

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Special Meeting
Community Focus Group

November 20, 2012
5:30 p.m.

Conference Room 1E-108
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Lee and Councilmembers Chelminiak, Davidson, Stokes, and Wallace

ABSENT: Deputy Mayor Robertson and Councilmember Balducci

Mayor Lee welcomed the Community Focus Group participants, noting that this is the first step in the visioning process to ensure that Bellevue continues to be the best community in which to live, work, and raise a family. Participants will be asked tonight to look into the future to help guide the City Council in making choices about investments and funding sources. With the input received tonight, the Council will continue to develop a collective vision and strategy to ultimately culminate in a Community Summit next year.

Mayor Lee explained that the outcome of this process will help the Council frame its future budget decisions. He said that Bellevue is visionary while realistic, and the City Budget reflects reality while the Council is planning for the future. He said Bellevue is poised for challenges and change, and there are tremendous opportunities if the community wants them and is willing to pay for them. Challenges and priorities include the Downtown Livability and Downtown Transportation Studies, Bel-Red corridor development, the Wilburton special opportunity district, Eastgate planning, neighborhood preservation and redevelopment, transportation infrastructure needs, East Link light rail project, arts and culture, and changing demographics.

Mayor Lee encouraged the focus group participants to look into the future and to be bold and audacious in considering the opportunities.

Mayor Lee noted that the Bellevue School District was not officially represented at the meeting due to a conflict with the Board's schedule.

City Manager Steve Sarkozy asked all of the participants to introduce themselves. He explained that the focus group process is intended to get everyone thinking about where we are and where we might be going as a community. He commented on the challenge for a public organization of defining success without the concept of a financial profit.

Mr. Sarkozy said the City uses a robust set of community indicators and survey mechanisms, including a budget survey and a community survey, which are conducted by an outside organization. The City tracks this information and actively uses performance measures to monitor and improve operations and outcomes. Key indicators include 97 percent of residents reporting that Bellevue is a good to excellent place to live, 99 percent indicating that the overall quality of life meets or exceeds their expectations, 97 percent responding that the quality of services meets or exceeds their expectations, 79 percent indicating that Bellevue is headed in the right direction, and 82 percent responding that they are getting their money's worth for their tax dollar at the local level.

Mr. Sarkozy asked the group to think about whether the City is using the appropriate indicators and whether there are other questions and issues that the City should be addressing. Key issues identified by the community are traffic, the need for road improvements, the ability to reduce congestion, affordable housing, property values, jobs, economic development, emergency preparedness and planning, community policing, and assisting low income residents.

Mr. Sarkozy commented on the challenge of meeting the community's needs, especially during the downturn in the economy in recent years. The City responded by resetting the budget and eliminating approximately \$30 million and 100 employees from the budget. Despite the budget cuts and adjustments, the City has preserved the financial principles that have been in place for a number of years.

Mr. Sarkozy said the proposed budget does not include any tax increases. Fees associated with enterprise accounts (e.g., water, sewer, development services) have been increased to keep pace with increased costs, however. Only 12.9 percent of Bellevue residents' property tax bills go to the City, and Bellevue has one of the lowest property tax rates in the state. The local Business and Occupation tax is below the average for cities that apply the B&O tax, and utility taxes are below the average as well. The City's primary revenues are property, sales taxes, utility, and B&O taxes. The City has maintained its reserves and triple-A bond rating.

Mr. Sarkozy said the City looks for ways to increase community feedback and involvement on an ongoing basis. Three public hearings are held before adoption of the budget, resident surveys are conducted, and citizens have the opportunity to comment before the Council during every meeting.

The participants were broken into four groups and asked to respond to the following three questions:

- What makes Bellevue a special place for you today?
- What would make Bellevue a special place in the future? 5 years? 10 years? 25 years? 50 years?
- What does the City need to do, beginning now, and how would we achieve the vision?

Mr. Sarkozy noted that a City staff person was assigned to each table to help facilitate the discussion and to take notes.

The following feedback was provided by the participants.

Table 1

- Brian Brand
- Alaric Bien
- Tom Sulewski
- Craig Foreman
- John Su

Question 1: What makes Bellevue a special place for you today?

- Natural environment
- Proximity to the region
- Preserving greenbelts
 - A weakness is the lack of a waterfront presence.
- Education system
- Diversity
 - Work on engaging the community's diversity.
- Knowledge workers
- Better place to do business than Seattle.
- Clean and safe
- Shopping
- Low tax rates
- Small ethnic retail places
- Downtown living
- Company headquarters
- Diverse residential living.

Question 2: What would make Bellevue a special place in the future? 5 years? 10 years? 25 years? 50 years?

- If we dream big, how will we pay for it?
 - Leverage bonding capacity with appropriate priorities.
- Need for affordable housing, especially in the downtown.
 - Adopt Washington state tax incentive program.
- Need to follow through on existing plans.
- Socio-economic diversity
- Increase in transit service
 - East Link
 - Buses
- Non-motorized enhancements
- Parking zoning/ratio policy
- Need more diversity in downtown businesses (i.e., too much reliance on High Tech?).

- Meydenbauer Park
- Lake-to-Lake connection to Lake Sammamish
- Pedestrian only road (Pedestrian corridor)
 - Covered walkways
- Bicycle routes, separated from traffic.
- More midblock connectors in downtown.
- Arena
- School in downtown
- Tateuchi Performing Arts Center
- Public-private partnerships or other innovative way to implement big ideas.
 - Mindset change
- Build-Operate-Transfer incentives for infrastructure development.
- Existing Auto Row
- Redevelop
- Transit oriented development (TOD)
- Linkage across freeway from Downtown.
- Downtown Circulator.

Question 3: What do we need to do, beginning now, and how would we get there?

- Complete Downtown Livability Initiative and Mobility and Infrastructure Initiative Plans.
- Parking policy
- Economic Development Plan
 - Collaborative process
 - Make things happen.

Table 2

- Jim Hebert
- Joe Rosmann
- Ernesto Simas
- Scott Lampe
- Irene Plenefisch

Question 1: What makes Bellevue a special place for you today?

- Chose to be here; could have been anywhere in Puget Sound.
- Bellevue is a collection of small villages.
- Unique, walkable neighborhoods
- Outstanding education base
- Amazing diversity
- Strong technology/IT base
- Not quite so liberal
- Entrepreneurism
- New metric: Retail capture ratio

- Convergence of location here:
 - Retail and commercial office market
 - Unique quality of Bellevue
 - Keeps taxes down and attracts brightest.
- A lot of DNA gets created and transferred here.
- Diversity
- Sense of human values here; strong sense of caring and volunteering.
- Education Program
 - (e.g. PRISM program, International School)
- Magnet effect
 - Bellevue became “in-place”
- Passion for continuous improvement and energy.
- A great place for geeks; not a sense of arrogance.
- Missing: World-class education institution.
- Missing: Multi-modal transportation system.
- Collaborative spirit of “making it work.”
- Diversity, schools, transit, retail important to recruiting workers.
- Bellevue could/should be more of a regional leader.
- Bellevue attracts top talent.
- Downtown core = A destination.

Question 2: What would make Bellevue a special place in the future? 5 years? 10 years? 25 years? 50 years?

- Address aging demographic/attract younger cohort/families.
- Re-energize informal social institutions within neighborhood “villages” – especially for younger cohort.
- Create more education opportunities.
- World-class education/research institution (including liberal arts).
- We have end-points/attractions. Need to develop more “people mobility.”
 - Kobe, Japan
 - Out-of-box thinking
 - Do our own or partnership for Eastside transit system?
 - Sync up with more Eastside collaboration to affect regional priorities and consolidated transportation.
- Need to think more about two to four spending priorities that will really affect our future 50 years from now:
 - Higher education with Eastside clout
 - Mobility with Eastside clout
 - Community renewed
 - Cultivate arts (e.g., Youth Symphony growth); great cities have great art.
- City with strong role in health and wellness (e.g., education and facilities, aquatics, clinics such as Bastyr).
- Be a Business Incubator city (might focus on technology/the sciences).

- Stadium
- Protect intellectual property.

Question 3: What do we need to do, beginning now, and how would we get there?

- Create an economic council.
- Develop Eastside collaboration on education.
- Develop Eastside collaboration on transportation .
- Work now to land higher education institution in Bellevue.
- Help with interim financing of Tateuchi Performing Arts Center – City bonding.
- Challenge financial institutions to take stronger role in housing redevelopment.

Table 3

- Dave Miniken
- Faith Roland
- Lincoln Vander Veen
- Ralph Rowland
- Jim Hill
- Renay Bennett

Question 1: What makes Bellevue a special place for you today?

- Downtown is a vibrant exciting place.
- Diversity – richness of community
- A destination (Snowflake Lane, holiday events); overall amenities.
- Safe and family friendly, feel secure.
- Invested in infrastructure
 - Quality of life (i.e., parks, streets, schools).
- A wide range of City services.
- Schools are the first thing many workers want to know about; educational atmosphere is uniquely good.
- Openness to working with faith community to serve community
- Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA)/Chamber of Commerce involvement in community/City.
- Quality schools, faith community, business environment.
 - Create pride.
 - People proud to be part of Bellevue.

Question 2: What would make Bellevue a special place in the future? 5 years? 10 years? 25 years? 50 years?

- Need to leverage every dollar, use other people's money, be more efficient.
- Stable Neighborhoods
 - Can't have slums on edge of Downtown; would result in downward spiral.

- Need to know costs of maintenance to make informed decisions.
- Proactively plan around light rail stations.
- Plan for growth.
- Do we have the schools, fire, police, housing to meet the growth?
- Codes are not ready for future growth; avoid the “death spiral.”
- Transportation issues of serving and supporting growth.
- Need to keep total taxes per capita manageable.
- Potential to develop compassionate side of community; ability to tackle issues like homelessness.
- Will leverage/celebrate diversity.
- Celebrate naturalization ceremony.
 - Opportunity to be a community event.
- Get older/stay here.
 - Affordability question
 - Transportation to support them? Varies across City.
- Infrastructure for mobility is essential.
- Headquarters of the Eastside
 - Today serving 600,000 – and will grow
 - On path to stay the leader.
 - Need to keep raising the bar.
- Need attractions
 - Places to take visitors (e.g., waterfront, or wineries in Woodinville as an example).
 - Need to use care in planning for type and location.
- Love to have an arena.
- Evening population adds to Downtown’s feeling of security.
- Aquatic center proposal will come back to serve city and region.
- Caveat to all projects/amenities: Appropriately sited and mitigated, designed to enhance community without adverse impacts.

Question 3: What do we need to do, beginning now, and how would we get there?

- Build infrastructure and get people to/from Bellevue.
(Only four ways to get here, all are challenged.)
- Infrastructure always needs to be on table.
(The broad concept of infrastructure which includes services.)
- Can revenue for Capital Investment Program (CIP) be more stable?
(Will pay taxes if receive value.)
- Want to know what we are paying for and that dollars are used effectively.
- Need public education of what things cost to enable the ability to be informed and make educated decisions.
- Need healthy, respectful dialogue at Council/City.
- Need to have an avenue to speak freely and be comfortable to disagree.
- Leadership makes progress.
- Accountable

- Approachable, willingness to partner/work together.
- Transparency
- The CIP needs to get bigger to support infrastructure investment (but not necessarily by increasing taxes).
- Stability of city is critical.
 - Neighborhoods, businesses, rules, taxes, etc.

Table 4

- Charles Lu
- Arjun Dave
- Ming Zhang
- Valentina Kiselev
- Earl Overstreet
- Paula Boyum

Question 1: What makes Bellevue a special place for you today?

- City government/administration is collaborative and listens closely.
- Local issues – big picture
- Ethnic/cultural recognition
- Manage budget with no tax increase.
- Diversity
- Public schools – high schools to Bellevue College to University of Washington.
- Open space – environmental stewardship
- High tech
- Open access.

Question 2: What would make Bellevue a special place in the future? 5 years? 10 years? 25 years? 50 years?

5 years/10 years:

- Cultural recognition and enhanced cultural competence.
- Public education
 - More structure
 - Move start time to 8AM/9AM.
- Health care system changes
 - Preventative medicine
 - Education
 - Partnerships
- We have a strong economic base, but need:
 - Maintain
 - Livable
 - Sustainable with regard to environment
- A Downtown that is more walkable.

- Clear vision for growth of the City.
- Choice: Bedroom community vs. Regional driver.
 - Continue higher density in Downtown.
 - Single family in current areas.

5 to 50 years:

- Preserve high tech.
- Create jobs.
- Encourage growth.
- Any increase in population requires investment in sustainability.
- At local level, encourage new methods of transportation (i.e., electric cars).
- Look at changing demographics.
 - People in need
 - Transit
 - Lower cost of housing
 - Make sure to address everyone in the community.
- Changing demographics creates opportunities for minorities, women.
- Connectivity – leader in high speed.
- Public safety – need safety structure.
- Connectivity of neighborhoods
 - Transportation modes
 - Alternatives
 - Green cars
- Urban without impacting neighborhoods.
- Establishment of a long-term university.

25 to 50 years

- Water issues

Question 3: What do we need to do, beginning now, and how would we get there?

- Capital investments in roads, fiber, education.
- Public/private collaboration
- Preparing for new jobs:
 - Skills development – high school
 - Retraining programs
- Partnerships with other counties
- Investments in education, economic development
- Take advantage of European, Asian, foreign resources and talent.
- Take advantage of federal grants.
- Enhance public education.
 - After-school programs
- City Council needs to develop a vision/strategic plan.
 - Where are we going?

- What do we want to be in 5-10 years?

City Manager Sarkozy thanked everyone for agreeing to participate in this process. He said the input would be compiled and distributed to the group, and he encouraged everyone to continue to think about these issues. The City will continue to work to refine the vision.

Mayor Lee thanked everyone for participating. He thanked the two youth participants for their impressive contributions and perspectives. He noted that this is the beginning of the process and discussions will continue. He acknowledged that the Council has wrestled with a number of challenging issues in the past, but he believes the Council is now on the same page with regard to transportation, the budget, and other ongoing priorities.

The meeting ended at approximately 9:00 p.m.

Myrna L. Basich, MMC
City Clerk

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