

Following is a summary of the issues being discussed by the East Main CAC in preparing their draft report for public review and comment before finalizing their recommendations to City Council.

Transportation and Station Access

Neighborhood vehicular access, traffic and commuter parking are interrelated issues identified early in the process that have been an important topic of discussion by the CAC. As a result of the light rail alignment, neighborhood access is being altered by the closure of SE 4th Street and SE 1st Place along 112th Avenue SE. Those closures will redirect neighborhood traffic to the remaining entrances of 110th Avenue SE and 108th Avenue SE along Main Street as well as 108th Avenue SE and SE 16th Street along Bellevue Way SE. There are currently turn restrictions along Main Street designed to discourage non-neighborhood traffic from using 110th Avenue SE and 108th Avenue SE.

The CAC is exploring the trade-offs of improving vehicular access to the neighborhoods which could also result in additional traffic cutting through the neighborhood to bypass Bellevue Way or 112th Avenue SE. Existing traffic on 108th Avenue SE is already a concern for the Bellecrest neighborhood and the potential for additional traffic on that street increases their concerns. Changes in vehicular access will also alter traffic patterns within the neighborhood which raises concerns about pedestrian safety. Two other related issues are the potential for commuters to park in the southern part of the neighborhood or to create an informal pick-up and drop-off area in the northeast corner of the neighborhood near the light rail station.

Another transportation related issue is providing good access to the station for people that will walk or bike or bus. The CAC is exploring different routes and improvements for existing and future residents and workers in the area to be able to get to and from the station via safe, convenient and attractive routes. Main Street and 112th Avenue SE are two of the primary corridors that will be used to access the light rail station. The CAC has been discussing ways to improve the look and function of these corridors for pedestrian and bicycle use in addition to the vehicular traffic they will continue to serve. Walk routes from the Surrey Downs and Bellecrest neighborhoods to the station are also being explored by the CAC with ideas ranging from basic wayfinding signage to sidewalks to a pedestrian bridge from Surrey Downs Park to 112th Avenue SE.

Redevelopment

The CAC has been diligently working to develop a vision and basic development parameters to guide future zoning and redevelopment of the existing Office/Limited Business (OLB) district located between 112th Avenue SE, I-405, Main Street and SE 8th Street. Most of the redevelopment potential, including transit-oriented development (TOD) for this area lies in the parcels north of SE 6th Street (i.e. Red Lion Hotel, Hilton Hotel, Bellevue Club and Hotel) which have been the main focus of the discussion. The role and function and urban design character for the redevelopment area are being considered relative to other areas of the city.

The land use context for most of the other Bellevue stations has already been established by the subarea plans for Downtown and Bel-Red. Even though the East Main station redevelopment area is situated next to Downtown and I-405, it is also next to single family residential. City policy has historically drawn the boundary for Downtown in this area at Main Street. Current Downtown zoning imposes building height and scale limits along the north side of Main Street that are less than those allowed in the central part of Downtown.

The key aspects of redevelopment being considered by the CAC are the types and mix of uses, amount of square footage and scale of buildings, walkability, livability, urban design, and community benefits. As the CAC has noted in their discussions, if done well, the TOD will be a new neighborhood that complements the surrounding community. By the same token, redevelopment raises questions and concerns from the community about additional traffic, noise, privacy and neighborhood encroachment. The CAC is considering all of these factors and concerns.

In order to consider a broad range of potential redevelopment scenarios, the CAC initially established a lower limit using the existing OLB zoning for the area and an upper limit based on the zoning proposed by the Downtown Livability Initiative CAC for the Downtown-OLB properties immediately north of Main Street. These parameters were used by the consultant team to develop four different scenarios within that range and assess the market potential for the types of uses and amount of development. Project consultants interviewed representatives of the Bellevue Club, Hilton Hotel, and the new owners of the Red Lion Hotel to inform them of the station area plan work and to gauge their interest in redevelopment potential for their sites. The site that possesses the greatest potential for redevelopment within the 20-year time period covered by the station area plan is the Red Lion property. The owners of the Red Lion have been extensively engaged with the CAC since the beginning of the project and are keenly interested in the CAC vision and ultimate recommendations for redevelopment.

The CAC discussed each of the redevelopment scenarios in the context of their guiding principles and hosted a public open house (live and online) to solicit feedback on the redevelopment scenarios and other issues. Public comments ranged from adverse to favorable on the amount and scale of potential redevelopment. Most of the concerns expressed were about additional traffic, shadows and privacy related to tall buildings and noise. There were also comments in support of maximizing development to take advantage of the station, including community-oriented retail and service uses, and making the area more pedestrian-friendly, particularly along Main Street.

The floor-to-area ratio (FAR), which establishes limits for building scale relative to the area of the parcel, is currently 0.5 in the OLB zoned East Main redevelopment area (i.e. the building area could be up to one-half the area of the parcel). By comparison, the highest FAR permitted in any Downtown zone is 8.0 – i.e. the building area could be as high as 8 times the property area. Around the BelRed stations the existing zoning allows for FAR up to 2.0 outright and up to 4.0 with bonus incentives – this range allows for the mix of uses, density, and livability factors necessary for successful TOD. Until

the BelRed zoning was adopted in 2009, Downtown was historically and intentionally the only part of the city to have ratios above 0.5. BelRed ratios reflect the intent of the City and the scale necessary to encourage TOD around the future light rail stations in that area. The CAC is discussing what ratio they will recommend for the East Main station area. In the citywide context, they are weighing whether future development should be more like Bel-Red or Downtown or something different.

Additional Considerations

There have been other factors that have arisen during the analysis of the potential redevelopment. The first of these involved the WSDOT master plan for widening I-405 that could have eliminated 114th Avenue SE with significant implications for traffic and access along the entire redevelopment area. After further discussions with WSDOT, it was determined that 114th Avenue SE will continue to function as it does today for the foreseeable future. Even with that issue resolved, traffic and site access in and around the redevelopment area continue to be important considerations of the CAC.

One of the possibilities being considered in consultation with the Red Lion owners is to create a new east/west street connecting 112th Avenue SE and 114th Avenue SE on the southern boundary of their parcel in exchange for vacating the “slip ramp” on the northern boundary of their parcel. This could improve access to their property, provide another two-way street between 112th Avenue SE and 114th Avenue SE (the “slip ramp” is one-way), and potentially create better circulation for the area in general. Traffic modeling for the CAC redevelopment vision will analyze the benefits of this option.

Another factor that has implications for portions of the redevelopment area is the view corridor of Mount Rainier from the public concourse and balcony at City Hall. The view corridor was previously recognized and applied in the design review process for the Metro 112 building at NE 4th Street and 112th Avenue NE. The Metro 112 project was modified to shift taller portions of the building west to preserve the view and code variances were applied to allow for the modifications. Adopted policies in the *Comprehensive Plan* support preservation of “views of water, mountains, skylines or other unique landmarks from public places as valuable civic assets.” (UD-62) The concourse and balcony were designed to function as public spaces and civic assets when this building was renovated as City Hall.

Preserving the view of the mountain includes providing a context, or setting, in order for the eye to comprehend the scale and grandeur of the mountain. For purposes of this analysis, the context was set at three times the width of the base, in other words, the width of the base of the mountain extended the same distance on each side. Attachment F is a photograph of the view from the “Compass” balcony with the protected view outlined. The projection of that view through the Downtown and East Main areas is illustrated by Attachment G. Line “A” is the centerline of Mount Rainier. The area between the lines marked “B” is the base of Mount Rainier at the horizon. And the area between the lines marked “C” is the view corridor (i.e. three times the width of the base at the horizon).

Site-specific studies will determine the precise heights and locations when development is proposed. Using city survey and mapping information for planning purposes the estimated building height above grade was calculated for the points where the western edge of the corridor (line “C” closest to 112th Avenue SE) crosses parcel lines. These heights range between 123 feet at the north property line of the Red Lion site to 186 feet on the south property line of the Bellevue Club site. The eastern edge of the corridor is entirely within the I-405 right-of-way for the East Main study area (i.e. south of Main Street). It is important to note that the total square footage of redevelopment previously considered by the CAC can still be accommodated with the view corridor; however the tallest buildings (i.e. between 125’ and 200’) would now be closer to 112th Avenue SE than I-405.

The view corridor has not been a consideration for this area previously because the maximum allowed height under the current OLB zoning ranges between 30 feet along 112th Avenue SE to 75 feet along 114th Avenue SE. The Hilton Hotel, which was developed prior to the current regulations, is 110 feet tall. None of the area to the west (i.e. closest to 112th Avenue SE) is included in the view corridor. The potential height within the view corridor increases proceeding south because of the rising angle of the corridor and because the topography is sloping down toward I-405. The amount of the redevelopment area within the view corridor also decreases farther south.