

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION  
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

September 28, 2016  
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Commissioner Laing, Commissioner Walter

STAFF PRESENT: Terry Cullen, Nicholas Matz, Gwen Rousseau, Department of Planning and Community Development

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

CALL TO ORDER  
(6:39 p.m.)

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

ROLL CALL  
(6:39 p.m.)

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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA  
(6:39 p.m.)

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

COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCILS, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None  
(6:40 p.m.)

Chair deVadoss reported that following the Commission's meeting on September 14 where low-impact development was discussed, Assistant City Attorney Catherine Drews reached out to him with a draft of the communication to the City Council. He said he took the liberty of asking Commissioner Laing to review it and provide feedback. He offered the Commissioners the opportunity to review the draft as well and provide feedback.

With regard to the Commission's annual retreat, Chair deVadoss said he and Commissioner Walter met with Mayor Stokes and staff and discussed the interest expressed in discussing the

role and responsibilities of the Planning Commission, and how the Commission can be most effective. He pointed out that the Commission, the Council, the staff and the public make up the four pillars of the system. Taking a look at only the Commission will put the Commission in a box in terms of the engagement mechanisms. The conclusion reached was that the full system should be discussed, but that it will not be possible to have the pieces in place by the scheduled retreat date of October 5. In line with the discussion, Comprehensive Planning Manager Terry Cullen is working on a straw man proposal to frame the discussion and the retreat will be rescheduled.

Commissioner Hilhorst asked how much time staff and the other parties will need to draw up the straw man proposal. Mr. Cullen said the challenge lies less in putting the straw man proposal together than in finding a date on which all parties can agree to meet. He said the likelihood is that the retreat will not be on the calendar until early to mid November.

Commissioner Morisseau asked who will be representing the public. Chair deVadoss said that piece has yet to be worked out.

#### STAFF REPORTS (6:47 p.m.)

Mr. Cullen briefly reviewed with the Commissioners the list of upcoming agenda items.

Mr. Cullen called the attention of the Commissioners to the Neighborhood Leadership meeting scheduled for October 4. He noted that Community Outreach meets with neighborhood leadership quarterly to engage in a continuing dialog on different topics of interest. The upcoming meeting is focused on picturing the future of Bellevue's neighborhoods. An artist illustrator will be brought in to diagram what the neighborhoods represent as their visions and values. He clarified that the meeting will not serve as the launch of the neighborhood area planning process.

Commissioner Hilhorst asked when the subarea planning process will be initiated. She said neighborhoods are struggling to solidify their identities, and the subarea planning is something that is supposed to occur on a regular basis. Mr. Cullen said the issue has been discussed with senior executive management, but a decision is still pending going to Council to discuss guiding principles. There is no date set for launching the process. The intention to start the program earlier was clear but other priorities drew away the available resources, including Eastgate and Downtown Livability.

Commissioner Hilhorst commented that earlier in the year the Commission had proposed to the Mayor that the Commission should be allowed to provide guidance and feedback as to which neighborhoods might benefit from being the first in line. The Mayor was open to having the Commission provide that information. She asked how the Commission should go about forwarding a formal recommendation to the Council urging that the process be launched. Mr. Cullen said the Commission is free to make such a recommendation at any time. He recommended, however, holding off making a recommendation relative to specific sequencing until the Council is slated to establish the guiding principles and give direction for the project.

Commissioner Morisseau asked Commissioner Hilhorst what recommendation she would forward to the Council and if it would include criteria on how to select the neighborhoods to study. Commissioner Hilhorst said the Commission has heard from specific neighborhoods over the past two years about potential identity crises resulting from significant development changes.

Lake Hills, Bridle Trails, Eastgate and the outlying downtown neighborhoods have all commented before the Commission. The Commission should share with the Council which neighborhoods have been heard from the most and recommend that they be addressed first.

Chair deVadoss asked Mr. Cullen to formally follow up with the Council liaison and provide the Commission with his feedback. Mr. Cullen said he would do that.

Mr. Cullen informed the Commission that staff has been working diligently over the past several months to find software that would make the online Comprehensive Plan much more user friendly. He asked Senior Planner Nicholas Matz to share with the Commissioners the preferred package and how it works.

Mr. Matz said staff has been struggling since the 2015 Comprehensive Plan update with how to make the document more usable in an online format. He said a program called "Flipping Book", which is an online magazine-type format, was deemed to be the best option. The Commissioners were given a quick demonstration and noted that Volume 1 has already gone live.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT (7:06 p.m.)

Ms. Betsy Hummer, 14541 SE 26th Street, thanked the Commissioners for their service on behalf of the residents of the city. She noted that work on the dorms at Bellevue College has started. However, a stand of trees that would have screened the new development from Sunset Ranch is no longer there. The city's tree canopy needs to be given careful consideration, especially since the city says it is so important. She said she was encouraged to hear Lake Hills mentioned as one of the primary subarea neighborhoods. Because of the lawsuit against Bellevue College for building various things on their site, it was deemed that they can do anything they want. That could mean that the state patrol can also do anything it wants on its property. Bellevue College is all zoned R-5 and it would be nice to see it given a more appropriate zoning to reflect its use. Larson Lake, which is the heart and soul of Bellevue as a city in a park, is zoned R-1. What happened with the Mercer Slough relative to the South Bellevue park and ride garage should not be allowed to happen in any of the city's parks just because of the underlying zoning. That issue should be taken under consideration during the subarea process. Another concern that not yet gone away is the adult family homes. The state claims the facilities can be sited anywhere. The concern with that is that existing smaller homes are often torn down to make room for a 7000 square foot building out of which a nursing home is operated, even though the structure qualifies as a single family home. Consideration should be given to having a more transparent system. There are about 12 such facilities in Lake Hills and four in the 98004 zip code area.

Commissioner Hilhorst asked why Bellevue College is allowed to build a dormitory for multiple dwellers in an area that is zoned R-5. Ms. Hummer said the college is allowed to build anything it wants on its property. Commissioner Carlson said the college operates as its own little city and can pretty much do whatever it wants.

Commissioner Carlson commented that adult family homes are not necessarily a bad thing. The use is typically very quiet and parking is not usually an issue. The homes afford the residents much better living situations than nursing homes provide, and the owner usually lives in the premises. Ms. Hummer agreed but stressed that her concern is with the need to make the process more transparent. The structures are built to house a number of people, not a single family, and there is usually a lot of business-like traffic in the form of deliveries and caregivers coming and

going.

Mr. Ian Morrison, a land use attorney with McCullough Hill Leary, 701 5th Avenue, Suite 6600, Seattle, thanked the Commission for the vote to move ahead to substantive review the Eastgate area plan amendment. He said the issue is still at a high level and the time for getting into the details will come. As the city went through the Eastgate/I-90 study process in 2010, consideration was given to the Eastgate Office Park site on 156th Avenue SE and concluded that it would probably retain its current economic use. Time has passed, however, and the property owner believes the opportunity exists to take a look at the goals of the Eastgate subarea plan and see how they could be applied to the site. From the Commission and the community, three key components have been heard, the first of which is traffic. A traffic engineer is currently working on an analysis of what the future could look like. Second, neighbors to the north in the community that uses Robinswood Park have raised the issue of wildlife, including owls. A wildlife biologist has been retained to survey and identify the resident wildlife species. Third, the community has highlighted the importance of the buffers and transitions between the office and residential uses. The design team has been directed to respect those key fundamental characteristics of the Eastgate area, particularly the relationship with the properties to the north.

Mr. Jeff Bates with CollinsWoerman, 710 2nd Avenue, Seattle spoke. He said the architectural firm has done a lot of mixed use residential infill over the years. For all the reasons mentioned by Mr. Morrison, the site represents an exciting opportunity in terms of infill development. He said consideration is being given to increasing the density on the site, though there is as yet no concrete vision. There are a lot of conditions associated with the site, including commercial to the east that is quite different from the single family to the north. The nuances of the edges will be considered and respected going forward.

Commissioner Hilhorst asked how dependent redevelopment of the site is on ST-3 passing. Mr. Morrison said no one has a crystal ball to say just how ST-3 will go. For purposes of the transportation analysis, there will be no reliance on ST-3.

Commissioner Hilhorst noted that the office park in its current configuration is amazing in the way it has been set in the middle of a woods. She asked if there will be any focus on trying to preserve the woodsy nature of the site. Mr. Bates said existing trees and landscaping should be retained to the degree possible, especially mature trees on the exterior boundaries. Mr. Morrison said the owner has heard the message from the community that the trees and vegetation should be retained. The site offers a real possibility for enhancing the pedestrian connections with Robinswood Park and getting people into nature.

Ms. Linda Nohavec, 3273 163rd Place SE, read from a letter submitted by Michelle Wanamaker who was unable to attend the meeting. The letter outlined a consistent non-regulated growth mandate to approve land use changes without first implementing both transit and traffic congestion relieving improvements to accommodate the growth. The recommendations by the CAC follows the Council principles related to vision and compatibility with adjacent neighborhoods, and the implementation concepts and strategies report. However, several policies in the Eastgate subarea plan are in direct violation of the CAC's recommendations, as well as the objectives and goals the Comprehensive Plan has defined for Eastgate expansion. The concern is that reports and information presented to the Commission and Councilmembers by planning staff are inaccurate. Recently a plat-protected forested greenbelt was cut to the ground by a resident because a senior planner did not check the plat map. The same thing has happened before. There is no mapping accuracy and that is something that needs to be addressed to keep other greenbelts from being eradicated.

STUDY SESSION  
(7:29 p.m.)

Eastgate Area Plan Amendment – 2016 Comprehensive Plan Amendments

Mr. Cullen said his years of experience in working with planning commissions has confirmed the important role the commissions play in local governance. The institution is comprised of the City Council, the planning commission, the staff and the public that provides input. In order for the institution to function well, all of the pieces must be in balance and working together, with all expectations and needs being met in a reasonable fashion. All of the work centers around the comprehensive plan, which is the core, and all discussion needs to come from that central place. Every action taken must be consistent with the comprehensive plan. Like the city's budget, the Comprehensive Plan is one of the few documents that actually encompasses the entire city by setting vision and policy. It takes longer to put together a comprehensive plan than it does a budget, and it involves every city department along with a tremendous amount of resources and citizen engagement. The Planning Commission, as part of the institution, must always keep the comprehensive plan front and center in everything it does. Absent that, this piece of governance will fall apart.

Mr. Cullen said he has not been feeling very comfortable over the past several months with the direction the Commission has taken and has recognized the need to be more fully grounded in the Comprehensive Plan.

Plans made by parents to send their kids to college, or plans made by people for their retirement years, are not unlike personal comprehensive plans. Any deviations from the plans trigger tradeoffs and consequences. All decisions must be made consciously and purposefully and with an eye on the ultimate outcome.

Mr. Cullen said his observation of the most successful planning commissions as an institution has been that all of the players are functioning in some capacity purposefully and consciously as policy analysts. All recommendations and actions made are carefully considered in light of how well they mesh with the long-term direction of the adopted Comprehensive Plan. The role as policy analyst goes beyond mere discussions. There are many structured ways to approach policy analysis.

Mr. Cullen invited Mr. Matz to present the study session in more of a policy format and to provide some updates about the amendment. He said the presentation would not represent any value judgments or recommendations, and would not purposely lead the Commission down the path toward a recommendation. He said nothing was intended in terms of changing the existing format. He said the presentation would represent a test of a new approach, and if it is of interest to the Commission, exploration can be made of the different options available for how to make it work.

Commissioner Hilhorst said whenever the Commission conducts a public hearing, there should be an associated study session or report from staff ahead of the public hearing. That approach allows for getting the facts and data on the table before the public speaks. Mr. Cullen said there was no intent to change that approach. The study session will be less about engaging in a back and forth about the merits of the case, rather it will be more about allowing the Commission to talk about potential policy implications and to indicate where some additional information might be needed to inform decisions. For instance, it has been stated by the public that they would like

to see the Eastgate Office Park area well treed and the current park-like setting retained. The Commission should first focus on what the Comprehensive Plan says about how to do that in order to frame the discussion around urban design or environmental policies. He asked for the Commission's indulgence to try the new approach to see if it has merit. Commissioner Hilhorst said she would welcome the approach if it allows the Commission time to ask questions and seek more data up front.

Commissioner Hilhorst asked if the need to adhere more closely to the Comprehensive Plan will mean bringing policies to the table as issues are brought before the Commission. She stated that over the last year the Commission has had discussions and made decisions on issues where the Commission was more aligned with the Comprehensive Plan than the staff were. Mr. Cullen allowed that there is much the staff could be doing to help integrate the policy discussion. For example, reports are often shared with the Commission and the issue of consistency with the Comprehensive Plan is something that becomes a reactive thing put at the end, instead of forming the basis for how a project is scoped, how the data is collected, how the findings are presented, and how the recommendations are made. It is not only the Commission that must focus on the Comprehensive Plan, it is all players that make up the institution, specifically the staff, the Commission and the Council. The Commission serves as the gatekeeper for the Comprehensive Plan and must act consciously in that role.

Mr. Matz explained that his presentation would unveil what his task is when proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments are raised. He allowed that the Comprehensive Plan is not a black and white document, and said that in making decisions it is necessary for the staff and the Commission to make informed judgment calls. He asked the Commissioners to keep the Eastgate Office Park amendment in the back of their minds during the presentation.

Mr. Matz noted that on July 28 the City Council accepted the Planning Commission's threshold review recommendation to refer the Eastgate Office Park site-specific CPA (Comprehensive Plan Amendment) to final review. Thus the privately initiated application joins the Council-initiated Vision Zero CPA in the established work program. The first step is to look at the plan as a single entity, which the Growth Management Act demands, and where changes are proposed, it must be understood what the cumulative impacts will be. The SEPA (State Environmental Protection Act) determinations that are part and parcel of CPAs are primarily used in that regard. When the two applications are before the Commission in November for a public hearing, the focus will need to be on the cumulative impact of the two proposed amendments.

The initial application for the Eastgate Office Park CPA involved a specific 14-acre site on which there are four buildings. The Commission recommended expanding the geographic scope to include two additional office facilities, one of which houses veterinarian practice and the other of which is home to an office of the state patrol, for a total of 21 acres. The proposed amendment seeks a change from Office (O) to Office/Limited Business (OLB).

The Commission's threshold review transmittal included two major findings in support of sending the Eastgate Office Park CPA to final review. First was the fact that the site area had been included in the Eastgate land use/transportation study. He said the argument that the potential for the site to redevelopment had been overlooked as time was spent considering all the other sites that are part of the Eastgate study area will be reviewed. Second, the Commission found that the significantly changed conditions criterion had been met. What the Commission suggested was that the things that have been happening in the area related to the Eastgate land use/transportation project warrant further review because of the potential for creating significantly changed conditions. Mr. Matz said one question that must be answered relative to

significantly changed conditions is whether or not something has happened or will happen and the Comprehensive Plan did not anticipate.

Mr. Matz shared with the Commission a map indicating the Eastgate/I-90 project study area. The map clarified the commercial and residential areas. Eastgate has always been one of the city's employment centers. It has developed with low-rise typical office developments with support commercial and ancillary facilities. The Eastgate/I-90 project study focused on the questions of what should happen next and what the communities are wanting to see happen.

The significantly changed conditions discussion will be threaded around the specific zoning designations, including O, OLB, OLB-2, and EG-TOD. There are also additional policies to consider around urban design, environmental considerations, and the interface between park facilities and the neighborhoods.

The process involves looking at the various goal statements of the subarea plans and then walking all the way down to a site-specific Comprehensive Plan amendment. The focus will need to be kept on what the community is saying it wants to see done with properties. The overarching Eastgate subarea plan goal calls for preserving and promoting the accessibility and appearance of residential neighborhoods, local amenities, and business establishments within the subarea. That statement serves as the starting point in deciding what is to be accomplished.

Mr. Matz said the process of making sure the Comprehensive Plan policies are being adhered to works best if the overall whole is broken down into its various components, beginning with defining the problem. The Comprehensive Plan establishes the citywide vision and policy framework by which land use decisions are analyzed. For Comprehensive Plan amendment proposals, the framework involves four specific components: the land use vision, the transportation vision, the economic development vision and the environment vision.

The specific language of the land use vision focuses balancing growth in specific areas and maintaining the health and vitality of established neighborhoods. Generally speaking, it could be said that the "specific areas" in which growth should be balanced are the downtown and Bel-Red, or specific neighborhoods in Eastgate. The health and vitality of established neighborhoods can refer to everything from Newport Hills to downtown or to 30 houses to the east of Crossroads.

The transportation vision focuses on making moving into, around and through Bellevue reliable and predictable. The reference is not just to residents and not just commuters. The issues of reliability and predictability must be specifically defined for particular areas.

The economic development vision seeks clarity about the role that economics play in integrating land use and transportation. That has not always been the approach. It was a huge thing to take land use and transportation and connect the two and then realize that they influence each other. It is now clearly recognized that economics plays a role in integrating those two components, and in fact the Eastgate/I-90 transportation study talks a great deal about the necessary role of economics in Eastgate as one of the city's employment centers.

The environment vision is specific to embracing stewardship by protecting and retaining natural systems and building for a sustainable future. The specific components are part of the overall vision and they highlight how policy can provide guidance and how proposals can be made that help bring the vision to fruition. Natural systems can be defined as individual trees, tree canopies, and greenbelts. Building for a sustainable future takes in everything from standards for

buildings to impervious surfaces.

Commissioner Morisseau noted that the land use vision incorporates the notion of balancing growth in specific areas, while the Growth Management Act calls for balancing growth in urban areas. She asked how the two are tied together. Mr. Matz said the city of Bellevue is defined as a metropolitan center. Together with Seattle, most of the region's growth will occur in those two cities. When the Growth Management Act talks about urban levels of development, it is talking about densities that are able to accommodate the growth. Associated with that concept is the need to have the ability to support the growth in the areas it is put. As a community, Bellevue has chosen not to spread out the growth but rather to concentrate it in specific areas, and to plan for, regulate and build infrastructure to accommodate it in those specific areas. The two specific buckets of growth are housing and employment. For employment, the city has designated employment centers, including the downtown, Bel-Red and Eastgate, and uses its regulatory authority to allow employment to occur at greater levels in those areas. The same is true for housing in that the city has looked at the number of housing units that must be accommodated under the Growth Management Act and has made decisions regarding where they should be located and what they should look like in terms of density. The decision reached was that the majority of the growth should be in attached housing in specific areas, such as the downtown, Bel-Red, Crossroads and Eastgate, where there is infrastructure to support it.

Commissioner Carlson asked where public safety fit into the mix. He noted that without low crime, the overall vision collapses. Mr. Matz suggested that the notion of public safety fits into each of the four specific visions. The Comprehensive Plan looks at public safety as a capital facility. The Capital Facilities Element talks about infrastructure that must be able to support all of the different things the city is trying to accomplish. The basic infrastructure needs are for water, sewer and transportation facilities, but there are also infrastructure needs for park, police and fire facilities specifically related to where the growth occurs.

Commissioner Hilhorst agreed with Commissioner Carlson that in calling out the four-part citywide vision and policy framework, the issues of public safety and infrastructure are left out. She suggested that the core responsibilities of a municipality are fire, safety and infrastructure. They may be implied in the visions, but that is not clear.

Mr. Cullen said those elements are not typically on the radar screen in the plan amendment process, but allowed that it is on the Commission's radar screen. He said concerns raised regarding policy perspectives will be brought back to be factored in.

Commissioner Hilhorst commented that as growth occurs, there is a clear need for transportation and utilities infrastructure to keep up, but there is also a need for police and fire protection infrastructure to also keep up. She said those issues need to be folded into the conversation. Mr. Cullen said that is a poignant illustration of the need to focus discussions and conversations around the Comprehensive Plan. Comments of that sort of telling with regard to what the weighting factors are. There is a clear need to use the Comprehensive Plan as the city grows and changes to be able to address the issues and have Bellevue remain a world-class city.

Commissioner Barksdale suggested that in some senses the city plans for future growth, but in other senses it must respond to the growth the plan outlines. Transportation and utility infrastructure should be spelled out in the plan, but fire and safety infrastructure must respond.

Mr. Matz commented that when Comprehensive Plan amendment applications are submitted, the applicant often cites specific policies in support of the application. The review process, however,



involves taking the wider view. The Eastgate/I-90 land use and transportation project changed the Comprehensive Plan a great deal, and those changes will have bearing on the proposed amendment as well as on the decisions and recommendations made by the staff for presentation to the Commission. The larger framing issues serve as a platform around which the more detailed conversations take place. At the Eastgate level, there are four specific policy themes that come into play: 1) create a coherent image in the I-90 corridor through design that includes elements of naturalistic landscaping, ecological enhancement and urban design; 2) encourage a greater mix of uses in office and commercial areas to provide goods and services in closer proximity to businesses, workers, and neighborhoods; 3) allow more intense office and commercial development in exchange for additional public amenities; and 4) support all transportation modes to improve connectivity and reduce auto trips. The Eastgate subarea plan specifically states that the Eastgate/I-90 land use and transportation project supports changes intended to capture market demand, improve transportation conditions, address concerns of the employment sector as well as the general public, and position the corridor to grow gracefully over time.

Mr. Matz stressed that while the plan calls for growing gracefully over time, everyone will view that statement differently and it will be interpreted in various ways. However, by relying on the different scales and levels, it will be easier to apply the statement. What the CAC suggested be done in the I-90 Office Park area are built into the policy framework. The land use plan for the Eastgate is a visual representation that underlies all of the decisions being made about what can be expected to see happen on the various sites.

Mr. Matz said the task before the Commission is to determine how the visions and strategies apply to the site-specific Comprehensive Plan amendment; to identify perspectives relative to balancing competing priorities; to determine how tradeoffs should be considered; and what additional information is needed in order to aid the Commission in reaching conclusions.

Chair deVadoss said one elephant in the room is the need for more land and facilities the school district will face as growth continues. Mr. Matz said the city works with the school district on those issues. As a service provider, the city must make sure that the district can accommodate the expected growth.

Mr. Cullen urged the Commissioners to submit to staff questions, comments and policy ideas that will be important to consider in moving forward. He shared as an example a policy analysis workbook sheet based on a structured approach. He stressed that he was not suggesting the Commission should follow the steps exactly as laid out. Policy analysis and determining the implications requires a structured approach; it cannot be done casually. There are three different levels of policies in the plan. First are the macro, big-picture policies that outline the vision. In looking for consistency with the plan, it is necessary to ask if any of the macro policies are applicable to the specific plan amendment. The macro policies address things like land uses, diverse and vibrant communities, housing, outstanding community facilities, transportation, economics, the environment, human services, parks, urban design and the arts. Second are the middle-level policies which constitute the objectives, and the micro-level specific policies constitute the tactics to be used. The plan has a rich mix of things that should be captured in some diverse and vibrant conversations.

Commissioner Barksdale commented that policy analysis involves a line of reasoning from the top down. A proper analysis also requires the right amount of evidence, including information from the community.

Commissioner Morisseau asked if it would be possible to utilize vision boards as part of the