

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

East Main Station Area Comprehensive Plan Amendment – Transit-Oriented Development & Vision

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Community Development

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL**DIRECTION**

Comprehensive Plan Amendments for East Main station area were deferred by City Council in December 2018. This was done to better understand the proposed substantial changes that deviate from the original CAC Vision for this area. At Council's direction, this is the first of two study sessions to discuss the proposed East Main Transit Oriented District comprehensive plan amendment. The second study session will be held February 19.

RECOMMENDATION

This study session is just one in a series of study sessions that will provide additional information and the opportunity to discuss options for future Council action. No action or recommendation is expected or required at this session.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

The City of Bellevue has planned for, and sought vibrant, active, and inclusive mixed-use development around each station served by the new East Link Sound Transit Corridor. The increased entitlements around each station area are specifically intended to realize a transit centric development pattern that supports active and vibrant ground (street) level activity and public interaction.

The Council appointed the East Main Citizen Advisory Council (CAC) in April 2014. The CAC worked on the East Main Station Area Plan from August 2014 to June 2016. The Council accepted the CAC's report in August 2016.

This desired development is not only intended to set a positive precedent for other station areas, but also help address several urgent growth-related issues including an appropriate jobs-housing balance (including affordability), healthy neighborhoods, and community space. This vision for the East Main Station Area was developed and vetted over a 24-month period with wide spread support.

Timeline

In April 2013, Sound Transit and the City agreed to the East Link light rail alignment. In May 2013, the City Council approved the station area planning work program, which included the East Main Station Area Plan.

In December 2017, Council initiated a comprehensive plan amendment and land use code amendment along with guiding principles for the East Main Station Area Development Plan (Attachment A). The

East Main plan amendment was included in the 2018 work plan as a publicly initiated amendment.

The Planning Commission held six study sessions (January 10, February 28, March 28, May 16, July 11 and September 26), two walking tours (February 9, March 31), two open houses (February 14, September 5) and one public hearing (November 7). The Planning Commission's recommendation to City Council can be seen in Attachment B.

Deferral & Study Sessions

The City Council deferred action on the East Main Transit Oriented Development (TOD) District Comprehensive Plan Amendment on December 10, 2018. During that deferral Council asked planning staff to organize two to three study sessions to help better understand the differences between the CAC Vision (and its related guiding City Council Principles), and the Planning Commission's recommendations. The Council Guiding Principles cover aspects that apply to both the CPA (Comprehensive Plan Amendment) and LUCA (Land Use and Code Amendment) processes. Council also asked for help understanding the consequences of any shift in direction away from the CAC Vision and for staff guidance to distinguish issues appropriate for the CPA and the LUCA process respectively.

The City Council has two study sessions scheduled, January 22 and February 19. This memo lays out the intent and issues covered in the first of these study sessions.

The specific focus of this session is to:

1. Briefly revisit the CAC Vision and Council Principles, its process, and timeline.
2. Explain in detail why the CAC Vision is fundamentally different from the proposed amendments endorsed by the Planning Commission.
3. Provide an early indication (as a preamble to the second Study Session) on what amendments are most appropriate in a Comprehensive Plan Amendment and what issues and items are more appropriately reviewed as part of a LUCA process.

The purpose of this first study session is two-fold. First to ask the Council to consider and ultimately decide if the CAC Vision and Council Principles are still valid, and if the Planning Commission proposed amendments meet their full intent. Second to begin the process to identify policy level changes that are compatible with a Comprehensive Plan Amendment and list the specific items of concern that are best addressed in the City's LUCA process.

The second study session will focus specifically on refining the above two lists. Namely, what can be folded into a CPA, and a list of what will be addressed in the subsequent LUCA review process.

Relevant extracts for this study session

The CAC's Vision for the East Main Station Area

"In 2035, the East Main district is a lively transit-oriented neighborhood that provides a graceful transition from Downtown to the surrounding neighborhoods. Building heights decrease from taller buildings in and near Downtown and the I-405 corridor to lower-scale buildings near the residential neighborhoods. Within the district, a variety of housing choices, offices, hotels and neighborhood-scale commercial services serve as a basis for a vibrant, livable and attractive neighborhood. New

development incorporates open space and landscaping, helping to soften edges, integrate the natural and built environment and provide gathering places.

Small walkable blocks and connected pathways allow people to move easily between the light rail station and destinations in and around the district. Along the arterials that form the edge of the district, wide sidewalks, abundant landscaping and pedestrian oriented development create a safe and attractive environment. The transportation system has been carefully managed to ensure mobility, safety and to protect the residential neighborhood from negative traffic impacts.”

The full text of the CAC Vision as embodied in the Bellevue East Main Station Area Plan is included in Attachment C.

The Planning Commission’s recommendations reflect specific stakeholder requests. Staff recommends that many of these regulatory requests are best discussed in the LUCA process, and not as part of a CPA as they do not constitute policy level changes. To make such changes in the Comprehensive Plan would have larger City-wide implications. Accordingly, this study session will seek to highlight the following issues (identified in the Planning Commission Recommended Policy, Nov 7, 2018, Public Hearing Resolution & Attachment) as appropriate for the CPA.

CPA relevant issues

- A PC recommendation to substitute “public” pedestrian system with “publicly accessible”. (*PC Recommendation: article 9, page 3*).
This implies private and controlled access to the public realm. (CAC Vision pages 15, 26 & 47)
- A location specific request for a skybridge (*PC Recommendation: article 11, page 3*)
A CPA change to existing skybridge policy would alter the City’s expectation of demonstrated public benefit as a basis. (Downtown Sub Area Plan S-DT-80, page 97, narrative page 117).
- Removal of “public” streets (*PC Recommendation: article 13, page 3*)
Public streets do not reduce buildable entitlement on adjacent blocks. They are critical to the vibrant active street life and the pedestrian quality asked for in the CAC Vision. (CAC Vision page 12). They are also essential to serve transportation needs and utilities systems.
- Change from “public streets and small block grid” to “streets and block grid”; delete reference to staff’s Figure. 1 (Generalized Street Diagram). (*PC Recommendation: article 14, page 4*)
This implies private and controlled access to the public realm. Small walkable blocks are an intentional part of the CAC Vision (page 12) and contribute to desired station area street quality. Figure 1 is an important illustrative visual translation of CAC Vision intent. It is not intended to be literal or required (actual circulation will be decided during the LUCA process).
- Introduction of language connecting large sites with large underground parking garages (*PC Recommendation: article 16, page 4*)
This is an unnecessary stipulation intended to justify having no streets or blocks under the guise of parking efficiencies. As downtown Bellevue’s blocks demonstrate, parking within blocks regardless of size can be designed well and is financially feasible.
- Removal of the word “public” in the creation of open space and pedestrian systems. (*PC Recommendation: article 31 A & C, page 5*)

This implies private and controlled access to the public realm. (CAC Vision pages 15, 26 & 47)

LUCA relevant issues

Other changes suggested by the Planning Commission are precise code related changes that can and will be discussed during the subsequent LUCA process. These are:

- Consideration of larger floorplates (*PC Recommendation: Land Use Element E. Page 1*)
This can be accommodated and based on whatever block network is determined.
- A reference towards a request for additional height (*PC Recommendation: Goals and Policies: article 4, page 3*).
The appropriateness of any change will be discussed during the LUCA review process.
- The need for a consistent datum (*PC Recommendation: article 4, page 3*).
This need cannot be assessed without a specific development application.
- New location specific N-S street (*PC Recommendation: article 13, page 3, and narrative added, page 6*).
The need for this street, alignment and design will be part of a transportation review process.

Separate from the above evaluation, planning staff was also given an opportunity to evaluate an early architectural model created by one of the largest land owners in the study area. Such development, if truly representative, is contrary to the intent and purposes of the City's approach to station area planning expectations and the basis for an entitlement increase. Moreover, it is a specific mix of requests that add up to a substantial shift away from the CAC Vision.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

The East Main Station Area is the first rail station in Bellevue to be considered for this new expectation for transit centric and oriented development. The decisions made relating to this station area plan amendment will have significant policy implications for the other station area plans that will follow.

Fiscal Impact

No fiscal impact has been identified for this agenda item.

OPTIONS

No immediate decision is expected because of this study session.

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

- A. Council's Guiding Principles to the Planning Commission for the East Main Transit Oriented Development District Plan Amendment and Land Use Code Amendment (December 4, 2018)
- B. Planning Commission's recommendation for the East Main Transit Oriented Development district plan amendment (heard November 7, 2018 Public Hearing – Resolution & Attachment)
- C. Bellevue East Main Station Area Plan (CAC Vision Recommendations)

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East Main Staff Report and SEPA review