

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

April 2, 2018
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Chelminiak and Councilmembers Lee, Nieuwenhuis, Robertson, Stokes, and Zahn

ABSENT: Deputy Mayor Robinson

1. Executive Session

At 6:01 p.m., Mayor Chelminiak called the meeting to order and declared recess to Executive Session for approximately one hour to discuss one item of potential litigation and one item of property acquisition.

2. Study Session

(a) Neighborhood Commuter Traffic

City Manager Brad Miyake introduced Mark Poch, Assistant Director of Transportation; Karen Gonzalez, Neighborhood Services Manager; and John Murphy, Associate Planner to provide the update on commuter traffic in neighborhoods and traffic calming mechanisms.

Mr. Poch said the City has had a successful traffic calming program for decades, and key objectives of the program are embedded in the City's Comprehensive Plan policies. With the recent increase in commuter traffic, staff wanted to provide an update regarding the extent of the problem and the tradeoffs involved in implementing solutions.

Ms. Gonzalez said the neighborhood traffic calming program began in 1985 to address concerns regarding excessive vehicle speeds and cut-through traffic. The program has implemented more than 200 projects and builds on collaborative relationships with the community. Ms. Gonzalez said traffic calming solutions are site-specific based on neighborhood concerns and needs. She noted that the neighborhood transportation levy approved last fall provides more funding for projects. Ongoing efforts by the City include public education sessions, including for children, Walk to School Day, residential parking zones, and other projects.

Ms. Gonzalez said most of the complaints from residents relate to excessive vehicle speeds and cut-through traffic. Commuter traffic is defined as motorists who do not have an origin or destination within a given neighborhood. She noted a Comprehensive Plan policy aimed at reducing the volume of cut-through traffic. She said tools that previously discouraged commuter traffic are no longer as effective as they were in the past. Commuter traffic is increasing due to the growth in the population and employment. With congested freeways and arterials, drivers are seeking alternate routes, which often are suggested by a number of navigation mobile apps. Ms. Gonzalez said the Woodridge neighborhood is one of the areas that is experiencing an increase in commuter traffic during peak travel times.

Mr. Poch said Bellevue has successfully advocated for projects within the regional transportation system, and the region is improving its transit system, including through the implementation of Sound Transit light rail. The City's efforts in recent years include the implementation of SCATS (Sydney Coordinated Adaptive Traffic System), mobility options, Neighborhood Congestion Reduction Program (Levy-funded), and roadway expansions.

Mr. Murphy said the Neighborhood Traffic Program is a collaborative effort with residents to identify problems, impacts, and solutions. He noted that traffic calming projects involve tradeoffs because the modifications to reduce issues can be inconvenient for the neighborhood residents as well. He said neighborhood traffic committees work with staff, typically over up to 10 meetings, to propose solutions that are ultimately put to a vote of the residents.

The neighborhood traffic commuter toolkit addresses safety first, then commuter traffic. The program involves public education and enforcement to supplement the traffic calming projects. The four primary types of roadway modifications are creating a one-lane zone, turn restrictions, partial road closures, and full road closures. Mr. Murphy said neighborhoods typically begin with a pilot project and enforcement is important. He said it helps once the navigation apps reflect the restrictions to discourage commuter traffic. He described a recent traffic calming project in the area of 108th Avenue SE and SE 16th Street involving turn restrictions, which reduced traffic volumes by 750 vehicles on southbound 108th Avenue SE during the evening commute. Mr. Murphy said it was helpful when the mobile navigation apps recognized the changes.

Mr. Murphy said enforcement is critical to implementing a new restriction. However, enforcement efforts strain police officer resources, and officers note that the majority of the violators often live in the neighborhoods. He said residents have requested exemptions to the traffic calming modifications through a system using tags or placards to identify residents. Bellevue has not taken this approach, and it is challenging to implement and enforce that type of approach. Mr. Murphy said there have been legal challenges in other states regarding exemptions that apply only to neighborhood residents. He said staff is currently working with the Woodridge Community Association to address relatively new problems with commuter traffic through their neighborhood.

Councilmember Stokes said it has been interesting to see what is happening in Woodridge, and the City's work with the neighborhood traffic committee has been well received. He said the increase in commuter traffic is primarily related to the congestion on I-405, which borders the neighborhood. He thanked staff for their work with Woodridge residents.

Councilmember Robertson expressed support for staff's work. She concurred that the concept of resident exemptions from traffic calming modifications is problematic from a legal and constitutional basis. Responding to Ms. Robertson, Ms. Gonzalez said the neighborhoods currently having relatively significant traffic impacts are Woodridge, Belcrest, Enatai, Newport Hills, and Tyee/Eastgate. Mr. Robertson said implementing "local access only" restrictions is a potential option that has been used in Clyde Hill.

Ms. Robertson questioned whether the City has tried working with navigation app companies to request the removal of certain streets from their maps. Mr. Murphy said his research indicates that companies will not remove streets from maps. However, they are sometimes willing to correct the classification of a street if it does not match the City's classification. He said the only streets that app companies will remove from their routings are dead-end streets.

Responding to Councilmember Robertson, Ms. Gonzalez said that full closure of specific streets during peak commute hours has not been considered by the City. An analysis of that as a solution would require a study of the potential impact on emergency response vehicle access.

Councilmember Nieuwenhuis commended staff on their work with the community. Responding to Mr. Nieuwenhuis, Mr. Murphy said that changes to vehicle routings in Waze typically occur relatively quickly, due largely to the social aspect of app users who report on real-time conditions, accidents, congestion, etc. Mr. Nieuwenhuis encouraged staff to contact app companies directly despite the research indicating that they are not receptive to requests for changes in routing recommendations. Mr. Murphy said that achieving changes in Google Maps is more challenging. The City's request that Google Maps reflect the changes on 108th Avenue SE and SE 16th Street (Enatai neighborhood) took a few weeks to be activated.

Councilmember Zahn said that traffic congestion is a popular topic of conversation with residents. She noted information in the meeting packet that states that local signs asking cars to slow down and/or indicating that children live in the area do not appear to be effective. She expressed concern that the signs can create a false sense of safety.

Ms. Gonzalez said signage is effective in community education. However, signs seem to have little effect in reducing speeds or cut-through traffic. She said the majority of drivers exceeding the speed limit live within the neighborhoods. Responding to Ms. Zahn, Ms. Gonzalez said the City's public education activities include traffic safety newsletters, information in neighborhood association materials, and portable speed radar signs.

Ms. Zahn said she appreciates staff's work with residents to identify solutions and to consider the tradeoffs of traffic calming projects.

Councilmember Lee said neighborhood traffic issues have been a longtime concern. He suggested addressing the number of drivers using neighborhood streets to avoid key commuter routes. He expressed support for solutions that enhance safety and make it less convenient to cut through neighborhoods.

Councilmember Lee suggested stop signs at every intersection in high-traffic neighborhoods. He said enforcement is important in educating the public and changing habits. He encouraged staff to explore whether other cities have implemented frequent stop signs in neighborhoods.

Mayor Chelminiak thanked staff for their work with residents to address traffic issues and to implement solutions. He suggested it is important to consider the classification, purpose, and connectivity of streets in implementing projects. He expressed concern that using bollards to block neighborhood streets during peak commute times could raise safety issues, particularly when it is dark. He noted that, while congestion is a significant problem during certain times of the day, speeding traffic causes unsafe roadway conditions.

(b) Council Business [*Regular Session Agenda Item 7*]

Mayor Chelminiak suggested taking up Regular Session Agenda Item 7, which proposes cancelling/rescheduling the April 9 meeting and requests action on reappointments to Boards and Commissions. He noted that local schools' spring break occurs the week of April 9. He suggested adding a meeting on April 30, a fifth Monday of the month that would not usually have a Council meeting.

- Councilmember Lee moved to cancel the April 9 Extended Study Session and to add a Special Meeting on April 30. Councilmember Stokes seconded the motion.
- The motion carried by a vote of 6-0.
- Councilmember Robertson moved to approve, and Councilmember Stokes seconded, the following recommended reappointments to Boards and Commissions:

Arts Commission - Becky Lewis and Carl Wolfteich
Environmental Services Commission - Lisa Shin
Human Services Commission - Michelle Kline and Benjamin Piper
Parks and Community Services Board - Debra Kumar

- The motion carried by a vote of 6-0.

Mayor Chelminiak noted that the Council appreciates the hard work of the Boards and Commissions.

3. Council Discussion of Upcoming Items: None.

At 7:53 p.m., Mayor Chelminiak declared recess to the Regular Session.

Kyle Stannert, CMC
City Clerk

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