



Bellevue Planning Commission

January 8, 2025

PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM

SUBJECT

Planning Commission Survey Results and Discussion

STAFF CONTACTS

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POLICY ISSUES

Staff will present a status report on feedback received during the Planning Commission's annual retreat which was held in November 2024. This included input from a survey on Commission functions and dynamics that was sent to both Planning Commissioners and key support staff.

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION

DIRECTION

INFORMATION ONLY

Staff will present a status update that includes a summary of the survey results and next steps to address the feedback. Direction from the Commission is being requested for any needed future actions.

SURVEY RESULTS

Planning Commission and key support staff completed a survey relating to continuous improvement of Commission meetings and dynamics. The results were discussed at the Commission's annual retreat on November 13, 2024.

The survey asked Commission members to reflect on:

- Identifying 1-3 areas where the Commission is functioning well
- Areas of improvement for Commission interaction through:
 - Adaptations which would allow better understanding and appreciation of one another's perspectives
 - Tools to allow for better flow in the conversation
 - Opportunities for improved decision-making
- Areas where staff can more effectively support the Commission
- Improving interaction with the community

Support staff were also requested to complete the survey, and included an opportunity for staff to provide the Commission with feedback on areas of improvement for Commission meetings.

Planning Commissioners feedback relating to the areas in which the Commission functions well fell into three common themes which included:

- Respect among the Commissioners and between staff and the Commissioners.
- Appreciation for the hard work that fellow Commissioners put in.
- Valuing the different knowledge and perspectives that the Commissioners bring to the table.

The areas highlighted where the Commission could function better included:

- More efficient conversations during the meeting by making better use of Roberts Rules of Order.
- Asking more focused questions and structuring the conversation differently, such as through shared images, limiting time, allowing for open conversations, and limiting comments that have already been articulated.
- The Commission could also function better by focusing the discussions on areas in which the Commission can have an impact.
- Spending time to allow the Commissioners to get to know each other better outside of meeting times could be beneficial.

Areas where staff support for the Commission could be improved included:

- Questions asked by Commissioners or requests for additional information do not always get addressed adequately by staff.
- Staff providing short written responses to address prior questions raised by the Commission.
- Staff should reference successful projects, precedents and benchmarks from other jurisdictions.
- Providing rationale and pro and cons for policy discussions with the Commission.
- The use of technology to improve communication and organization was raised in terms of packet organization.
- The process could be improved by balancing topics to minimize additional meetings.
- Staff should report on adjustments made to commissioner's recommendations before recommendations make it to Council.

Areas where managing interactions with the community could be improved included:

- Greater diversity of community voices at Commission meetings,
- Clarify for the benefit of the community the individual roles and powers of the Commission, the staff and the Council.

Overall functioning of the Commission can be improved by:

- Ensuring that the scope and ask of the Commission is clear at the outset of every discussion.
- Managing time and the agenda items effectively to ensure the meetings do not go over time.
- Including more data, especially financial data, to help in the decision-making process.
- Commissioners being sensitive to additional requests of staff, and highlighting clearly when a written follow-up is needed.

Support staff feedback provided in the survey included:

- Planning Commissioners could improve upon recognition of policy issues that are implicated by specific agenda items (Comprehensive Plan Amendments and Land Use Code Amendments) and focusing discussion on those policy issues that directly relate to specific agenda items under discussion.
- Focusing on the larger policy implications that may apply citywide when evaluating stakeholder requests for policy changes to benefit specific properties or specific development projects.
- Planning Commission could better focus on Council direction provided for processing specific item and ensure that the scope established does not change beyond direction provided by Council.
- The Commission can occasionally focus on technical details in connection with broader policy direction/recommendation, which can lead to inefficient discussion or, potentially, discussion that may not pertain to the policy changes being considered.
- Planning Commission sometimes expands agenda items that are being processed to comply with Washington State mandates into broader policy discussion that is not warranted when Council direction is to bring City Code and Policy into compliance with state requirements.

Next Steps:

Staff have begun to implement some of the issues raised by the Commission, by providing specific written responses to questions raised by Commissioners and rationale for the staff recommendations included in the Commission materials.

Staff will also look for opportunities to provide benchmarks and comparisons from other jurisdictions with pertinent agenda topics and also work to ensure meetings are more appropriately balanced with topics; as well as ensure that Commissioners are better informed when adjustments to recommendations made by Commissioners are forwarded to Council.

The Commission Chair could also assist with facilitating discussions during the meeting and ensuring that one topic on the agenda does not take up the majority of the time during the meeting.

Staff is looking for any additional feedback from the Commission on the responses to the Commission's and support staff comments relating to opportunities for improvement with the overall process.