

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

July 8, 2015
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Vice-Chair deVadoss, and Commissioners Barksdale, Laing, Morisseau, Walter

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Chair Hilhorst, Commissioner Carlson

STAFF PRESENT: Paul Inghram, Patti Wilma, Emil King, Department of Planning and Community Development

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Stokes

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. by Vice-Chair deVadoss who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Chair Hilhorst and Commissioner Carlson, both of whom were excused.

Vice-Chair deVadoss welcomed new Commissioner Morisseau. Commissioner Morisseau said she was born in Haiti and moved to the United States when she was 17. She said she moved to the Puget Sound area eight years ago. She said she is a structural engineer and a real estate agent, her husband works for Microsoft, and they have two daughters.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Andrew Miller, 111 NE Main Street, said he represents the property owner at that address. He noted that the East Main light rail station walkshed extends to the north of Main Street and will affect that area of the downtown, just as that area of the downtown will affect the station. He said FAR is a block of clay that can be molded in many different ways. A high FAR with low height limits results in short, squatty buildings; a high FAR with increased height limits can result in projects that provide more light and air. In the case of the gateway intersection at 112th Avenue and Main Street, something outstanding should be done there. To accomplish that, however, will require increased height and FAR.

4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Laing. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Walter and it carried unanimously.

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

Councilmember Stokes said he was glad to see the work of the Commission regarding downtown livability is under way. He said the study provides the opportunity for the Commission to consider code elements that have been in place for a long time without being revised. The work of the CAC, which included a great deal of input from the public, will inform the Commission's process. Building height and FAR are always contentious issues that the Commission will need to carefully consider. The Council is anticipating receiving from the Commission solid rationale for any recommendation to change the current code.

Councilmember Stokes added that the work done by the Commission relative to updating the Comprehensive Plan was very well received by the Council. The Council is very close to wrapping up that work.

6. STAFF REPORTS

Comprehensive Planning Manager Paul Inghram said the Council is on the precipice of adopting the Commission's work on the Comprehensive Plan. The Council recommended including in the Urban Design Element a policy about solar access and a sense of openness. One of the Councilmembers proposed a couple of new policies for the Utilities Element dealing with transmission lines, one aimed at avoiding the establishment of new corridors, and one focused on using existing rights-of-way. There was also a policy added about adaptation to deal with climate issues. The anticipation is that the Council will take final action on July 20.

7. DRAFT MINUTES REVIEW

A. March 25, 2015

Commissioner Laing noted a number of corrections to the draft minutes. A motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Commissioner Laing. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Walter and it carried unanimously.

8. STUDY SESSION

A. Downtown Livability

Commissioner Laing reiterated that he represented a property owner with regard to a code amendment affecting Old Bellevue that is pending before the City Council. He noted that the code amendment has been mentioned in the packet materials, though the issue is not one that is before the Commission. He said he would recuse himself from the conversation regarding downtown parking and asked to hold that particular conversation to the end of the meeting.

Strategic Planning Manager Emil King briefly reviewed the Downtown Livability Initiative CAC recommendations addressed by the Commission on June 24. He asked the Commissioners to consider three questions in working through the remainder of the CAC's recommendations: 1) what topics or items do you see as complicated/controversial versus straightforward; 2) what further information or analysis do you need to accomplish this code update; and 3) what topics or items call for additional targeted public outreach. He briefly reviewed the schedule going

forward; noted that a second Commission/public walking tour will be slated; and said a joint workshop with the Council will be scheduled in the fall to talk about the incentive amenity system.

Mr. King reminded the Commission that the work done by the Downtown Livability Initiative CAC was focused only on the Land Use Code for the 410 acres within the downtown subarea. A methodical review of all six of the light rail stations that will be in Bellevue is under way. The station area planning effort will identify the important issues relative to each of the stations. Some elements of station area planning were, however, incorporated into other elements of the Downtown Livability Initiative CAC's work, particularly those relating to the Bellevue Downtown station that will be constructed adjacent to City Hall on the King County Metro site, and the East Main station whose walkshed extends into the downtown subarea.

The Commissioners were reminded that the typical walkshed for transit facilities is a quarter of a mile, a distance that can be covered in five minutes. Within the prime transit-oriented development walkshed, it is important to focus on land uses and how they interface with the station. However, it is also generally recognized that people will walk a half mile or more to a light rail station, so consideration is being given to the land uses within the broader area of influence. The quarter-mile walksheds for the Downtown Bellevue and East Main stations intersect in the area along Main Street between the freeway and 110th Avenue. Both stations will serve portions of the downtown.

The CAC had some good thoughts around how the Downtown Bellevue station will function relative to pedestrian/bicycle connectivity, including how it should interface with the pedestrian corridor and some land use changes that might be appropriate. The changes considered for the Downtown OLB zone clearly had a relationship to the East Main station, but there is a point of view that more could be done in and around the East Main station to the north of Main Street, an area outside the purview of the East Main CAC.

Mr. King said the CAC looked at the desired character of the Downtown Bellevue station area. The Comprehensive Plan of ten years ago included no discussion of a light rail station adjacent to City Hall. The CAC rightfully considered how the light rail station will actually change the character of City Hall, Meydenbauer Center, and the surrounding properties. They also focused on pedestrian/bicycle and transit linkages and how they interface with the light rail station. The street designations in the previous Comprehensive Plan for 110th Avenue NE, 112th Avenue NE and NE 6th Street did not contemplate a heavy pedestrian-oriented use for the site where the station will be. The CAC offered several recommendations relative to transit-oriented development that reinforce the draw for redevelopment in and around a quarter-mile of the station. Sound Transit is making a significant investment in Bellevue and it makes sense for the city to think about how that investment can be capitalized on. The CAC addressed the issues of traffic and parking management as well, but no significant code changes relative to parking were made for the station area. The CAC did, however, highlight the need for a new parking study.

The CAC had some significant recommendations relating to design guidelines. For 112th Avenue NE, the original vision was for a suburban street when the downtown zoning was established 30 years ago, including a requirement for a suburban-type setback from the street. The CAC recognized that a more urban look and feel for that location would be appropriate. Given that the East Main station will be on 112th Avenue SE, the CAC recognized the need for walkability both to the north and south of Main Street.

The CAC also made some significant recommendations about higher density, as expressed by FAR, and allowing for additional building height in the DT-OLB zone. The CAC also recommended extending the pedestrian corridor beyond 110th Avenue NE to 112th Avenue NE to better interface with the light rail station. Also highlighted by the CAC was the need for a non-motorized connection across I-405 in keeping with the boundaries of the station area walkshed.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Barksdale, Mr. King said the front door of Bellevue Square is situated at the western end of the existing pedestrian corridor. The CAC offered five recommendations for enhancing the corridor, including better weather protection, a greener and more pleasant walking environment, the need to program the space, and the need for better lighting and wayfinding identifying the way to connect with both the transit center and the light rail station. As redevelopment occurs, the balance of the pedestrian corridor will be built out. Community Development Manager Patti Wilma added that the intersection where the pedestrian corridor crosses 106th Avenue NE will include a curbless crossing, helping pedestrians to move easily and safely across the street. Also, the walkway to the west of 108th Avenue NE on the pedestrian corridor will be widened and have new lighting installed. Once light rail construction occurs, the intersection where the pedestrian corridor crosses 110th Avenue NE is likely to become a scramble. Some of the clutter will be eliminated from the existing transit center to facilitate moving people through the area more quickly.

Vice-Chair deVadoss asked if any consideration has been given to creating pedestrian crossing tunnels. Mr. King said there have been discussions about subterranean access to the station, though those conversations occurred when the thinking was that the station would actually be in a tunnel under 110th Avenue NE. Once it was determined that the station would be aboveground, talk of tunnel connections died down.

Commissioner Morisseau asked if pedestrian bridges have been considered and she was told by Mr. King that the Council allocated up to \$5 million to look at exceptional station access. A bridge up and over 110th Avenue NE was studied as an option, but the costs associated with such a structure did not appear to be in line with the time pedestrians would save by using it.

Commissioner Laing suggested that consideration should be given to using technology that would freeze the intersection when a train enters the station, allowing pedestrians to scramble in all directions. Mr. King said the direction given from the Council favored an at-grade solution. Consideration has been given to a potential pedestrian bridge connecting the City Hall block with the station and Meydenbauer Center over NE 6th Street.

Turning to the topic of building height and form, Mr. King noted that a section in the report from the CAC explained the relationship between increased height and bulk to the issue of livability. The section flowed both from the CAC's discussions and the Land Use Code audits that were done. The audits highlighted that much of what is in the code is working as intended, but they also shed light on some opportunities for improvement.

The CAC recognized that allowing for additional height and bulk can result in opportunities to create a more distinctive skyline. The height restrictions in place tend to produce a plateaued skyline from some vantage points. Height can encourage more interesting and memorable architecture, but floor plate size and urban form can also help give license to creativity. Many of the CAC's recommendations were built on the notion of allowing for more light and air between buildings, and with additional height comes the opportunity to achieve the permitted FAR in

different architectural formats, opening the door for more ground-level open space.

The CAC discussed the notion of promoting more variability in building heights. Currently many of the downtown zones have a base height and maximum height that has resulted in buildings going up to the same level. The CAC suggested there may be creative ways to average out building height in ways that will achieve more variability in height. The CAC also recognized that height and density can be used to reinforce district identity.

Increasing the allowable height and FAR could result in a "lift" relative to the incentive system. Currently the incentive system is tied to allowing taller buildings and increased FAR. The CAC also recognized the wisdom of adding density around the light rail transit investment, particularly in the DT-OLB zone.

Mr. King said the report from the CAC included principles for guiding height and form which essentially serve as criteria against which changes to the current approach should be weighed. The principles included the notion of additional height or density resulting in better urban design outcomes over the status quo; continuing to distinguish the special market niche played by the downtown core; helping to deliver additional amenities that enhance livability; addressing the impacts that may result from additional height and density; and continuing to provide appropriate transitions between the downtown and the adjacent neighborhoods while promoting better linkages.

Councilmember Stokes asked the Commission to keep in mind that Bellevue is unique in that it is a much bigger city than the population of 134,000 indicates. Bellevue serves as the urban center for the Eastside. Bellevue is projected to continue to grow as an urban center, and that fact needs to be recognized in the context of balancing the needs of Bellevue's neighborhoods.

Commissioner Morisseau asked if decisions to adjust building heights will be made in conjunction with changes to the existing building codes. She pointed out that seismic and wind criteria are affected by height. Ms. Wilma said all planning work is carried out in union with the development services department which implements the adopted International Building Code. No red flags have been raised to date by staff in that department relative to the notion of allowing additional height and bulk, primarily because the amount of height being considered is already contemplated in the International Building Code.

Commissioner Walter said she hoped the discussion going forward will include a focus on what the housing needs are projected to be in the downtown. Seattle is considering doing away with single family zoning, an approach that should not be copied by Bellevue. ~~The~~ As the designated urban center, downtown Bellevue growth areas of the city should be designed to accommodate the necessary amount of housing growth while protecting the bordering neighborhoods and, all of which are the single family neighborhoods in Bellevue.

Councilmember Stokes pointed out that at the same time the city must remember the downtown is a neighborhood as well and must be made livable. While the challenge is unique, the city is up to it.

Mr. King said 3D modeling software was used to build a model of the downtown. All existing buildings were factored in along with all buildings under construction. The model calculated what could happen on the underdeveloped sites under the current code and under what the CAC was contemplating. He shared with the Commissioners one model run showing what

redevelopment could look like in the DT-OLB zone along I-405. The model will continue to be used going forward in analyzing the recommendations of the CAC.

Under the current code, the highest densities and building heights are focused in the core area called the O-1 zone. In that zone, buildings are allowed to reach 450 feet. Office buildings are allowed an FAR of 8.0, while residential buildings have no FAR limit. Each zone surrounding the O-1 district has lower heights in line with the wedding cake approach; the lowest heights and densities are in the A and B perimeter districts surrounding the downtown.

Commissioner Walter asked why residential in the O-1 district has no limit on FAR. Ms. Wilma said the system was set up that way to encourage residential. She said there are limits on floor plate size and that is what controls residential building bulk.

Mr. King said there are two recommendations from the CAC that would have an impact on the amount of development allowed that would be different from what is currently allowed. For the DT-OLB zone the CAC recommended height of up to 350 feet and an FAR of 6.0 for the area between NE 8th Street and NE 4th Street, and height of up to 200 feet and an FAR of 5.0 between NE 4th Street and Main Street. For the MU district, the CAC recommended allowing residential buildings up to 300 feet and non-residential buildings up to 200 feet, and recommended increasing the allowed non-residential FAR to 5.0 to be on par with residential developments.

The current approach relative to the Perimeter A district allows for residential buildings up to 55 feet. The CAC recommended allowing up to 70 feet in the zone. The Council provided direction in May that any changes to the Perimeter A district would need to improve the interface from the perspective of the adjoining residential neighborhoods.

Councilmember Stokes commented that the DT-OLB district faces the freeway, not a residential neighborhood. The freeway itself has changed dramatically since the current zoning was put in place.

Commissioner Laing added that in addition to the freeway there is a fairly significant grade change and the CAC recognized that having additional height and density adjacent to the freeway makes sense. The view of the city for those passing by on the freeway is one that evokes images of about 1973 and from a gateway perspective changes are needed. He also indicated that the proposed building height of 70 feet recommended by the CAC for the Perimeter A district is driven by the fire code and the five-over-one construction style that has five floors of wood-framed construction over a concrete podium that normally accommodates structured parking. The fire code limits wood-framed construction to 70 feet, and concrete and steel buildings do not pencil out financially until about 125 feet. Allowing building height in the zone of up to 90 feet would mean nothing because no one would be able to realize it. The recommendation of the CAC is to conform the zoning to fit with what the market can deliver.

Commissioner Barksdale asked if along with building height in the Perimeter A district consideration will be given to the amount of sunlight that can reach into the downtown. Ms. Wilma said consideration will be given to tower spacing and guidelines having to do with orientation to preserve light and air resources.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Walter, Mr. King said the Land Use Code audit was conducted on the subarea policies, and the Comprehensive Plan update package that is

currently before the Council includes no changes to the downtown subarea plan, except for the discussion about the south boundary.

After the CAC process was completed, staff took a little time to delve a little deeper on a site-by-site basis to determine what the increased height in the Perimeter A district would look like on the ground. In addition to allowing for an additional floor and increased floor-to-ceiling heights, the anticipated outcomes included better maximizing the total FAR potential, enhanced opportunities for street-level activation, improved modulation and building massing proportions, and the potential to add lift to the incentive system for additional public amenities.

The DT-OLB fronts the freeway but also extends to the corner of 112th Avenue NE and NE 12th Street and includes the stormwater detention facility to the south of NE 10th Street. The zone is largely built out but there is some redevelopment potential in the area between NE 8th Street and Main Street. The general philosophy of the CAC was to take the height and FAR development regulations that apply to the area on the hillside to the west of 112th Avenue NE and push them to include the east side of 112th Avenue NE adjacent to the freeway.

Commissioner Barksdale asked if the additional traffic that would result from allowing more height and bulk adjacent to the freeway will result in creating a barrier to getting into and out of the downtown area. Mr. King said some sensitivity testing is being done using the 2030 traffic model. The modeling will look at the impacts under the current zoning and under the proposed zoning to determine the delta.

Mr. King said the anticipated outcomes with regard to the recommendations for the DT-OLB zone include the potential to add density around the investments in light rail, maintaining visibility permeability and protect the view corridors to Mt. Rainier, the opportunity to create a more distinctive skyline, and the potential to add lift to the incentive system for additional public amenities.

The Deep B district is the area to the north of NE 8th Street and south of NE 12th Street and to the east of 100th Avenue NE. Ms. Wilma said it is close to single family in the Northtowne and Vuecrest neighborhoods. The lack of development occurring in that area is what led the CAC to address it. The area is lower in elevation than Vuecrest and has more of a small town feel in the way it serves as a neighborhood shopping and service area.

Mr. King said the area has seen very little development activity over the last three development cycles. Aside from the Avalon building on the corner of NE 10th Street and Bellevue Way, there has been no significant development take place. Under the current code, the maximum residential height allowed is 90 feet and the maximum FAR is 5.0. The owners of properties in the Deep B district expressed to the CAC a desire to look at something a little new as far as regulating height in the downtown is concerned. Their idea they pitched was to look allowing for variable heights between 160 feet and 240 feet for residential with an average of 200 feet, all without an increase in FAR. The approach would not allow a single parcel to achieve 240 feet; a multiple tower site would be required in order to average their respective heights. The anticipated outcomes included increased opportunities for ground-level open space, variable building heights and opportunities for alleys with addresses, the potential for increased tower spacing to improve light and air, the opportunity to create a more distinctive skyline, and the potential to add lift to the incentive system.

~~Answering a question asked by Commissioner Barksdale~~ asked whether the social impacts are

being considered as part of the discussion about design and taller buildings (e.g. ground-level open space for public use). Mr. King noted there are a couple of examples described in the anticipated outcomes. One example being said the term “alleys with addresses” which originally came up in the 2004 planning effort that updated the downtown subarea plan. Some alleys in the downtown act primarily as driveways that break up the superblocks, but several businesses actually open on to them. He added that the notion of open space is predicated on the spaces being open to the public but allowed that could be made more clear.

Mr. King said the current code for the MU district allows residential buildings up to 200 feet with an FAR of 5.0, and allows office buildings up to 100 feet with an FAR of 3.0. There are many examples of 200-foot buildings along NE 10th Street. The CAC recommended retaining the maximum 5.0 FAR for residential while allowing an additional 100 feet of building height, and to increase office height up to 200 feet with a maximum FAR of 5.0. While residential would be allowed to go higher, the total square footage for both types of uses would be the same. The anticipated outcomes include increased opportunity for ground-level open space, consolidating building massing for fewer towers, the potential for increased tower spacing to improve light and air reaching the ground level, and the potential to add lift to the incentive system.

Vice-Chair deVadoss acknowledged the volume of detail to think through relative to building height and bulk. He suggested the Commission will need time to digest it. He recommended moving on to the issue of parking and come back to the height and bulk issue at a future meeting.

Commissioner Laing recused himself and left the room.

Ms. Wilma said parking was discussed by the CAC on numerous occasions. In recognition of the various complexities the issue presents, the CAC ultimately decided to recommend a comprehensive downtown parking study. Since 1986 the city has conducted 17 parking studies and surveys, each with a unique focus. The fact is, however, that technology, need and transit have all changed. Staff will be going before the Council in early August to talk about the work plan for both the Planning and Community Development and the Department of Development Services, and part of the discussion will include the notion of including another parking study. A comprehensive study will be costly and could take up to two years to complete. The direction given by the Council will determine what approach to take relative to the gambit of parking options, technologies, demand and management.

Ms. Wilma said the one thing that has moved quickly through the process is the parking amendment for Old Bellevue. In late May staff was given direction from the Council to move ahead with a targeted code amendment to clarify an exemption in the code for restaurants and retail businesses that has resulted in confusion and misapplication because of the terminology used. A public hearing was held on the code amendment on July 6 which covered two options, one identifying 1998 as the sunset year for the exemption, and one accommodating some nonconforming uses by identifying 2006 as the sunset year. The issue will be before the Council in August.

There are some elements of the parking issue that are not overly controversial, including valet parking and Car To Go shared car usage. There is technology available that allows persons to individually rent their parking space for the day. Those are things that could happen immediately.

Councilmember Stokes clarified that what the Council is seeking is an approach that will bring everyone into compliance with the code without triggering adverse impacts on specific building owners.

Ms. Wilma added that the exemption has resulted in a shortfall of about 24 parking stalls. The city has added, however, 25 on-street parking stalls in the meantime. Even so, it still feels like there is an insufficient supply of parking in Old Bellevue.

Commissioner Walter noted that in the Comprehensive Plan update Policy TR-12-11 was eliminated. She said the comments about parking related to being development friendly were confusing; she said she could not imagine developers not wanting to come to Bellevue. The She also commented that she disagreed with the premise about that the amount of parking affecting drive-alone behavior is not true; she believes people do not drive based on whether or not there will be parking available, they drive because they need their cars. Currently there are few viable alternatives to driving alone and the number of parking spaces is unlikely to impact traffic.

Ms. Wilma said there are other topics that were highlighted by various stakeholders that did not get addressed in great detail by the CAC. The list includes issues related to garbage collection and the location of dumpsters; the desire to allow food trucks to operate in the downtown without crowding the streets and obstruct sidewalks; mechanical equipment that vents directly onto the sidewalk; vacant sites and buildings; and permitted uses. With regard to the latter, Ms. Wilma noted that there are more pets per household in the Northwest than there are children, but Bellevue code does not permit doggy daycare uses in the downtown. For each topic there may be quick fixes that could be made to accommodate downtown workers and residents.

Councilmember Stokes said the Bellevue Downtown Association offers tours of different cities. He said he participated in the tours of Denver, Austin and Pasadena and came away with the realization that a real difference in livability can be made in deciding how the sidewalks are to be treated. Downtown Bellevue is a destination place, but everything that can be done should be done to ensure it is safe, comfortable and inviting. Some of the things Kirkland and Redmond have done recently to create more walkable spaces may be applicable to Bellevue.

9. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Kathy Riley, a resident of Bellevue Towers, said downtown Bellevue is a vibrant environment and that is the very reason she chose to move to the downtown. She stressed the need to consider preserving major view corridors in the downtown as growth continues to occur. Views are an important part of downtown livability.

10. NEXT PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

A. July 22, 2015

Mr. Inghram briefly reviewed upcoming agenda items and meeting dates.

11. ADJOURN

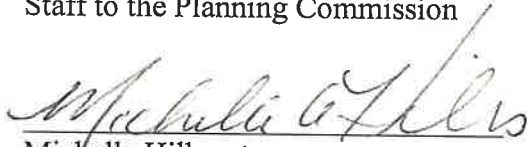
A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Walter. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Barksdale and it carried unanimously.

Vice-Chair deVadoss adjourned the meeting at 8:49 p.m.



Michael Kattermann
Staff to the Planning Commission

9-11-2015
Date



Michelle Hilhorst
Chair of the Planning Commission

9/9/15
Date

* Approved as corrected, September 9, 2015