

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES

June 24, 2015  
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Morisseau

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

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:37 p.m. by Chair Laing who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Morisseau who was excused.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Andrew Miller spoke representing the ownership interest for the property at the northwest corner of Main Street and 112th Avenue NE, the former site of the Lexus dealership. The site is 200 yards north of where the new East Main light rail station will be located. He voiced concern that even though light rail is coming to the city, true transit-oriented development principles are not being implemented. The large investment of public funds should include a good return. Station area planning starts with identifying the walkshed, or the properties within the distance people are willing to walk to and from the station. The success of a station will be measured in ridership and in order to be successful the walkshed area will need to include density and an intensity of uses that will drive light rail ridership. Walkshed, ridership, density and station success are terms no one seems to be using. The Downtown Livability Initiative was a great idea but it put in place some blinders that led to some zoning recommendations that are not quite appropriate. A purposeful decision was made not to look south of Main Street where the light rail station will be located, so the Downtown Livability Initiative recommendation for the corner of Main Street and 112th Avenue NE was ~~to for~~ continued lower density and heights. The East Main station area planning CAC has been handed a study area that does not include anything north of Main Street in deference to the Downtown Livability Initiative work. Therefore the Downtown Livability Initiative did not consider the implications of the light rail station, and the station area planning process is not considering the implications of the full walkshed. The owner

of the property on the northwest corner of Main Street and 112th Avenue NE is proposing additional height and FAR. In fact, allowing additional height and FAR on all three corners of the intersection could be accomplished while retaining the wedding cake zoning approach that respects Surrey Downs. The intersection is in fact a gateway, both into the city and the East Main district. It is also directly in the middle of the walkshed for the East Main station. Something special should happen there, but nothing will unless a group like the Planning Commission decides to take on the issue holistically. With additional height and FAR the property owner could work hand in hand with Wig Properties, owners of the Red Lion site, to make the walkshed a place where people will want to be, in turn making the East Main station successful.

Commissioner Walter asked how much more height and FAR is desired by the property owner. Mr. Miller said of the four corners to the intersection, one will be developed as a park. The Perimeter Districts A and B are in play there and with the park being developed on the south side of Main Street it will become Perimeter A and will serve as the buffer, allowing things to shift a little bit. The area on the northeast corner is currently recommended to go to an FAR of 5.0 and a height of about 200 feet. The Red Lion site would be well served with the same height and FAR. The northwest corner property is split by two perimeter zones, one with an FAR of 3.5 and one with an FAR of 5.0; it should all be 5.0. A high FAR without additional height cannot be used in its entirety. A maximum height of about 200 feet should be given to the site.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Hilhorst, Comprehensive Planning Manager Paul Inghram said the site in question is within the Downtown Livability Initiative area. As the Commission works through the Downtown Livability Initiative issues, staff will keep the Commission informed as to the work going on by the East Main station area planning CAC to make it easier to see how things match up.

Commissioner Carlson asked what building height is currently allowed for the northwest corner property. Mr. Miller said 55 feet is allowed in Perimeter A and 90 feet is allowed in Perimeter B. The recommendation of the Downtown Livability Initiative CAC was to go to 70 feet in Perimeter A and to leave height in Perimeter B unchanged. The building on the property is three stories and about 36 feet tall; the 70 feet would allow for one additional floor. Perimeter B is a throwaway zone in the sense that above a certain height it is necessary to switch from wood frame construction to concrete, but concrete buildings do not pencil out economically until they are taller than 90 feet.

Mr. Bill Herman, a resident of Bellevue Towers, suggested the Commission as it moves ahead with the issue of downtown livability should keep in mind all the stakeholders and the impacts on current residents and employees. Growth equals traffic and according to a recent *Seattle Times* article congestion in the region has increased 52 percent since 2010. It is bad and getting worse. The livability CAC was charged with addressing issues the original plan could not foresee. Their recommendation includes the notion of equalization and increasing the FAR in the Downtown-Mixed Use district to 5.0. To some extent it makes sense to increase height and density near the light rail station as a way of addressing growth through maximizing the use of light rail. The equalization cure, however, could be worse than the disease in terms of impacts. The city should encourage people to live where they work in the downtown, an approach that would require some units to be affordable. Currently less than one percent of the people who work in the downtown actually live in the downtown, and there are a variety of reasons for that. The argument has been made that with more height and FAR the resulting buildings will be taller and skinnier, but there is nothing in the plan that dictates skinnier and the buildings could simply

be taller. Much has been said about open space in association with taller and skinnier towers, but nothing has been said about podiums. The desired open space is at ground level.

Chair Laing clarified that there is no recommendation from the Downtown Livability Initiative CAC for higher heights. There is a recommendation for the city to conduct a study. It is ~~too~~ ~~bad~~ unfortunate that so many downtown residents did not feel sufficiently engaged in the process and hopefully as things move ahead that population will participate and help to inform the outcome. There is a lot of process left and any actual recommendation to the City Council will be developed by the Commission.

Mr. Patrick Bannon, president of the Bellevue Downtown Association, said he served as a member of the Downtown Livability Initiative CAC. He said the BDA supports a careful evaluation of the recommendations of the CAC. The current downtown code has been in place for some 30 years and the opportunity is at hand to carefully evaluate what is working and what is not working and thoughtfully propose improvements. The BDA will engage with the Commission throughout the process that hopefully will put the downtown on a firm footing going forward. The downtown residential community alone has grown by some 250 percent since 2005 and stands at close to 12,000. Employment is continuing to grow as well. Building design and the amenities offered in the downtown play an essential role in the health and vibrancy of the city's economy.

Commissioner Carlson asked what portion of downtown households have children. Mr. Bannon said the estimates show there are some 800 school-aged children living in the downtown.

#### 4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

#### 5. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCILS, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None

#### 6. STAFF REPORTS

Mr. Inghram said the Council is continuing to make progress relative to the Comprehensive Plan update. Most recently they have focused on some of the remaining urban design and utilities issues. The Council is hopeful it will be able to finish its review of the Comprehensive Plan at its meeting on July 6.

#### 7. DRAFT MINUTES REVIEW

##### A. March 25, 2015

Commissioner Hilhorst called attention to the last two paragraphs on page 14 of the minutes and asked staff to check the recording to see if something was missing between the discussion of Policy EN-X3 and the Parks and Community Services Board recommendation for a new policy.

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

##### B. April 22, 2015

A motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Hilhorst. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Carlson and it carried without dissent; Chair Laing abstained from voting.

C. June 10, 2015

Commissioner Hilhorst called attention ~~the first sentence of the first paragraph to a correction on page 5 of the minutes.~~ and noted that "Mr. Hamlin said praised..." should read "Mr. Hamlin praised...."

Commissioner deVadoss ~~and questioned the use of the word "noncontroversial" in the fourth paragraph on page 8 of the minutes.~~ Chair Laing ~~also identified corrections~~ said he likely used the word but agreed the word should be stricken.

Chair Laing noted that Commissioner Morisseau should be shown on the first page as having been absent from the meeting, and that Councilmember Stokes should not be included in the list of Commissioners present.

A motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Commissioner Carlson. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hilhorst and it carried unanimously.

8. STUDY SESSION

A. Downtown Livability

~~Senior Planner~~ Strategic Planning Manager Emil King reminded the Commission that the work under way is focused on the Land Use Code for the downtown. The process will include circling a review of the downtown subarea plan and the option of making changes to the policies. The recommendations of Downtown Livability Initiative CAC, however, are primarily focused on the Land Use Code. The review of the subarea plan will include the work accomplished through the Downtown Transportation Plan update process.

The Downtown Livability Initiative CAC process included a methodical review and critique of what about the downtown code is working, where there is room for improvement, and what things are just not working. The two-year process included a great deal of public outreach and the interested parties list has more than 700 people on it. The process included walking tours, open houses and focus groups as part of the outreach effort. When the community check-in is reviewed, additional ideas provided by the public about how they would like to stay informed will be talked about.

The final report of the CAC is broken down into topical areas, the same ones the CAC reviewed. Ultimately some of them will be combined in the code and design guidelines to conform to the standard format. At the direction of the Council, a date will be set in the fall for a joint Council/Commission discussion centered on the incentive system for the downtown.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner deVadoss, Mr. King said in walking through the recommendations of the CAC he would take care to identify which are code related and which are not.

Mr. King pointed out that the CAC's final report incorporates the principles established by the Council. The same principles will apply to the work of the Commission along with the new direction given by the Council in May. He said the Commission is tasked with focusing on the code-related recommendations. Any modifications to height and form will need to result in better urban design outcomes after considering all potential impacts.

The CAC recommended additional building height in the core part of the downtown but no additional density. With regard to the Perimeter A district, which is the first 150 feet around the north, south and west edges of the downtown-, the CAC recommended an examination of increasing building heights to 70 feet from the current 55 feet. The Council talked about the issue at length and concluded that any changes made to the district will need to improve the interface from the perspective of the adjoining residential neighborhoods.

Councilmember Wallace made a specific request asking the Commission to look at potential design guidance allowing banks and financial institutions to fall under the heading of what is called pedestrian-oriented frontage. Historically such institutions have had regular banking hours, a single entrance for security reasons, and a less-than-lively storefront. Councilmember Wallace noted that there are design features that could make the institutions more enlivened as their operations methods and hours change. ~~Senior Planner~~Community Development Manager Patti Wilma added that percentage of a business with a pedestrian-oriented frontage (POF) is exempted from the FAR calculation. In some areas, a percentage of POF is required.

Mr. King said the Council provided direction on two elements relating to parking. First, they want to see fast-tracked a parking amendment related to Old Bellevue, and to that end staff is already at work. The CAC recommended conducting a comprehensive parking study for the downtown and the Council directed that it be included as a planning initiative on the work program.

Mayor Balducci and other Councilmembers highlighted the need for a robust public engagement process, including walking tours, open houses and community check-ins.

Commissioner Hilhorst asked if any of the data generated by past downtown parking studies can be built on. Ms. Wilma said in putting together a presentation for the Council staff will identify the extent of studies done in the past and will make a suggestion as to whether or not a consultant can put them all together and fill in the gaps, or if an entirely new parking study is needed. The study done in 2010 or 2012 focused on commuter parking only; it did not include retail or residential.

Commissioner Walter commented that there will be a lot of land use planning work associated with updating the downtown area codes. It would seem logical to have the parking information in hand as the Commission works through the recommendations of the CAC.

Chair Laing clarified that there was a lot of concern on the part of the CAC regarding residential parking requirements for multifamily. Currently the requirement is for one parking space per unit for an apartment or condominium, and the suggestion has been made by some developers that the ratio could be reduced given that there are an increasing number of residents who choose not to own a car. One of the recommendations from the CAC was to look at what the actual residential parking experience is in Bellevue before acting to lower the parking requirements. The CAC also heard from employers that office environments are changing with the result that in some office spaces there are actually fewer employees per floor. There are questions about what

the parking ratios should actually be. Structured parking is expensive to provide and developers do not want to be told they have to build parking that will not get used. At the same time, the CAC expressed concerns about not having enough parking. There are some issues the Transportation Commission has taken up, including street parking and identifying areas where it can be added and where it cannot be added. There have been a lot of parking studies conducted in Bellevue, some dating back to the late 70s. Most of them highlight the need for public parking garages in the downtown. With regard to light rail, the CAC recognized it is coming and will trigger some changes in the way people commute. However, the CAC felt strongly that parking requirements should be not adopted based on the assumption that light rail will reduce the need. Mr. King said staff will scope out what a new parking study would entail, what it would rely on, what new information is needed, and what it would take to do it.

Mr. King informed the Commission that the first community check-in saw about 50 people attend. It was set up as an open house during which the public could talk to staff about different issues. That was followed by a half-hour presentation on what is in the final report from the CAC and some additional work staff will be doing. Mayor Balducci was present and she added a few introductory comments regarding the Council's thoughts. The presentation was followed by an open question and answer period. The questions raised addressed what the city can do to encourage better design; whether or not continued growth a good idea; the fact that currently the residential being developed is nearly all apartments rather than condominiums; and what the city or developers can do to deal with localized transportation issues. There were also questions asked about the standards applied to hotels, and how to better reach the younger generation living in the downtown.

Mr. King said the final report will include answers given to questions such as what livability means to downtown residents; what is most needed in the downtown; why these chose to live in the downtown; what additional analysis should be done; and ideas for public outreach. Generally people continue to be interested in online information; the importance of having physical public meetings at City Hall; receiving newsletter updates; and talking to people directly at events in the downtown.

Ms. Wilma said during the CAC process a consultant was brought onboard to conduct a full inventory of the open spaces in the downtown, including some interesting sociological assessments of how the spaces are used. The CAC and the public commented that much of what is called open space in the downtown in fact feels private or is hidden away. The recommendations of the CAC include expressing open space by neighborhood and requiring superblocs to be broken up through the use of midblock connections integrated into individual development proposals. One non-code recommendation included looking at the concept of placing a lid over I-405 and develop it with something like a park providing pedestrian and bicycle access; and exploring methods for paying for downtown open space.

The CAC pointed out that there is no open space in the Northwest Village area where QFC is located and recommended finding some. Small plazas with active edges were highlighted as being desirable but not the highest priority. Pea patch community gardens were also highlighted as desirable open space elements along with outdoor pet areas.

Chair Laing clarified that open space needs and elements were identified through a variety of means. The CAC did not, however, recommend coming up with a system that would result in each of the identified needs in each district being addressed.

With regard to the pedestrian corridor, Ms. Wilma said the CAC's code-related recommendations included looking at extending the corridor to the east to 112th Avenue NE to integrate the civic district; providing as much weather protection elements as practicable; looking for ways to activate the corridor with festivals, art and music; looking for opportunities to provide landscaping; and looking for ways to accommodate bicycle and other wheeled users along with pedestrians. The non code-related recommendations included investing in key segments of the corridor, which is primarily private property; encouraging more lighting and wayfinding; looking for partnerships; identify funding to complete the grand connection lid over I-405; and considering a new identity for the corridor by naming it.

Commissioner Carlson asked if the grand connection concept an alternative to or a supplement to a park element spanning I-405. Mr. King said it most likely would be an alternative to the park. Some analysis and conceptual design work has been done on extending NE 6th Street along with a wide pedestrian/bicycle path. A grand connection that included park open space and pedestrian/bicycle connectivity would serve the same purpose, and it would be unlikely to see both connections created.

Ms. Wilma said the grand connection would be more than just a lid over I-405. It is in the early stages of discussion and would ultimately connect Meydenbauer Bay to the Eastside rail corridor, with the pedestrian corridor serving as a key link in the middle. Mr. King pointed out that the Council identified it as a priority at its most recent retreat.

Ms. Wilma said the design guidelines will be approached in three ways: making it more readable by getting away from obtuse language; getting more robust with the criteria for the public realm in terms of sidewalks, landscaping, building podiums, pedestrian circulation, building materials, façade treatments, rooftop mechanical equipment screening, and public views from public places; and transitions to adjacent neighborhoods. The CAC recommended the Commission consider opportunities for flexibility in the guidelines and standards to allow for creativity.

Commissioner deVadoss asked if the CAC looked at the potential of using rooftops as open green spaces. Ms. Wilma said the issue was raised by various stakeholders and ended up on the amenities list as something to consider. The challenge is in assessing the public benefit of something that would ~~in fact be quite a private space~~. A green roof can be aesthetically pleasing and a good screening mechanism.

Commissioner Carlson said green roofs and other creative green landscaping can beautify urban areas and should be encouraged. Commissioner Barksdale commented that there are some examples in Seattle of gardens and pet areas on rooftops.

Mr. Inghram said Seattle has a per-unit outdoor/open space requirement. Ms. Wilma said Bellevue does not.

Ms. Wilma said the building/sidewalk relationship guidelines in the current code could use some remodeling. The guidelines relate to how the ground plane and the building wall create a place. There is a hierarchy relating to the degree to which streets are pedestrian oriented, and thirty years ago it was not foreseen that some of the streets would become as heavily residential as they have and there is a clear need to make sure they are pedestrian friendly. Guidelines are needed to address how future midblock connections might be developed and relate to the surrounding buildings. The guidelines also need to address the issue of public views, transitions, walkability and sidewalk widths.

Mr. King said the amenity incentive system dates back to the original downtown code. It currently has 23 items on it, items that development projects can incorporate to receive height and density bonuses. The Commissioners were encouraged to review the section in the code audit that deals with the amenity system to gain a better understanding of what amenities have been historically pursued. It was noted that of the 33 most recent projects, 30 included underground parking, took credit for it, and gained additional height and density as a result; and 28 pursued pedestrian-oriented frontage. The amenities of providing space for non-profits, providing public restrooms, and providing childcare services have never been pursued. The CAC spent a lot of time seeking public comment on the current system and rather than coming up with a revised amenity system acknowledged the need to have a policy debate and the need to conduct some economic modeling, which will be the focus of the joint session between the Council and the Commission.

Commissioner Hilhorst asked why the childcare amenity has never been pursued. Chair Laing said his hypothesis was that incentives based on uses that could change over time, as opposed to something physical like under building parking or a plaza, are problematic. Should a childcare operation in a space provided by a developer in exchange for bonus height or density fail, the developer could not allow anything to locate in that space other than another daycare. If for whatever reason a daycare simply will not work in that space, the space would need to remain vacant.

Mr. Inghram pointed out that there are daycare facilities located in buildings in the downtown, but none of them came about as a result of the amenity system.

Mr. King said the joint session with the Council will focus on a number of topics, including the legal framework associated with incentive systems; alternative approaches for revising the amenity system; and alternative approaches for having the correct amenities in a growing urban center outside of an incentive system. The CAC had a good discussion about focusing in on those amenities that truly help with the livability of the downtown and turning away from offering bonuses for amenities developers will provide anyway. The CAC was inclined to allow for flexibility to encourage good design, and agreed that the importance of or need for different amenities might vary by neighborhood.

Commissioner deVadoss said there is a growing trend worldwide around the notion of smart cities. He said he was surprised to see nothing included around how to think about the downtown in that context. The idea is to use technology to make cities more livable and the elements relevant to Bellevue should be explored.

Mr. King said several potential new amenities were identified by the CAC. They included signature streets, third places/gathering spaces, upper level plazas, landmark tree preservation, activated rooftops, affordable housing, space in which to create art, iconic features, and pedestrian bridges.

## 9. OTHER BUSINESS

A motion to nominate Commissioner Hilhorst to serve as chair was made by Commissioner Carlson. The motion was seconded by Commissioner deVadoss. Absent additional nominations, the motion carried unanimously.



Chair Laing handed the gavel to new Chair Hilhorst and took a moment to say it had been a pleasure to serve as chair of the Commission. Chair Hilhorst thanked Commissioner Laing for his leadership over the past year.

A motion to nominate Commissioner ~~Laing~~ deVadoss to serve as vice chair was made by Commissioner Laing. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Carlson. Absent additional nominations, the motion carried unanimously.

10. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Bill Herman, a resident of Bellevue Towers, commented that Bellevue's amenity system is one of the city's strengths. The CAC focused on the tradeoff of creating value for more amenities. He said whether or not more is better needs to be discussed along with the need for extraordinary amenities that will actually increase livability.

11. NEXT PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

Chair Hilhorst said the next Commission meeting would occur on July 8.

12. ADJOURN

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Laing. The motion was seconded by Commissioner deVadoss and it carried unanimously.

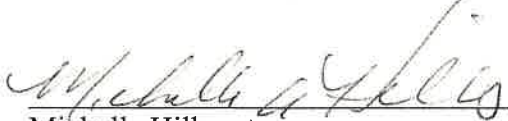
Chair Hilhorst adjourned the meeting at 8:36 p.m.



Michael Kattermann  
Staff to the Planning Commission

9-10-2015

Date



Michelle Hilhorst  
Chair of the Planning Commission

9/9/15

Date

\* Approved as corrected, September 9, 2015

