

January 20, 2015

## CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION ITEM

### **SUBJECT:**

Transmittal of Downtown Livability Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) Recommendations

### **STAFF CONTACTS:**

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### **POLICY ISSUES:**

#### Land Use Code relationship to Downtown Livability Initiative

The City Council launched the Downtown Livability Initiative in 2013 to update the Land Use Code for Downtown Bellevue. A Council-appointed Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) was tasked with developing recommendations that built upon the City's successes and furthered the *Great Place Strategy* as articulated in the Downtown Subarea Plan:

*Great Place Strategy: To remain competitive in the next generation, Downtown Bellevue must be viable, livable, memorable, and accessible. It must become the symbolic as well as functional heart of the Eastside Region through the continued location of cultural, entertainment, residential, and regional uses located in distinct, mixed-use neighborhoods connected by a variety of unique public places and great public infrastructure.*

### **DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL:**

Action  
 Discussion  
 Information

Tonight is an opportunity for the Council's initial review of the Downtown Livability CAC's recommendations as contained in their Final Report (provided under separate cover). Staff will be accompanied by CAC co-chairs Ernie Simas and Aaron Laing to provide Council highlights of the recommendations as well as an overview of the CAC process, including community engagement opportunities to date.

No action is requested tonight. At a future meeting Council will be asked for direction on next steps.

### **BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:**

Council launched the Downtown Livability Initiative in 2013 to review specific regulations that guide development and land use activity in Downtown Bellevue. The scope of work and Council principles adopted in early 2013 (Attachment A) focused on what had changed over the past few

decades and how this effort should address livability. The Downtown Land Use Code has not been significantly updated since its inception in 1981 and does not reflect changes to the Downtown Subarea Plan that occurred in 2004.

#### Advisory Committee

In spring 2013, Council appointed an advisory group to help guide this process. The 14-member CAC was co-chaired by Aaron Laing (Planning Commission) and Ernie Simas (Transportation Commission) and included representation from all City boards/commissions and the Bellevue Downtown Association, Bellevue Chamber of Commerce, small business, and nearby neighborhoods, as well as an architect, a Downtown resident, and a City-wide representative.

The CAC began its work in May 2013. Committee meetings occurred monthly and were open to the public. From June through November 2013, the Committee conducted a thorough review of the existing Land Use Code through a series of “code audits” to understand what was working, what was not working, and where there was room for improvement. In January 2014, an “Alternatives Workshop” was held where the CAC provided guidance to staff on a range of alternatives and strategies to be evaluated as they formed their recommendations. Between March and June 2014, the CAC went through the analysis and evaluation for each topic and developed a set of recommendations.

#### Integration with Downtown Transportation Plan Update

The Downtown Livability CAC incorporated a set of “referrals” from the Transportation Commission’s update to the Downtown Transportation Plan, which had a head start on the Livability process. These included recommendations for Code changes relating to sidewalk widths, landscaping, through-block connections, etc. Council received the Transportation Commission recommendation for the Downtown Transportation Plan on October 7, 2013 and, at that time, provided direction to implement the plan through policy and projects (for which Council has provided early implementation funding).

#### Public Outreach

Public outreach for the Downtown Livability Initiative has involved a concerted effort to engage a broad spectrum of stakeholder communities. The outreach has been ongoing, beginning in November 2012 and continuing through today. The public outreach kicked off with a large public open house and scoping meeting in late 2012 with over 150 attendees.

In March 2013 and July 2013, the community participated in focus groups to provide detailed comments on Downtown’s livability. Attendance at these two sets of focus groups was 187. All comments were compiled for the CAC to consider in their deliberations. The public had the opportunity to participate in walking tours of Downtown in spring 2013. Forty-five people provided first-hand experience about livability issues that were captured in a report and provided to the CAC.

The CAC held monthly meetings and provided opportunities for public comment at the beginning and end of each meeting. The dates and times of these meetings were posted on the City’s Downtown Livability website. In June 2014, the Downtown Livability Initiative hosted a public open house focused on the CAC’s recommendations, drawing 75 participants.

Throughout the Downtown Livability Initiative, presentations to business, neighborhood and community groups were continual. Neighborhood Association presentations were made to the Downtown Bellevue Residents Association, Vuecrest Homeowners Association, Pacific Regent, Belletini, Northtowne Neighborhoods Association, and Bellevue Towers Homeowners Association. Additional presentations were provided to the BDA, BDA Restaurateurs Group, Old Bellevue Merchants Association, BOMA, Bellevue Chamber of Commerce, and other residents and business owners.

Neighborhood Outreach staff has also used the Downtown Livability Initiative to actively build a database of Downtown building and resident contacts. Working jointly with the BDA throughout 2013, the core of a residents group was formed, and Neighborhood Outreach assisted with the launch of a new Downtown Bellevue Residents Association in January 2014.

Communication tools included a Downtown Livability project website and updates on the City's Facebook site and Twitter Feed. The City of Bellevue Neighborhood News included three articles on the project to date, as well as monthly meeting notices for the CAC meetings. Updates on the project status were sent out to an interested parties list, which currently stands at 868 individual email addresses.

Outside media coverage included eight articles published in the *Bellevue Reporter* as well as coverage in other media including *The Seattle Times*, Downtown Bellevue Network, Patch and other local media sources.

### CAC Recommendations

The Downtown Livability CAC is now formally transmitting its recommendations to Council. The Final Report of the Downtown Livability CAC (under separate cover) details the process, community engagement, and full set of recommendations developed by the group. The recommendations are those of the group as a whole and, for each topic, include a reference to their relationship to livability. The CAC focused on code-related recommendations, but also include a number of other non-code recommendations that the group felt were important.

The CAC has set a broad framework for moving forward, and recognizes that much additional work is needed to develop the fine-grain details needed for technical Code amendments. The CAC feels the Code should be readable, well integrated, and forward-looking, and urges the City to move forward with the technical work needed to translate these recommendations into Land Use Code updates for Downtown.

The CAC's report includes work on the following topics:

- Public Open Spaces
- Pedestrian Corridor
- Design Guidelines
- Amenity Incentive System
- Station Area Planning
- Building Height and Form
- Downtown Parking
- Other Topics (mechanical screening, food trucks, etc.)

The recommendations represent the culmination of the CAC's work, but are a mid-point in the overall process. There is still significant work needed to refine the recommendations, perform additional analysis, develop actual Code language and design guidelines, and continue to engage the public.

The following areas of additional analysis and related work have been identified:

- Additional analysis on specific details of building heights and form to determine precise standards and appropriate mitigation provisions, such as tower separation, transitions, protection of public view corridors, and building form.
- Development of new design guidelines, with illustrations that help convey the desired design intention.
- Development of clear direction on allowable departures from design guidelines.
- Development of new Code text, integrating the Downtown Code into a single, well-integrated document.
- Completion of the environmental review process.
- Additional and robust stakeholder and general public engagement, to ensure that the updated Code considers and appropriately incorporates public input.
- The design guidelines and amenity incentive system must ensure that any additional building height and/or FAR results in a higher quality, more livable outcome than what is likely to be achieved under the existing Code.

#### Part of a Broader Livability Strategy

The CAC's work on updating the Land Use Code is only one part of a broader Livability agenda for Downtown Bellevue. With the Code update, the City's rules and incentives should result in every private development contributing to making Downtown more people-friendly, vibrant and memorable, and adding to the amenities that make for a great city center. But beyond this Code framework, a wide variety of other participants and processes are essential for Downtown Livability and also underway at this time:

- Public Safety. The City Council recently set aside funding to begin site selection for a new Fire Station #10 to serve Downtown and the surrounding area. This funding will secure land for a facility that will provide rapid response for fire and emergency medical calls throughout the city center. The Police Department has a designated Downtown Policing Squad comprised of a lieutenant, corporal, and four officers. There is also an officer assigned to City Hall during business hours. Similar to the rest of the City, the violent crime rate in Downtown is very low. The majority of Downtown crime is theft related, with shoplifting and theft from vehicles ranking at the top.
- Schools. The Bellevue School District is in the process of siting a new elementary school to serve the growing family population of Downtown. This need was anticipated and fully funded in the 2014 schools capital construction bond.
- Pedestrian Safety and Convenience. This is a major issue for Downtown Bellevue, given the growing residential and employee populations, the increasing numbers of pedestrians, and Downtown's legacy pattern of superblocks. While the CAC report includes a number of recommendations in this area, numerous additional pedestrian improvements are covered in the new Downtown Transportation Plan, a companion effort to this CAC work. Among these are enhanced intersection treatments for pedestrians and further work on mid-block

pedestrian crossings. The Council funded implementation for some of these pedestrian improvements in the new Capital Investment Plan adopted in December 2014. This CIP funding is providing for enhanced bicycle facilities on 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and on 108<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, an improved pedestrian crossing at 108<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street, and a wider and gently sloping ramp in the “Garden Hillclimb” segment of the Pedestrian Corridor.

- ADA Access. The City of Bellevue remains committed to ensuring that the civil rights of people with disabilities are preserved and that it complies with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations pertaining to these rights. The Council provided a dedicated resource for addressing citizen accessibility requests and implementing high priority improvements identified in the City’s ADA Transition Plan for Public Rights of Way in the new Capital Investment Plan adopted in December 2014. Bellevue’s Comprehensive Plan (Policy TR-26) directs staff to: “Address the special needs of physically challenged and disabled citizens in planning, designing, implementing, and maintaining transportation improvements, particularly non-motorized improvements, and other transportation facilities, and in delivering transportation services and programs, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.” This policy commitment is carried forward in all phases of project and service development provision.
- Traffic Capacity. A number of street capacity projects are underway or in the works to provide improved vehicle access to Downtown. The new NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street connection from 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE to 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, and the widening of 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, add capacity for traffic entering and exiting Downtown. Both will be completed in 2015. Full funding is now in place for the Spring Boulevard connection between NE 12<sup>th</sup> Street and 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, which will provide additional capacity at the north end of Downtown. The City Council also recently approved funding for full design and environmental review of high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) improvements on Bellevue Way just south of Downtown, which would add significant capacity to move people during the evening commute period.
- Bicycle Access. The companion Downtown Transportation Plan includes an enhanced system for bicycle circulation both within Downtown and connecting to surrounding neighborhoods and to regional bicycle facilities along SR 520 and I-90.
- Public Transit. East Link light rail is in the final design stage, moving forward on the full plans for the two stations serving Downtown, at East Main Street and NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street. In 2023, the system will open with a dedicated guideway to downtown Seattle, Redmond’s Overlake District, and the rest of the regional high capacity transit system. The Downtown Transportation Plan identified access improvements and transit route modifications that will provide 97 percent of Downtown residents and employees with a short walk to a transit stop or station.
- Parks. The City Council recently approved funding to complete the Downtown Park, which includes constructing the remaining portion of the circular water feature and promenade, and completing a generous “gateway” at the Park’s NE quarter fronting on Bellevue Way. Work continues on the first phase of Meydenbauer Bay Park, which will result in a spectacular connection between Downtown and the Lake Washington waterfront. These Park improvements will be completed in the next three years.
- “Grand Connection.” The City Council has adopted as a priority the creation of a major pedestrian connection and open space from Meydenbauer Bay, through Downtown, and across I-405 to the Eastside Rail Corridor trail (old Burlington Northern rail line). Conceptual

design work will be proceeding in 2015 on what will become a signature feature for Downtown.

To summarize, the Downtown Livability CAC recommendations focused on updating the Land Use Code; these are part of a much larger livability strategy for Downtown. The full goal of enhanced livability for the city center will require progress on all these fronts.

#### Next Steps

Tonight's study session provides an opportunity for the Council to receive an overview of the CAC recommendations, to hear from the Co-chairs of the group, and to ask questions regarding their rationale and process. At a subsequent meeting the Council will be asked for direction on further processing the CAC's work, including forwarding some or all of the recommendations to staff and Planning Commission for further work on the detailed Code amendments.

#### **ATTACHMENT:**

A. Downtown Livability Initiative: Scope and Council Principles

#### **AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL DOCUMENT LIBRARY:**

Final Report: Downtown Livability Citizen Advisory Committee Recommendations