



Bellevue Planning Commission

January 26, 2022

PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM

SUBJECT

Status Report on Planning Commission Survey Results

STAFF CONTACTS

Emil King AICP, Assistant Director, 452-7223

Thara Johnson, Comprehensive Planning Manager, 452-4087

Community Development Department

Mathew McFarland, Assistant City Attorney, 452-5284

City Attorney's Office

POLICY ISSUES

Staff will present a status report on feedback received during the Planning Commission's annual retreat which was held in December 2021. This included input from a survey on Commission functions and dynamics that was sent to both Planning Commissioners and key staff.

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION

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DIRECTION

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INFORMATION ONLY

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Direction from the Commission is being requested respective to process changes during meetings raised by Commission members during the annual retreat. Staff will present a status update that includes a summary of the survey results, topics that can be accomplished now, and topics that will need more discussion with the City Manager's Office and City Clerk's Office at a future date.

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 December 1, 2021.

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 provided feedback that fell within three themes: Planning Commission process during meetings, public comment, and coordination with staff. Some of the comments raised by the Commission can be easily addressed if the Commission determines that their preference is to amend their process while still adhering to the Commission's by-laws. A few of the comments raised will need to be addressed with other City Departments such as the City Manager's Office and City Clerk's Office. The City has a number of boards and commissions, and there is consistency among the various boards and commissions relating to their function and process, which also generally follow protocols established for the City Council.

Planning Commission Process:

Commissioners made recommendations to utilize the raise hand feature during virtual meetings rather than calling on Commissioners individually, with the intent of saving time and also voting with the raise hand feature.

Staff agrees that the raise hand feature could be utilized to save time during meetings when Commissioners have specific questions, or to improve efficiency during discussions and deliberations. However, utilizing the raise hand function relative to voting may not result in significant time saving, since the vote does need to be verbalized to ensure a complete and accurate record of the action taken by the Commission and to reflect the vote within the minutes.

Commissioners also suggested utilizing a consent calendar to approve minutes could be used as another opportunity to save time during meetings. Staff agrees that a consent calendar could be utilized; however, the consent calendar would also need to be approved by the Commission, and any items that a Commissioner would like to discuss could not be approved via the consent calendar (including any changes to the minutes prior to approval). Also, the Planning Commission would need to amend Article VI.D of the bylaws to include a consent calendar in the order of business. For each of these reasons, this approach may not necessarily increase the efficiency of Planning Commission meetings in the near term or the future.

Commissioners also raised the issue of not utilizing detailed minutes to reflect the meeting discussions, which is consistent with the procedural training that the Commission received during the retreat. This recommendation would need to be discussed further with the City Manager's Office and City Clerk's Office because all boards and commissions have their minutes reflected consistently with detailed minutes. Also, utilizing detailed minutes does provide the Commission officers with the context of the discussions and deliberations in preparing for Council meetings and also responding to questions from Council. Similarly, the detailed minutes is also a very useful resource and reference point for staff in providing a comprehensive summary of issues raised by the Commission. Finally, the Commission should also note that the detailed minutes are available to the public, and members of the public may review and reference those minutes for certain Planning Commission items in connection with their public comments.

Public Comment:

Commissioners raised several comments relating to opportunities for improving public comments within the legislative process. Comments included exploring better ways to incorporate comments in a timely manner, and not being required to make recommendations at the time of the hearing when a number

of public comments are raised. Commissioners also discussed challenges with concerns being raised by community members who feel burdened by changes in policy and code.

Staff has been working towards continuous improvement with monitoring ongoing public dialogue and comment with various legislative processes. A number of strategies have been emphasized recently which include:

- Highlighting for the Commission the extended calendar which provides an opportunity for Commission to identify if there are topics where they would like additional meetings
- Staff has also responded to and will continue to respond to Commission requests for additional meetings, which has recently occurred in connection with several legislative items before the Commission – Great Neighborhoods, DASH Glendale and Evergreen Court Comprehensive Plan Amendment, C-1 Land Use Code Amendment
- Updating project specific webpages with a summary of the engagement opportunities
- Ensuring the Commission is aware of any new comments relative to a topic they are discussing or working towards making a recommendation on by forwarding correspondence via email, publishing comments with the Commission packet and also summarizing the content of the comments during meetings
- Staff responds to comments raised by the community in a localized manner, similar to the issues raised during the Great Neighborhoods planning process for Northwest and Northeast Bellevue Neighborhood Area plans.
- The Process IV land use process, which is delineated in LUC 20.35.400 to 20.35.450, and the Land Use Code provisions governing amendments to the Comprehensive Plan (chapter 20.30I LUC) and amendments to the text of the Land Use Code (chapter 20.30J LUC) also provide multiple opportunities for public comment throughout the legislative land use process.

Commission and Staff Coordination:

There were several comments raised relating to staff and Commission coordination. A number of comments relate to providing background resources, training materials, additional background on state law and planning mandates, decision criteria for legislative processes and also providing the Commission with the packet five days in advance of the meeting.

Staff has prepared a draft resource guide for the Commission, which is currently in the process of being revised and will incorporate the information requested by the Commission. Also, with the upcoming Comprehensive Plan Periodic update, staff is providing briefings and background prior to the initial project discussion which will provide the Commission with the needed context and education. Staff will also work towards ensuring that the packet is provided to the Commission where feasible five days in advance of the meeting.

The Commission also recommended that staff identify alternate viewpoints to the Commission in connection with legislative items before the Commission and provide additional justification for the proposed staff recommendation on those legislative items.

Looking forward, staff can elaborate on the recommendation rationale and emphasize to a greater extent the supporting policy to support the recommendation as well as alternate viewpoints. The recommendations expressed by the community may not always align with the staff recommendation to the Commission and in some instances may not be consistent with the decision criteria that the City is required to utilize in formulating recommendations. The goal of City staff is to always provide the Planning Commission with competent and thorough professional support, including providing staff recommendations that are based on planning and land use expertise. However, both staff and the Planning Commission are bound by the applicable statutory framework and decision criteria in City Code when making recommendations to the City Council for legislative changes.

Next Steps:

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

With the exception of revising the current approach for detailed minutes which staff will report back to the Commission at a later date, the majority of comments raised by the Commission can be moved forward to implementation as described in this memo.

ATTACHMENTS

N/A