in City Hall. Rather, the work is focused on protecting the view from the public area that is in fact designated as part of the public open space, and it is based on Council policy that is specific to the downtown.

Commissioner deVadoss agreed that protecting views from City Hall appears very awkward. The approach could have downstream impacts in terms of economic growth. Absent strong citizen feedback, the approach appears odd.

Commissioner Carlson suggested that very few people visit City Hall in order to gain a view of Mount Rainier. It makes little sense to use government regulations to preserve something people do not go to City Hall to take advantage of.

Commissioner Barksdale pointed out that the alternative would be to have no protections at all, which undoubtedly would result in the loss of the views. Keeping a view corridor from open public areas makes sense from a tourism standpoint. Private buildings can provide views of Mount Rainier in a variety of ways, including through rooftop amenities. The options are to find ways of protecting the views or risk losing all of the views from public spaces.

Chair Hilhorst asked for clarification of an earlier statement about no other views of Mount Rainier. Mr. MacDonald confirmed that according to the analysis done by staff, the view from City Hall is the last view of Mount Rainier from any public space in the downtown. The analysis was not in any way exhaustive, however, and it is up to interpretation whether or not views of the Cascades should also be protected. He added that the height limits currently in place will not impact the view from City Hall. Mr. King added that the redevelopment area to the east of 112th Avenue SE and south of Main Street, which is home to the Hilton and Red Lion hotels and the Bellevue Club, are under review by the East Main Station Area CAC, and additional height is being discussed. The property to the south of City Hall on which the Metro 112 building was constructed also lies within the view corridor window; the architects re-sculpted the building through the shifting of FAR on the property in order to preserve the views in accord with the Council policy.

Commissioner Carlson noted that directly south and southwest of Downtown Park there are apartment buildings that are about six stories tall. Those buildings block the views toward Mount Rainier from the park. He asked if construction of the buildings would have been prevented had the policy had been in place at the time. Mr. King said staff walked Downtown Park specifically to look for view windows. He said there are in fact still view windows toward Mount Rainier from the park. The view issue was not raised as part of the review process for the Old Bellevue projects.

Chair Hilhorst suggested that additional analysis would be helpful to identify all of the views

from public spaces. Additionally, there should be a determination made as to whether only views of Mount Rainier from public spaces are to be preserved or if views of the Cascades and Olympics from public spaces should also be preserved. She also agreed that consideration needs to be given to any possible economic impacts associated with retaining view corridors.

Mr. Kattermann reiterated that the East Main Station Area CAC is considering additional height for the properties to the east of 112th Avenue SE and south of Main Street. The CAC is not, however, charged with making a recommendation regarding the view corridor itself. The Council does, however, want to revisit the issue before the recommendation of the CAC is forwarded to the Planning Commission.

Turning to the topic of neighborhood character, Community Development Manager Patti Wilma said the issue was recommended by the CAC as something in need of being reinforced and developed. The downtown subarea plan in the Comprehensive Plan discusses neighborhood identity as a fundamental part of the great place strategy. The downtown was originally set down in 600-foot superblocks with retail in one corner, office in the middle, and residential on the edges. The 2003 Comprehensive Plan update looked at the priority of breaking down the superblocks to make them more pedestrian friendly and to create areas people can relate to as neighborhoods. Seven neighborhoods were identified in the Comprehensive Plan. The Northwest Village and East Main neighborhoods are similar but different. Both are areas awaiting significant change, both have proximity to neighborhoods outside the downtown, and both have similar zoning and building height characteristics. However, each has different topographies and different neighbors, with Northwest Village adjacent to a two-lane road and East Main adjacent to I-405.

Commissioner Barksdale suggested the two neighborhoods would be good to story map to see how development is occurring in each area.

Ms. Wilma addressed next the streetscape standards and guidelines. She noted that street types lay the foundation for dimensional standards. There are pedestrian-biased streets (Main Street, the pedestrian corridor), auto-biased streets (NE 4th Street, NE 8th Street), and neutral streets that essentially are a mix of both. There are in the Comprehensive Plan policies to develop signature streets, including Bellevue Way as a shopping street, 106th Avenue NE as an event and entertainment street, and 108th Avenue NE as a commerce street. The information can be layered to create the building and sidewalk relationship guidelines.

Ms. Wilma noted that the staff recommendation included removing a private street in the northeast corner of town, and upgrading the shopping and pedestrian priority of 103rd Avenue NE. The entire Old Bellevue district is really a shopping area and the intent was to have that street continue with that activity and vibrancy.

Commissioner Walter asked how much of the recommendation reflects what is on the ground and how much is prescriptive. Ms. Wilma said about 50 percent of the downtown is built out in accord with what the code calls for. Bellevue Way is a shopping street and is mostly built out to be just that. The entertainment street, 106th Avenue NE, is where the farmer's market operates and where the arts fair is sited. It is not physically fully built out, it is planned to be the entertainment street. The design guidelines will inform what will happen in the future as the street continues to build out.

Mr. King stressed that the recommendation meets the policy direction of the plan while recognizing what is already on the ground.

Commissioner Carlson noted that earlier in the meeting the Vuecrest residents objected to increased building height in the area of the downtown adjacent to their neighborhood. Ms. Wilma said Perimeter Design District A rings the downtown edge and currently has a 55-foot height limit and a 20-foot buffer from the back of the sidewalk. There are very different conditions on all the edges of the downtown. Vuecrest is entirely single family separated by only a two-lane road. Along NE 12th Street there are land use buffers in the form of McCormick Park and multifamily on the north side of the street. There is ample opportunity to customize conditions on the edges without making them all the same.

A motion to extend the meeting to 9:15 p.m. was made by Commissioner deVadoss. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Barksdale and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Carlson said he understood the objections from the Vuecrest neighborhood were in regard to the number of stories to be allowed in the perimeter district. He asked if the recommendations mean the neighborhood will simply be out of luck as the downtown builds out or if the complaints have merit. Ms. Wilma said the concerns certainly do have merit, though customized conditions could be realized depending on the perimeter. The East Main area has the exact same zoning but far different existing conditions. There is the potential of adding additional height up to 70 feet, which could have an impact on the adjacent neighborhood, but something like a reduction in the allowed lot coverage could serve as a tradeoff to balance things out for the neighborhood.

Ms. Wilma clarified for Chair Hilhorst that the recommendation for NE 6th Street and Bellevue Way relative to vehicular access means no curb cuts to access development would be permitted, and that parking on private property would also not be allowed.

Chair Hilhorst said it would be helpful to include the light rail alignment on the maps of current and future uses.

Ms. Wilma said through-block connections have helped to break up the downtown's superblocks and improve walkability. She noted that in Portland blocks are 200 feet and in Seattle they are 300 feet.

Commissioner Carlson asked if Bellevue's 600-foot blocks make it easier to drive a car. Mr. Kattermann said that is not necessarily the case given that there are fewer route options. Smaller grid patterns allow for more options, though the streets are not typically as wide as they are in Bellevue.

Ms. Wilma called attention to page 37 of the packet and noted that the map was taken directly from the CAC report. She said how the throughblock connections are treated are at the discretion of the developers. The CAC looked at a six-foot minimum clearance for all frontage categories except retail connections, for which they recommended a 12-foot minimum. The staff, however, has recommended eight feet minimum for the various frontages and 12 feet for retail connections.

Ms. Wilma said the Downtown Transportation Plan update included recommendations relative to sidewalk widths. Those routes expected to carry particularly heavy pedestrian traffic were recommended to have the widest sidewalks. Along the events street the recommendation is for sidewalks 20 feet wide. Staff are recommending some sidewalks should be 12 to 16 feet wide, particularly along the section of Bellevue Way yet to be developed as part of the future grand connection and the art walk.

Commissioner Carlson asked if any of the proposed sidewalk recommendations will reduce existing lane widths and parking opportunities. Ms. Wilma said they do not. In all cases the curb line would remain the same and the additional sidewalk width would come from the private property side. The impact on development would be considered in the incentive system and FAR calculations. She stressed that the requirements would apply only to new development.

Commissioner Barksdale asked if there is any anticipation that the full street adjacent to the widest sidewalks would ever just be blocked off to accommodate something like a fair or other event, leaving room for people to walk around the area. Ms. Wilma said that could be the case, which the street constructed essentially without a curb. Throughblock connections will also improve ways for people to get around or to bypass events should they want to.

Chair Hilhorst commented that NE 6th Street where the transit center is located will be part of the grand connection and should be considered as an appropriate location for holding street fairs and the like. Ms. Wilma said the standard for the pedestrian corridor is 60 feet wide building to building between Bellevue Way and 112th Avenue NE. Once the corridor is fully built out, the space certainly could be used for special events, particularly in light of the grand connection concept.

There was consensus in favor of directing staff to move forward with drafting code language for the Commission to review and comment on.

9. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Patrick Bannon, president of the Bellevue Downtown Association, thanked the Commission for paying close attention to the potential changes that will be important to the downtown. He asked the Commission to seek out public input regarding the proposed sidewalk and right-of-way designation changes, not to slow the process, but to make sure all voices are heard and all potential tradeoffs and impacts are identified.

Mr. Jonathan Kagle, PO Box 312, thanked the Commissioners for taking into consideration his previous comments and said he was looking forward to seeing things progress. He stressed that when talking about things like building form, sunshine and shadows, the focus should not be solely on public spaces; consideration should also be given to adjacent neighborhoods like Vuecrest and Northtowne.

Mr. Walter Scott with Legacy Corporation, 400 112th Avenue NE, asked the Commission to keep in mind the area between 112th Avenue NE and I-405, and NE 6th Street and NE 4th Street. Development of the area could go very well or not so well depending on how it is viewed and how much attention is given to it. The transit station and some of the initiatives that came out of the CAC could be problematic, most notably the call for 24/7 open space. Privately owned areas should be closable at night. The main impetus for nighttime activity in the area will be retail, and retail is very sensitive to issues like loitering.

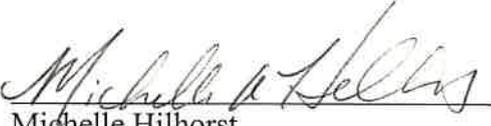
10. ADJOURN

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Walter. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Barksdale and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Hilhorst adjourned the meeting at 9:09 p.m.


Michael Kattermann
Staff to the Planning Commission

1-28-2016
Date


Michelle Hilhorst
Chair of the Planning Commission

2/1/2016
Date

* Approved as amended, January 27, 2016