

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

December 9, 2019
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Chelminiak, Deputy Mayor Robinson, and Councilmembers Lee, Nieuwenhuis, Stokes, and Zahn

ABSENT: Councilmember Robertson

1. Executive Session

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 p.m., with Mayor Chelminiak presiding. There was no Executive Session.

2. Study Session Items

- (a) Placemaking through partnerships in Downtown Bellevue: Report on Grand Connection Activation Pilot with the Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA)

City Manager Brad Miyake recalled that the Grand Connection framework was adopted by the Council in 2017. He introduced discussion regarding the Bellevue Downtown Association's report on the Grand Connection Activation Pilot Project.

Jesse Canedo, Chief Economic Development Officer, said the Grand Connection plan identified four early action areas in which economic development staff could lead or provide strong support: 1) establishing measurements of success, 2) deploying tactical urbanism and other pilot projects, 3) identifying partnership opportunities, and 4) infusing arts and culture elements along the route. The early action items are meant to support the long-term vision for the Grand Connection. They also allow the City and property owners to utilize existing portions of the Grand Connection now, including Meydenbauer Bay Park, Downtown Park, Compass Plaza, City Center Plaza, sidewalks, road improvements, and lampposts along the route.

Mr. Canedo said City staff began working with the Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA) in February to identify opportunities for implementing the early action objectives. He introduced BDA staff to present the results of the Grand Connection Activation Pilot Project.

Patrick Bannon, President of the BDA, thanked City staff for their partnership with the BDA, property owners, and businesses. He noted the Grand Connection's role in economic development, placemaking, and providing public spaces for connecting with each other.

Augusta DeVries, BDA's Managing Director of Programs and Member Engagement, said the Grand Connection is critical for uniting Meydenbauer Bay, Downtown, and the BelRed and Wilburton areas. She said the pilot project focused on the Pedestrian Corridor between Bellevue Way NE and 110th Avenue NE. The goals were to visually define the Grand Connection, introduce color and seating, and to generate public excitement regarding future placemaking efforts. The pilot project involved the placement of yellow lanterns along the route through partnerships with a number of entities including the Kemper Development Company, OMNI Group, Madison Marquette, Central Bar and Grill, PACCAR, Kilroy Corporation, Commonwealth Partners, and the City of Bellevue. Ms. DeVries said the lanterns contained solar units that powered them after dark.

Matt Jack, BDA Policy Manager, highlighted the project timeline from January through September. He described the numerous tasks involved in implementing the key steps of the project: 1) communication and gathering support, 2) research and testing the lanterns, 3) designing the installation, 4) permit application, 5) implementation, 6) maintaining the lanterns and seating during the three-month activation period and marketing the pilot project, and 7) gathering information regarding the public's perception of the project. Mr. Jack said the BDA is proud of the project and grateful to City staff for their partnership and assistance.

Ms. DeVries described the key lessons learned: 1) it took time to achieve stakeholder support for the project, 2) placemaking is place management and maintenance, 3) collaboration and innovation are essential, and 4) public feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Survey respondents indicated support for more lanterns and other creative activations, as well as more bistro seating, along the Grand Connection route. Of the 154 respondents, 58 percent indicated that they work in the Downtown and 53 percent said that they live in Bellevue. Ms. DeVries said that public feedback complimented the lanterns and the color they added to the Downtown environment, the appeal of outdoor seating, and the role of the lanterns in wayfinding. She noted the importance of placemaking in a competitive economic development environment.

Kris Goddard, Public-Private Partnership Manager, said it was a fantastic experience working with the BDA. He said ground-level activation requires significant resources and is essential in an urban environment. He noted that BDA staff invested nearly 600 hours in the project. He said the pilot project highlights the importance of partnerships and reinforces the goals previously identified for the Grand Connection.

Mayor Chelminiak thanked staff for the presentation and their hard work. He noted that he and Councilmember Nieuwenhuis served as liaisons to the Grand Connection project. He recalled discussing the concept with Bellevue's congressional delegation, who were excited about how Bellevue is creating new mixed use neighborhoods. Mr. Chelminiak said they understood the importance of the Grand Connection over I-405.

Responding to Councilmember Nieuwenhuis, Ms. DeVries suggested involving the creative community and potentially consultants in identifying future activations along the Grand Connection. In further response, Ms. DeVries said it would be helpful to have further discussion about the City's goals related to placemaking and about optional permitting approaches for similar installations and projects. Mr. Jack said that safety is paramount, and guidelines for future installations would be helpful in addressing the types of issues and considerations that might not currently be addressed in the City Code.

Councilmember Stokes said this is an exciting project and great team work. He noted his past involvement in a number of BDA trips to other cities with similar features and projects. He thanked the BDA for its work with City staff. He said he is pleased to see that planning for the Grand Connection is at this stage.

Councilmember Lee congratulated staff on their good, creative work. He concurred with the importance of placemaking and partnerships and noted the lessons learned from the activation pilot project. He said this is the beginning of identifying additional creative ideas for the Grand Connection.

Councilmember Zahn expressed enthusiasm for creating a fun environment. She noted that there are murals on some of the buildings along the corridor. She encouraged involving youth in exploring ideas for games or other activities. She looks forward to continued work related to the Grand Connection.

Deputy Mayor Robinson said the project is a great example of a public-private partnership. She looks forward to what is possible for the future in terms of expanded partnerships and creative activations.

Mayor Chelminiak said a number of property owners have expressed an interest in learning how the Grand Connection can be integrated with their properties.

3. Discussion of Upcoming Items: None.

At 6:53 p.m., Mayor Chelminiak declared recess to the reception for recognizing his 16 years of service on the City Council.

Charmaine Arredondo, CMC
City Clerk

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