

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION  
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

February 10, 2016  
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Laing

STAFF PRESENT: Emil King, Patti Wilma, Dan Stroh, Bradley Calvert, Department of Planning and Community Development; Kevin McDonald, Department of Transportation

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m. by Chair Hilhorst who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Carlson, who arrived at 6:51 p.m., and Commissioner Laing, who was excused.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Brittney Barker with Fortin Group, 10112 NE 10th Street, Suite 202, said Fortin Group is a multigenerational family owned real estate asset management company that owns about ten acres in the Northwest Village area of the downtown to the north of Bellevue Square, including the Bellevue Village Shopping Center, Bellevue Village North office building, and La Chateau apartments. Fortin Group has been actively involved in the livability study since its inception in 2011. A team of urban planning, feasibility and urban transportation experts has been formed to help inform the range the options under the current zoning, and what may be deliverable under new zoning. Fortin Group supports the forward-thinking urban design approach the Commission is studying, particularly in the way it emphasizes connectivity, walkability, open space and civic vitality. Support was voiced for the recommendation of the Downtown Livability Initiative CAC for updating the "Deep B" overlay zoning to provide a welcome alternative to the wall that would otherwise be created by the current zoning, effectively blocking off surrounding neighborhoods to the downtown and greatly reducing options for the provision of public amenities.

Mr. Andrew Miller, 11100 Main Street, spoke representing BDR Holdings as well as John L. Scott Real Estate. He said the BDR property is located on the northwest corner of 112th Avenue NE and Main Street, and John L. Scott is the property immediately to the west. The properties together are just under three acres and have just under 450 linear feet of frontage on Main Street. The properties are only 200 yards or so from where the new East Main light rail station will be. Unlike other downtown perimeter properties, there is a significant grade coming up Main Street, and the properties are within the watershed of two light rail stations. Additionally, the properties are located at a gateway intersection, and there will be a park to the south of Main Street once light rail is completed. The property owners to the north and west are interested in the changes happening in conjunction with East Main and are interested in the coalition building efforts that are under way. There are some excellent opportunities for the city, the residents of Surrey Downs, and the future users of the East Main light rail station. Changing the zoning and the incentives correctly will resolve many challenges facing the area. The intersection of Main Street and 112th Avenue is the first one encountered when entering the downtown from the Main Street crossing of I-405. It would be appropriate to create a visually unique and pedestrian-engaging connection to the downtown via a grand stair anchored at the intersection. Redeveloping the two properties to include external/internal retail would give Surrey Downs residents and light rail users an engaging space with restaurants and retail. Excess parking in a garage on site could also solve part of the concern that the East Main station will have no parking. Such a project could help to create a presence for the East Main station area. Increased height and FAR would be needed to bring it all about. The Commission was asked to direct the staff to further study the area in light of the unique set of parameters for the area, including the light rail station, the work being done by the East Main CAC, the hill climb into the downtown, and the need for the right zoning and incentives that will help to create a transit-oriented development that will best leverage the significant investment in the light rail system.

Ms. Darcie Durr spoke as general counsel for West 77 Partners, 10620 NE 9th Place, a real estate developer headquartered in Downtown Bellevue. She asked the Commission to direct staff to further study the DT-O2 subdistrict on the north side of the downtown core, with particular attention paid to the height and FAR limits for the superblock fronting NE 8th Street between 106th Avenue NE and 108th Avenue NE. She noted that the O2 north zone is bordered by the O1 zone to the south and MU to the north. The vision for the block is consistent with the existing Comprehensive Plan policies which identify NE 8th Street as a major gateway into the downtown. Policy S-DT-48 calls for gateways that have a sense of quality and permanence. The Downtown Livability Initiative CAC recommended an increase of 150 feet of height in the O1 district for a new limit of 600 feet. The CAC recommended an increase of only 50 feet for a new limit of 300 feet in the O2 zone. While that might make sense for other O2 subdistricts, it will not lead to desirable results along NE 8th Street given the disparity of 300 feet in the distance of a single street. The CAC got it right for the O1 zone, but a lack of corresponding increase in the O2 north zone will create a lopsided result, certainly not the sense of quality and permanence called for in a signature gateway into the downtown. The Commission is also being asked to look at increases in height to 300 feet for the MU zone for residential; that zone is directly to the north of the O2 north district. Going to 300 feet in the MU and the O2 will negate the transition and the distinction between the MU and the downtown districts. A corresponding increase in height and FAR for the O2 zone district is needed to preserve the other districts. The 2004 Comprehensive Plan established 106th Avenue NE as an entertainment avenue, and highlights NE 10th Street as a candidate for a major public amenity. The current O2 zoning has not, however, produced the desired entertainment district. The opportunity exists to spur that kind of development by allowing additional height and FAR. West 77 Partners has partnered with Dr. Emil Melezia of UNC Chapel Hill in an attempt to make its corner of Downtown Bellevue as vibrant as possible. His research shows that density and compactness leads to vibrancy. The

opportunity now exists for the city to realize the Comprehensive Plan goals of a signature gateway along NE 8th Street and to create an entertainment district along 106th Avenue NE.

Mr. Carl Vander Hoek with Vander Hoek Corporation, 9 103rd Avenue NE, thanked the Commissioners for their continued input on topics of vital importance to the future of Bellevue. He said the most important leg of the work lies ahead. Based on the recommendations of the Downtown Livability Initiative CAC, consultant work should be conducted related to the analysis of a variety of options, economic outcomes, transportation and parking. The work should commence immediately to be useful in the process. The Commission should request of the Council to initiate the intended further analysis to be conducted by the Downtown Livability Initiative consultants. Based on the recommendation of the CAC, building heights should be considered for an increase in the Old Bellevue perimeter design districts A and B. The recommendation was to go from 55 feet to 70 feet in Perimeter A, and the recommendation should be fully analyzed. There is a need for code language clarifications regarding the DT-OB Perimeter A and B districts relative to non-residential FAR, specifically language regarding the minimum and maximum FAR; unless clarified, the language could limit the potential for hotel development in Old Bellevue. The packet materials discuss an 80-foot separation between towers and noted that should a property owner choose to develop close to a property line, the developable area of an adjacent site could be impacted, leaving whoever develops last having to squeeze a tower on a smaller floor plate depending on the placement of neighboring towers that develop first, leading to a race to develop first and speeding up the natural market pace of development and growth of the area beyond the infrastructure improvement timeline. With regard to the intersection analysis technical memo in the packet, the question should be asked how staff supports the methodology behind the computer modeling and signal improvements to arrive at the conclusion that after the proposed height and FAR increases, the overall growth projections for Bellevue through 2030 remain the same, and that there will be a decrease of eight percent in average delay per vehicle at downtown intersections. If there is a shorter delay for vehicles, there will be a longer delay for pedestrians crossing the street. More information on the methodology and assumptions is needed.

Ms. Todd Woosley with Hal Woosley Properties spoke representing the Kramer family, owners of the Eastgate RV site. He said he was encouraged by the Commission's previous discussion that considered the requested FAR for the site. The Commission asked for a better understanding of what a development at the proposed FAR could look like, and he presented them with a brochure for the LIV Bel-Red development in the Bel-Red corridor that serves as a good example of what could happen. The Commissioners were encouraged to look at what is possible, and were informed that architectural drawings for the RV site will be submitted to the Commission for consideration at the next meeting.

Mr. Alex Smith with K. Smith Enterprises, 700 112th Avenue NE, said the business' property is in the DT-OLB zone. The highly visible site is directly east of the Meydenbauer Center and kitty corner from City Hall. He noted that with him were Harold Moniz and Arlan Collins with CollinsWoerman, land planners and architects, and land use attorney Larry Martin with Davis Wright Tremaine. He expressed support for the general direction embodied in the CAC's recommendations to significantly increase development capacity in the DT-OLB zone adjacent to I-405. The Commission was encouraged to include in its recommended code revisions a process to allow flexibility to depart from the development standards, an approach adopted by some other major cities, including Vancouver, B.C., to ensure that rigid numerical standards do not stand in the way of truly superior projects that add value. Highly visible and accessible sites that can serve as gateways and which have the potential to become city landmarks cry out for

expertly crafted design solutions. Exceptional projects do not always fit within prescribed boxes. Providing for flexibility should be allowed to achieve superior results that will benefit the community by creating memorable places.

Mr. Patrick Bannon, president of the Bellevue Downtown Association, said the organization has grown up along with the city of Bellevue. The members, including the land use and livability committee, are reviewing the information along with the Commission. In reviewing the recommendations of the CAC relative to height and form, the Commission will be taking a step toward updating the Land Use Code that is 30 years old and better align future development with the great place strategy that is already part of the Downtown Subarea Plan. Most would agree with the goal of achieving a better built environment and pedestrian realm through great projects that will improve livability, attract residents and jobs, enhance values, and support Bellevue as a healthy and vibrant city for years to come. The proposals to equalize the commercial and residential FAR, and to increase heights, are intended to achieve those outcomes. There will certainly be a need for additional analysis and scrutiny as the options are reviewed. In the final analysis, there should be allowance made for departures for projects that meet the intent and objectives of the code and livability principles. The shading and shadow studies are valid. However, it is unclear whether orienting every new tower in a certain direction will achieve the absolute best outcome for the downtown. Descriptive design guidelines and principles along with predictable and guided flexibility in height, form and spacing should ultimately lead to stronger designs and better outcomes and livability.

Mr. Jonathan Kagel, president of the Vuecrest Community Association, PO Box 312, said the community of 204 families is located to the northwest of Bellevue Square and has been around for almost 70 years. The area is unique in that it is a single family area adjacent to a quickly growing and dynamic downtown area. The "Deep B" area is just a block from single family homes that are limited to a single story. Depending on the outcome, there is the potential that within a block of the traditional rambler-style single family community there will be towers ranging up to 240 feet high. That is hardly in keeping with the wedding cake format. Vuecrest residents understand and embrace the way in which the downtown is growing, and they understand that in the coming years there will be additional changes. The change should, however, be controlled in a way that will retain the uniqueness of Vuecrest. Opportunity should be taken to think of the Northwest Village area as a whole, and the Vuecrest community should have a place at the table along with other interests. The best choice for the Northwest Village area will be something close to a Comprehensive Plan showing how buildings and walkways can work together without being overly prescriptive.

Mr. Walter Scott with Legacy Corporation, 400 112th Avenue NE, echoed the comments of Mr. Smith, Mr. Bannon and Mr. Kagel relative to the need for flexibility in the rules. The Legacy Corporation site is immediately east of City Hall between 112th Avenue NE and I-405. The site slopes down to the freeway and the uniformity of midblock connections might require some discretion to allow for an option that might work out better for all concerned.

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

Chair Hillhorst reported that on February 1 she presented the Commission's early wins recommendations to the City Council. She said the recommendations were very well received and the Council said kudos are due to the Commission. Questions were asked of staff and the answers will be coming back to the Council.

## 6. STAFF REPORTS

Strategic Planning Manager Emil King reminded the Commissioners about the state Department of Commerce short course on local planning to be held at City Hall on March 2.

With regard to staff transitions, Mr. King said Terry Cullen, the recently hired Comprehensive Planning Manager, will be taking over as staff liaison to the Commission in a couple of weeks. He also informed the Commissioners that Erika Rhett has taken a job as a consultant and will leave city employment in about a week.

## 7. DRAFT MINUTES REVIEW

### A. January 27, 2016

Chair Hilhorst called attention to the fifth sentence of the last paragraph on page 12 of the minutes and noted that her comment about growing Eastgate not taking anything away from Bel-Red was in fact in response to a comment that had been made earlier in the meeting by Ms. Rhett. She said she would like the minutes revised to reflect the question as well as the comment made.

Commissioner Carlson referred to the first paragraph on page 7 and noted that his reference to "Bellevue Brew" should be changed to read "Bellevue Brewery."

There was agreement to hold approval of the minutes to the next meeting.

## 8. STUDY SESSION

### A. Downtown Livability Land Use Code Update

Mr. King briefly reviewed the Downtown Livability Initiative study schedule. He noted that the Council is currently slated to take action on the early wins as early as February 16. The ongoing review and refinement work on the overall Downtown Livability Initiative will take a number of months and ultimately will result in the transmittal of a package of recommendations to the City Council for review and adoption.

Planning Director Dan Stroh said the topic of urban form and height will be one of the more interesting elements of the overall discussion. He said the recommendations of the Downtown Livability Initiative CAC have been taken to heart, and every attempt is being made to carry them forward. However, the CAC left unanswered a number of questions in regard to urban design outcomes aimed at increasing livability and quality of life. If additional height and FAR are allowed in some areas, it should be allowed with an eye on achieving better outcomes. There are a suite of items in front of the Commission as it works through the full CAC report, including open space, refinements to the pedestrian corridor, the bonus incentive system, and changes to the subarea plan. The intent is to have the study wrapped up by the end of the third quarter of the year.

Mr. King noted that interest has been expressed in allowing members of the public to come in and talk for more than five minutes regarding ideas and projects. Based on that desire, a window of time has been scheduled for an hour before the March 9 Commission meeting in which folks can come in, set up displays, and talk informally with Commissioners. The opportunity has been made known to all on the Downtown Livability interested citizens list, is posted on the

Commissioner's website, and will be forwarded to the Bellevue Downtown Association and other organizations.

Senior Planner Kevin McDonald stated that at the beginning of the Downtown Transportation Plan work, expectations were set for downtown growth in terms of land use, employment and population through the horizon year of 2030. Much of the work was based on a market forecast. As of 2010, the downtown employment figure stood at 42,000; that number is forecast to increase to 70,300 by 2030. The population of about 7,000 in 2010 is forecast to go to about 19,000 by 2030.

A map of the downtown was shown to the Commissioners that indicated an assigned distribution of the projected 2030 population and employment growth figures based on the market forecast for land use changes, the existing 2010 zoning, and the availability of redevelopable land. In terms of employment, the greatest intensity of employment is anticipated to be in the core of the downtown and in the hospital district. A second map indicating population growth showed a more scattered pattern. Using a combined population and employment metric for the downtown, the Commissioners were shown how the intensities in the downtown could spread out by 2030. It was noted the metric is important in that it directly relates to how the transportation system functions and where transportation investments should be made to serve the expected population and employment.

Mr. McDonald shared with the Commissioners the average annual weekday traffic volumes at specific measured points along different arterials in the downtown between 1990 and 2010. He noted that despite all the land use growth that occurred in the 20-year period, traffic volumes stayed relatively constant. The work to develop the Downtown Transportation Plan included adding three years of growth between 2010 and 2013; surprisingly, the relative constancy continued. In the opinion of staff, the constancy is the result of a transportation strategy that encompasses all modes of travel. Between 1990 and 2013, the city has made improvements to all modes and has provided incentives for people to use modes other than single-occupant vehicles. The result of incentives, disincentives and infrastructure investments has been changes in the way people choose to get to, from and around the downtown. On the land use side, as the downtown area has grown, more jobs and more housing have come online along with more services and amenities, and more people are choosing to get around on foot, by bicycle or by transit. In 1990, people used their cars to get around, in part because it was necessary to travel longer distances to get to what they wanted to do; as the downtown has filled in with more land uses, there are more choices, trips are shorter, and people are choosing not to use their cars.

Chair Hilhorst commented that telecommuting is certainly more prevalent than it was in previous years, which translates into fewer people coming into the downtown to go to work. Mr. McDonald said telecommuting is a part of the "all of the above" strategies and is specifically in the transportation demand management package. Various employers, including the city, provide incentives and disincentives for different modes of travel, and one of the incentives is the opportunity to work from home. Telecommuting reduces the travel demand on city streets and the need to accommodate parking in the downtown.

Commissioner Carlson asked if the model includes data regarding traffic using I-405. Mr. McDonald said traffic volumes on I-405, I-90 and SR-520 have increased over the years. He agreed to provide information to the Commission with regard to the specific volumes. Commissioner Carlson suggested the fact that traffic volumes in the downtown have remained relatively steady could be tied to the fact that between 1990 and 2013, NE 4th, NE 6th, NE 10th and NE 12th streets were expanded. The increased options for cars to travel could be the reason why congestion has not increased. Mr. McDonald allowed that route options is a clear benefit of

having a more complete roadway network. One way traffic volume is measured involves what are called screenlines. Screenlines are lines drawn along the perimeter of a geography, and all traffic passing through the imaginary line is measured. The Downtown Transportation Plan work included screenline metrics. Despite the fact that there are more travel options, the screenline volumes around the perimeter of the downtown were shown not to have changed. The number of persons transitioning across the screenlines has not been reduced, but they are traveling in buses, in carpools/vanpools, by bicycle, or on foot.

Commissioner Walter suggested that the information about traffic volumes remaining steady defies what is actually encountered by those driving in the downtown in their cars. It feels as though traffic volumes are up and congestion is worse. Mr. McDonald said the traffic volume numbers were one of the surprising discoveries of the Downtown Transportation Plan.

Commissioner deVadoss asked how Bellevue's traffic picture compares to cities such as Portland and Vancouver, B.C. Mr. McDonald said steady traffic data is not an anomaly for urban areas that offer intense mixed use development that is well served by transit and good walking environments. Like Bellevue, those cities offer more than a central business district to which people flock in the morning and leave after work; each is a downtown made up of neighborhoods where people live, work, shop and are entertained. As such cities grow and diversify in their land uses, they are not seeing commensurate increases in traffic volumes even while seeing a commensurate increase in person throughput.

Mr. McDonald noted that the land use pattern from the Downtown Transportation Plan, which was built on the 2010-2013 forecast, was in part based on a redistribution of growth based on the potential to change the zoning in some areas of the downtown. One such area was the DT-OLB area along I-405 where potential growth could be created by allowing for taller buildings and an increased FAR, resulted in the movement of some jobs to that district. The change in vehicle travel patterns and levels of service resulting from the redistribution was also considered. All capacity projects in the pipeline were included in the model. Most of the roadways in the downtown are about as wide as they can get, but that does not mean transportation capacity for vehicles cannot be improved. Many of the capacity projects, however, will occur outside of the downtown, though they will have a direct impact on the levels of service for vehicle travel in the downtown. The model showed that the redistribution of land use under the Downtown Livability Initiative and the Downtown Transportation Plan scenarios would result in a slight difference in vehicle volumes, average vehicle delay, and the total hours of vehicle delay in the downtown. Maps of the downtown showing the intersection levels of service under both scenarios were shown to the Commissioners. In both instances, levels of service were better on the west side of the downtown and worse on the east side of the downtown closer to the freeway. The slight change in the average vehicle delay at downtown intersections that results from the Downtown Livability Initiative scenario can be attributed to the fact that employment would rise in the DT-OLB area, resulting in fewer trips on the downtown streets.

Mr. King clarified that the CAC gave direction in its report to further analyze the model impacts of both changing the zoning in the DT-OLB zone and the DT-MU district. Those are the only two recommendations in the report that have an effect on the allowable FARs in the downtown, and the modeling was done in part to determine the impacts of both approaches.

Commissioner deVadoss said he would like to see staff develop a worst case/best case scenario.

Commissioner Morisseau asked how the modeling results compare to the current levels of service. Mr. McDonald said in the 2010 baseline, the overall downtown average level of service

for all system intersections was C, and the average vehicle delay was 27 seconds. Under the 2030 scenario, the average vehicle delay rose to 48 seconds.

Community Development Manager Patti Wilma focused the discussion on the height and form recommendations from the CAC and the follow-up staff analysis. She reminded the Commissioners that the CAC developed recommended principles relative to what potential height and form changes needed to accomplish. Specifically, the CAC directed that any changes would need to result in better urban design outcomes; continue to distinguish Bellevue's special market niche held by the downtown; help to deliver additional amenities that enhance livability and character; address impacts from additional height having to do with public views, shadows, tower spacing and other issues; and continue to provide for appropriate transitions between the downtown and adjoining residential areas while promoting better and more complementary linkages.

Height and form relates to livability in a number of different ways. It can: bring about opportunities for more light and air between buildings by allowing additional height; bring about opportunities for more ground-level open space; promote variability in building heights; reinforce district identity; add "lift" to the incentive system through allowing additional height or FAR; create a more distinctive skyline; encourage more interesting and memorable architecture; and add density around light rail transit investment.

Ms. Wilma shared with the Commission a map of so-called "soft sites", which are those likely to be redeveloped by 2030. She noted that within the "Deep B" and DT-MU Civic Center areas were shown as having the opportunity for redevelopment. For the balance of the MU district near Bellevue Square and Downtown Park, the opportunity for redevelopment is limited, while along Main Street to the east of Bellevue Way there is quite a bit of redevelopment potential.

The CAC recommendations applicable to the entire downtown area included addressing the impacts that may result from additional height by using design guidelines, tower spacing, mitigating for shadows, and ensuring permeability from I-405 for public views. Ms. Wilma said the recommendation of staff was for an 80-foot separation between towers 40 feet above grade; subjecting all floors above the current maximum height to additional tower spacing and diminished floor plate requirements; and provide exceptions for small sites.

Community Development Program Manager Bradley Calvert explained that under the International Building Code, the building separation standard is 40 feet. In reality, best practices have typically landed at closer to 80 feet. He shared with the Commissioners an example of a residential development on half a superblock which under the current requirements could fit four highrise structures on podiums that would largely cover the entire site. By increasing height and increasing the tower separation to 80 feet, the same site could yield three towers, allowing for additional open space at the ground level and variation in building height, without changing the FAR.

Commissioner Carlson asked what the Chamber of Commerce and the development community have said about the modeling outcome. Ms. Wilma said they have been supportive of additional building height and equalizing the FAR in the DT-MU for commercial and residential uses. Staff have not heard of any specific opposition to increasing tower separation.

Mr. Calvert noted that from the perspective of standing on the sidewalk, increasing tower separation gives permeability to the sky and avoids the canyon effect. Shadowing of the sidewalk is also substantially reduced.

Mr. Calvert said the recommendation is to increase tower separation to 80 feet; allow for a departure to the rule for design excellence to include fluid and slender forms and unique forms; increasing the tower separation for developments seeking increased height and FAR; allow for increasing the maximum floor plate provided tower separation is increased by the same percentage increase; and providing exceptions for sites under 30,000 square feet. Sites on which tower separation of 80 feet is not feasible may not be appropriate for multiple towers.

With regard to fluid, slender and unique forms, Mr. Calvert said opportunity should be allowed to reduce the tower separation distance where curved or angled/irregular façades are utilized in ways that would not be harmful to the pedestrian realm. In such cases, the amount of surface area under the 80-foot threshold would be substantially smaller.

Commissioner deVadoss said he could see the benefits associated with increasing tower separation, but asked if there are any potential negative tradeoffs. Mr. Calvert said in most cases there would be no negative impacts, only a repositioning of towers on sites in ways that will optimize the amount of light and air reaching the pedestrian realm.

Mr. Calvert said the issue of the last property to develop getting squeezed out can be addressed by considering early on the placement of towers relative to neighboring properties.

Commissioner deVadoss asked if there were a way to assure an equitable solution. Mr. Calvert said that would need to be further investigated to determine if there should be a guideline or recommendation. Ms. Wilma said at the preliminary development stage it would play out with staff asking the developer to indicate how they could or could not assure tower separation in regard to adjacent properties. Working together will yield the best outcomes. Commissioner deVadoss asked if the city could simply require a separation of at least 40 feet from a property line. Mr. Calvert said that approach could be taken.

Mr. Calvert pointed out that requiring a separation of 80 feet between towers on two small sites of less than 30,000 square feet would make the sites entirely undevelopable. Accordingly, the recommendation of staff is to require a 20-foot setback from the property line and a 15-foot setback from any public-facing street right-of-way. The approach would yield at least 40 feet of separation between two properties while assuring a pedestrian-scale look and feel at the ground level. A 30,000 square-foot site under the recommendation would yield a floor plate of about 18,000 square feet. Because the maximum allowable floor plate in the DT-MU is 20,000 square feet, some tweaking may be necessary.

Ms. Wilma said staff also was recommending buildings with façades of 120 to 140 feet should be required to include substantial articulation, which is the direction that was given by the CAC. There is no current dimensional standard that says articulation must begin at a certain level above ground level. The guidelines would indicate what the articulation is intended to accomplish, and it would be left to the designer to provide. There are some industry standards that come into play for the podium level of buildings.

Mr. Calvert said one of the recommendations relative to floor plate size is that for anything above the existing maximum height, up to the proposed maximum height, the floor plates would be reduced by 20 percent. The idea is to allow for more slender forms while also satisfying the desire for additional tower separation for pursuing extra height or FAR, and to yield a generally better aesthetic.

With regard to connected floor plates, the Commissioners were informed that under the Land Use Code, buildings under 70 feet in height are allowed to exceed the maximum floor plate size

for the purpose of creating a more continuous form, and to allow for safe and efficient exiting. The code allows for including the floor area of residential units or other building uses, though the connection cannot occur more than three floors above 40 feet in height. The code calls for a provision to require a change in the elevation of a building to make it appear as distinct and separate elements. The result has been buildings with very long façades and buildings with a center “donut” courtyard, both of which involve overly large massing that defeats the purpose of the FAR.

Mr. Calvert said the recommendation relative to small sites was to address the overall scale of massing; reinforce the intent of “separate and distinct building elements”; modify the connecting floors quantity; and remove the allowance of habitable floor area within the connection. With regard to internal courtyard buildings, the connection should be between three and seven feet in depth and have a functional relationship to the overall façade length of 7.5 percent. Notches that currently are only required to start at the fourth floor should go all the way to grade, creating a distinct separation that breaks up the massing. The intent of the connecting floor plate provision is to allow for safe and efficient exiting, but under the current approach the connections are being turned into usable space, circumventing the intent.

For typical sites, the recommendation is to offer dimensional guidance to enhance the appearance of separate buildings; improve the human/building scale relationship; and reduce the scale of massing. The intent is to provide guidelines rather than specific dimensions relative to the proportional relationships necessary to establish an aesthetic of distinctly separate buildings. The separation between the spaces should be the same as the width of the building. In high-traffic areas, the result would be scale that is more related to pedestrians in the form of building entrances, stoops, recesses or protrusions every so many feet.

Commissioner deVadoss said the proposed approach appears to be quite prescriptive. He asked if the developer could be given the leeway of coming back with alternatives that meet the general intent. Mr. Calvert said there is room for departure. The proportions are intended to serve as a starting point. Ms. Wilma added that under the current approach, staff does not have the leeway to modify the dimensional requirements in any way. It would be preferable to be able to work with designers and developers to achieve results that meet the intention of the code.

With regard to wind, shade and shadowing, Ms. Wilma said the CAC recommended maximizing sunlight on throughblock connections and addressing any impacts that may result from additional height or density. Staff supports the direction and recommends using tower stepbacks, canopies, marquees, awnings and green roofs to deflect wind; using tower separation to maximize light and air at the ground level; and orient the shortest building façades in the north-south to mitigate wind and shade impacts at the pedestrian level.

Mr. Calvert added that any development that provides a public space that earns FAR amenity incentive system points should be required to provide a study showing that the building orientation will not leave the open space in permanent shade and shadow. He said the same orientation would serve to mitigate the impacts of wind. The north-south orientation, along with providing stepbacks on all façades oriented toward public space, is part of the staff recommendation. The staff recommendation also calls for providing a green roof, a parapet with a minimum height of four feet, or stepbacks at 40 feet and 80 feet to mitigate down drafts and wind speed.

Ms. Wilma noted that the CAC also recommended adding direction on articulation for building massing, along with a continued strong emphasis and focus on ground-level treatments, and building off the 15 percent/15-foot rule to accommodate architectural integration of mechanical

equipment or interesting roof forms. She said the recommendation of staff supports the CAC direction. To emphasize the base, middle, top, the podium height should be clarified as being limited to 45 feet to the top of the podium roof. Mr. Calvert noted that where the floor plate size for all floors above the existing maximum height is reduced, the natural result will be distinctions between the base, middle and top of buildings.

Commissioner Walter asked if there had been any feedback from developers relative to the increase cost associated with constructing articulated structures as opposed to big square boxes. Ms. Wilma agreed it is probably more expensive to build a taller building with more articulation. However, the tradeoff is additional floors that will lease out at higher rates, yielding the opportunity to recapture the investment.

Commissioner Carlson suggested the Commission would benefit from having a public hearing before making any final decisions as a way to hear directly from developers and others what they think of the recommendations. Commissioner Barksdale said the open house will provide the public an opportunity to comment. The public hearing is a good medium for eliciting comments, but an open house is a more conversational environment. Ms. Wilma agreed and urged all of the Commissioners to attend. There is also opportunity for the public to share their views at every Commission meeting. Mr. King reminded the Commissioners that the Commission will ultimately conduct a public hearing on the full package of recommendations, but ahead of that event there will be opportunity for the public to comment more informally.

Ms. Wilma noted that for the DT-MU, the CAC recommended considering FAR of up to 5.0 for both residential and non-residential. She said staff supports that recommendation. With regard to building height in the district, the direction of the CAC was to consider allowing up to 300 feet for residential and 200 feet for non-residential, and using design guidelines to spell out the details relative to public views, shadows, tower spacing, transition and the effects on the pedestrian level. Staff supports the recommendations of the CAC and recommends requiring open space, more tower spacing and reduced floor plates for existing the current maximums, and eliminating the 15-foot height limit for mechanical equipment, relying instead on screening and location criteria.

The CAC did not address the DT-MU "C" overlay district but staff has identified the need for some changes. All portions of the "C" overlay have the same dimensional requirements as the underlying DT-MU zoning. The only difference is that to build in any of the districts, developers must provide neighborhood services. The recommendation of staff is to eliminate the "C" overlay. The population in the downtown and the market is driving the uses that are provided in particular developments. Currently in the downtown there are four grocery stores, nine cleaners, and three large drugstores. Additionally, a large hardware store is located just east of I-405. The market has clearly come in to fill the need for neighborhood services that was called out 25 years ago, and the code no longer needs to call for them.

Chair Hilhorst asked if there has been any feedback from the downtown community or the Bellevue Downtown Association. Ms. Wilma said written feedback has been received with the opinion that the "C" overlay neighborhood services called out in the code are lacking for downtown. There was discussion regarding the market deciding where the uses need to be located based on rents and the populations to be served.

Commissioner Walter commented that if only a certain type of use is allowed in a district, the demand for the space will be smaller than if any use is allowed there. With less of a demand, rents will be lower. Lifting the code requirements could result in a higher demand, in which the desired use may not locate in the downtown. Mr. King clarified that the "C" area is not limited to

the uses listed, rather that neighborhood service uses need to be provided in order to get to the maximum height and FAR. In the opinion of staff, the market is driving the provision of the uses and there is no need to include them as special requirements.

Commissioner deVadoss voiced his support for the staff recommendation.

Ms. Wilma directed attention to the DT-MU Civic Center district along 112th Avenue NE between NE 4th Street and NE 8th Street and noted the CAC had recommended consideration of an FAR of 6.0 for both residential and non-residential uses, and mitigating the impacts through tower design and separation, permeability from I-405, connectivity with Wilburton and the pedestrian environment. Staff concurs with the recommendation. The CAC also recommended allowing building height to 350 feet for both residential and non-residential and utilizing design guidelines to address and mitigate for public views, shadows, tower spacing, transition and the effects on the pedestrian realm. Staff supports the recommendation and also recommends requiring open space, more tower spacing and reduced floor plate size where the current maximum height is exceeded, and eliminating the 15-foot height limit for mechanical equipment.

The topography of the DT-MU Civic Center district drops off toward the freeway and the CAC proposed giving consideration to increasing the allowed floor plate size. There is already in the code an accommodation where floor plates above 40 feet can be averaged, and that provision addresses the desire of the CAC.

Ms. Wilma said the “Deep B” area is adjacent to the Vuecrest neighborhood. The CAC recommended no change to the allowed FAR for the district but did recommend considering an increase in building heights to between 160 and 240 feet, with an average height of 200 feet, for residential uses only. They also recommended using design guidelines to address public views, shadows, tower spacing, transition and the effects on the pedestrian environment. The staff are in support of the CAC recommendations and also supports requiring open space, more tower spacing, and reduced floor plates where buildings exceed the current maximums; limiting single towers to a height of 160 feet; and requiring a development agreement where multiple building projects seek additional height.

Commissioner deVadoss asked Ms. Wilma for her professional opinion regarding the proposal. Ms. Wilma said the northwest corner of the downtown is very different from the southeast corner even though the zoning criteria are the same for both. The edges of the downtown that are adjacent to sensitive receptors need to be looked at in a very customized way. The Council was clear in stating that any additional building height will need to be a good deal for the surrounding neighborhoods as well, which calls for paying special attention to tower spacing and open space. The development agreement process is open to the public and gives all the opportunity to be involved, and that is a good way to make sure the needs of all are met.

Commissioner Carlson commented that the Vuecrest neighborhood is unique in that it runs right up to the periphery of the downtown, with only a two-lane road separating the areas. The recommendation will allow for very tall buildings very close to single family homes. Ms. Wilma said if she were a resident there she would want any actions taken to assure that she could still feel good about living there, and that new development would be of the highest quality. She said responsible density is the right approach and that can happen through codes and guidelines.

Commissioner Carlson observed that development can impact the value of properties being developed as well as the properties surrounding new development. He asked how the proposal might impact property values within the Vuecrest neighborhood. Ms. Wilma said a poor job of redeveloping the “Deep B” area could negatively impact property values. The fact is the

downtown has become a draw and good development can have a positive impact. She shared with the Commissioners drawings comparing the existing approach with the proposed approach and what could be yielded given a variable building height scenario.

Ms. Wilma sought from the Commission direction regarding the issues raised by the West 77 Partners and BDR Holdings/John L. Scott representatives. Mr. King said in the opinion of the staff, the issues fall outside the foglines established by the CAC. The request relative to both is to keep the sites in the mix as the Commission works on downtown livability. The properties are within the scope of the Downtown Livability Initiative work, but both are seeking additional analysis relative to exceeding the recommendation of the CAC for building height and FAR.

Commissioner Morisseau asked how tall the towers are that lie on NE 8th Street between 108th Avenue NE and 110th Avenue NE. Ms. Wilma said they are in the hundred-foot range. Mr. King noted that the CAC recommended building height of 300 feet in the DT-O2 district and no change to the current FAR. West 77 Partners would like to see an analysis of building height up to 400 feet and an FAR of 8.0.

Commissioner Walter said she favored additional study relative to the BDR Holdings/John L. Scott sites, but was not clear as to what did not get done during the CAC process relative to the West 77 Partners site. Mr. King said the DT-O2 district is interesting in that there is a piece to the north of NE 8th Street, a piece to the south of NE 4th Street, and a piece that encompasses half of the Bravern and half of the City Hall block. The issue is that the area north of NE 8th Street may have some different circumstances that were lumped together with the CAC's overall look at the three areas.

There was agreement to continue analyzing the BDR Holdings/John L. Scott and West 77 Partners properties.

Commissioner Carlson commented that the recommendations of the CAC in all respects sound fine on paper, but the fact is they encompass some very real changes. He said he would feel more comfortable soliciting more input from the community before making any recommendations.

Commissioner deVadoss said he believed the CAC and staff recommendations are pointed in the right direction. He reiterated, however, that he would like to see a public hearing conducted to gain more input from the community.

There was agreement not to give staff any specific direction relative to the "Deep B" area until after the public forum on March 9.

With regard to the DT-MU Civic Center and DT-MU areas, the Commissioners generally concurred with the CAC and staff recommendations but agreed not to reach a conclusion until after the March 9 public forum.

A motion to extend the meeting to 9:45 p.m. was made by Commissioner deVadoss. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Carlson and the motion carried unanimously.

## 9. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Carl Vander Hoek with Vander Hoek Corporation, 9 103rd Avenue NE, thanked the Commissioners for asking good questions and for wanting to hear more from the public and the Bellevue Downtown Association. He cautioned the Commission to be careful in making decisions relative to average annual weekday traffic counts in that the problem with averages is

that they are averages. Some of the materials presented around job and population growth indicated potential development sites, and it would be good for them to be made public for consideration.

Ms. Darcie Durr with West 77 Partners, 10620 NE 9th Place, thanked the Commissioners for their time and hard work in studying the issues. She said she would have an exhibit ready for the March 9 meeting and would readily answer any questions in advance of that meeting.

Ms. Linda Abe with Su Development, 1100 106th Avenue NE, said the company is committed to doing interesting highrise building through good design. She agreed that plain square buildings cost less to construct, so incentives and bonuses are needed in order to make quality designs pencil out.

10. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner deVadoss. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Morisseau and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Hilhorst adjourned the meeting at 9:31 p.m.



Emil King  
Staff to the Planning Commission

3/24/16  
Date



Michelle Hilhorst  
Chair of the Planning Commission

3/23/16  
Date

\* Approved as corrected, February 24, 2016