

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

July 22, 2020
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Morisseau, Commissioners deVadoss, Ferris, Laing, Malakoutian

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Vice Chair Moolgavkar

Deleted: Commissioner

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Jennifer Ewing, Emil King, Department of Community Development

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Barksdale

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER
(6:38 p.m.)

The meeting was called to order at 6:38 p.m. by Chair Morisseau who presided. She explained the meeting was being held remotely in compliance with the Governor's emergency order concerning the Public Open Meetings Act. She noted that during the meeting there would be no opportunity for oral communications from the public, and added that all written comments submitted prior to 3:00 p.m. would be summarized into the record as part of the pertinent agenda topic. Public comment and testimony at scheduled public hearings will be allowed at upcoming Commission meetings.

2. ROLL CALL
(6:39 p.m.)

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Vice Chair Moolgavkar who was excused.

Deleted: Commissioner

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
(6:40 p.m.)

There was agreement to move agenda item 3A to the end of the meeting just prior to agenda item 13.

A motion to approve the agenda as amended was made by Commissioner Malakoutian. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bhargava and the motion carried unanimously.

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None
(6:42 p.m.)

5. STAFF REPORTS

(6:42 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Comprehensive Planning Manager Thara Johnson briefly reviewed with the Commissioners the schedule of upcoming meetings and agenda items. She informed the Commissioners that on July 20 staff offered a presentation to the City Council on the C1 component of the affordable housing strategy and noted that the Council directed the Commission to begin work on a Comprehensive Plan amendment; that work will begin in the fall. Work on parking code changes will also come before the Commission in the fall.

Chair Morisseau informed the Commission that she would be presenting the Comprehensive Plan amendment threshold review recommendations to the Council on August 3 along with either Vice Chair Moolgavkar or the new Commission chair.

Deleted: vice-chair

6. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

(6:49 p.m.)

Ms. Johnson indicated an email was received that included an attachment related to recommendations on the parking standards. Additionally, an email was received that was in relation to the issue of gun safety.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None

(6:52 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION

(6:52 p.m.)

A. Environmental Stewardship Plan Update – Draft Actions

Environmental Stewardship Program Manager Jennifer Ewing reminded the Commissioners that the process of updating the environmental stewardship plan was continuing as part of the Council's 2018-2020 vision priorities. The Council directed a review of the progress made relative to the Environmental Stewardship Initiative and to analyze additional steps the city could take to achieve its environmental goals. On November 12, 2019, the Council provided direction to engage with all of the city's boards and commissions to gather input on the strategies and actions of the plan. No formal action is needed from any of the boards and commissions, however.

Ms. Ewing reminded the Commissioners that on February 26 she shared with them the 2050 targets that were presented previously to the Council. She said the Council and the community expressed a desire to see some near-term targets developed as well, which spurred staff on to work on the development of targets for 2030 in alignment with the county's goals and those of peer cities. The 2030 targets are intended to put the city on a path toward achieving the 2050 targets. Most of the targets assume a linear progression through to 2050, with the exception of the electric vehicle target where the anticipation is that as the market changes over the next ten years or so progress toward that goal will accelerate. Some numerical goals will be set around having the majority of jobs and housing units within a quarter mile of frequent transit. While the Frequent Transit Network will be shrunk down for a while, the anticipation is that at some point it will go back. The targets, which are longer-term goals, will not be revised accordingly.

The Commissioners were informed that there are land use components to a number of the strategies. A number of actions are being considered relative to materials and waste, including outreach and education for residents and businesses. There will be actions for the Commission to consider in all of the focus areas, including getting to zero waste by 2050; reducing single occupancy vehicle trips for those who live and work in Bellevue; moving toward 100 percent of the vehicle trips be by electric vehicle; reducing vehicle miles traveled per capita by 50 percent, which will be predicated on the majority of growth occurring in growth areas; establishing goals around 100 percent renewable energy and reducing energy use; working toward increasing the city's overall tree canopy; getting to where all city residents live within a third of a mile of a park, open space or trailhead; and reducing greenhouse gases emissions by 80 percent.

Ms. Ewing said the plan builds on the foundation of environmental work done over the years. The Environmental Stewardship Initiative was started in 2007 but many city departments have had environmental programs in place for decades. The plan update seeks to establish some short-term and long-term goals and targets by updating some existing targets and creating some new goals and targets. The plan is intended to be a five-year plan and over time the work will continue to evolve. Additionally, not everything will be funded right out of the gate.

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Since February staff have been conducting outreach in addition to looking at the universe of potential actions, looking at what has been accomplished to date, reviewing the accomplishments since the last environmental stewardship plan from 2013, and considering the costs, benefits and impacts of various actions. That work is feeding the analysis of various strategies.

With regard to greenhouse gases emissions, Ms. Ewing said the two largest sources are transportation and energy used in buildings, followed by natural gas and solid waste. She said the strategies and actions going forward will focus on land use and mobility with the goal to reduce emissions. The actions are both at the state/federal level as well as the local level. The Clean Energy Transformation Act requires utilities to use 100 percent renewable energy by 2045. If no actions were taken, greenhouse gases emissions would increase, but each strategy will reduce the upward trend line. Collectively, the actions are projected to reduce greenhouse gases emissions 80 percent by 2050.

A draft list of actions was shared with the public in the form of focus groups with business groups and other organizations around the city. Behind the scenes the work has included vetting the draft actions with the staff and department leadership. Some of the actions could potentially be addressed as part of future Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Code updates. Relative to the climate, the draft actions include climate vulnerability and environmental equity assessments that are intended to return information around where there might be environmental justice and vulnerability concerns. The sustainable district notion is typically a public/private partnership in which a neighborhood might set environmental goals that align with citywide goals. The model could have some relevance in Bellevue, possibly in downtown or in parts of the Bel-Red or Wilburton areas. The air quality draft action is more focused on gathering additional information regarding air quality in Bellevue. There are currently only a couple of air quality sensors in place and the intent is to try to get better information about what the air quality is like in specific areas where increased densities are contemplated. The information could be used to inform Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Code updates relative to the proximity of various buildings to freeways.

With regard to mobility and land use, a need has been outlined that came from the Downtown Livability Initiative relative to a growth center parking study. Ms. Ewing said the current thinking is that it would make the most sense to hold off on such a study until light rail opens. Covid-19 has triggered an increase in telecommuting and those impacts on parking should also

be studied. Also of interest are the areas along the frequent transit network that could be suitable for more development, and that study could be taken into consideration as part of the next Comprehensive Plan update.

The bigger topic relating to materials management and waste is the code requirements around space for recycling. The code has not been updated to account for the fact that there are three waste streams which has implications in terms of space. The newer multifamily buildings do not all provide for organics collection due to a lack of space. From a livability and walkability stance, having dumpsters out on sidewalks is less than ideal. The recycling rate in multifamily and commercial buildings is lower than in single family homes and space requirements could be one reason for that.

Ms. Ewing said there is an evident desire for the city to review its tree preservation code and to strengthen it in terms of permit requirements for tree removal, and requirements around tree retention and replacement. The tree code was updated as part of the last National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System work in 2016, but additional updates need to be made to bring the city in line with neighboring communities. Also in regard to natural systems, there is a need to integrate multiple environmental benefits into the selection and design of parks and potentially properties used for utilities and other purposes.

The draft actions in the energy category relate to various types of incentives for building green. They include incentivizing advanced green building certifications, such as the living building certification, harmonizing green building incentives across the city, and looking at ways to encourage additional incentives for green affordable housing.

Ms. Ewing noted that currently the Environmental Stewardship Initiative is framed in the Comprehensive Plan as a program rather than as a functional plan. One recommendation is to update the Comprehensive Plan to reflect the Environmental Stewardship Initiative plan as a functional plan that is updated on a five- or six-year basis.

The second phase of outreach and engagement was launched with an open house on March 3 just before the county limited large gatherings. Additional in-person outreach plans set for the spring months were moved to more of an online format. The online survey received about 600 responses. The Earth Week climate anxiety talk was shifted to an online format. There were a couple of focus groups conducted with business groups and other environmental groups from around the region, and there has been participation with a couple of different Bellevue School District opportunities, including a sustainability town hall with Bellevue High School.

The top five priorities evident from the survey are a ban on single-use plastics, a transportation master plan, updating the tree preservation code, a home energy retrofit program, and targeted land acquisition.

The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered the need to change the way outreach was conducted and the need to determine the impact on the actions relative to economic recovery. Staff have reviewed the findings with an eye on making sure there will be no undue burden on businesses and residents. Consideration has been given to pushing out the timeline somewhat for certain actions as the economy recovers. Strategies that reduce costs for residents and businesses have been prioritized. There is a need to incorporate sustainability into economic recovery.

Ms. Ewing noted that while the timeline for moving forward has been revised, things are still moving forward. The process of engaging with boards and commissions is under way and will

continue through the summer months. There will be a check-in with the Council in September as part of releasing the finalized draft plan. The intent is to have the final plan ready for the Council to adopt by the end of the year.

Commissioner Malakoutian asked if there has been any analysis done to date regarding the changes resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic that might impact some of the strategies. He also asked if the outcomes of the survey will be turned into top priorities or if the survey was intended only to identify issues. Ms. Ewing said there are a number impacts resulting from Covid-19 but it will be necessary to wait and see how they play out. There has been a big decline in traffic as most people are telecommuting, but as the economy recovers it remains to be seen if the shift toward telecommuting will continue. If workers continue to telecommute even one or two days per week there will be positive impacts on traffic and total vehicle miles traveled. It could also have positive impacts on parking as well. The impact of Covid-19 on transit also needs to be tracked. King County Metro is facing significant budget cuts due to Covid-19 but there is no sense yet as to the long-term impacts, but it is thought that until there is a vaccine, transit ridership will continue to be low.

There are some unknowns in regard to how some state policies will be implemented, and that could impact how Bellevue achieves its goals. The assumption pre-pandemic was that the state-level work would move forward, including the Clean Energy Transformation Act, the green buildings bill and the ban on plastic bags. Now there are questions about state funding levels for implementation. The anticipation is that it could be up to two years before actions in the plan are revisited and before taking any steps to adjust them.

The survey feedback is being used to prioritize and identify actions that are not fully supported but which it might make sense to do anyway. The feedback is also being used to note those areas of strong support.

Commissioner Bhargava noted that much of the material was around specific areas, such as mobility and green buildings, and he asked if the plan connects the various elements across multiple aspects to form an overall sustainability plan for the city. He asked if there are components of the plan that talk about density bonuses or development incentives tied to green building certification or locating development near transit to reduce vehicle miles traveled. Ms. Ewing said every attempt will be made to make that connection clear. Much of the work to make the connection between land use and transportation clear is already being done. City bonuses and incentives are already in place but consideration is being given to how to strengthen them.

Commissioner Ferris said incentivizing green buildings within the affordable housing realm is a wonderful ideal, but given how difficult it is to come up with funding for affordable housing nothing should be put in that will increase the burden on the development of affordable housing, resulting in a disincentive. With regard to creating more density, she noted that under Covid-19 more people are working from home, and if developers are forced to create really small units, people may be deterred from wanting to work from home. Living spaces need to be created that will encourage people to work from home. Mr. Ewing said the affordable housing community has been generally supportive of green building but is leery of approaches that would add costs.

Commissioner deVadoss commented that the modeling behind climate science has always been suspect. It is very clear that the scenario shows that. The way people live and work is fundamentally shifting and no one can say for sure what the world will look like in five years let alone 50 years. He recommended tabling the initiative until more is known. Ms. Ewing said staff would take the suggestion into consideration. She noted that it is clear from the outreach that

there is a strong desire on the part of residents to move the work forward.

Commissioner Bhargava said he did not see in the plan anything about reducing water usage and the ability to use recycled water. He asked if that is captured in the building energy component of the plan. Ms. Ewing said water use reduction is being looked at in terms of citywide goals. There are also goals relative to city operations that involve water use reduction, which in turn would reduce the amount of electricity needed to pump water, and that is part of the emissions inventory. The Cascade Water Alliance does most of the work to encourage water use reductions on behalf of the city's utilities department, though nearly all of the green building programs address water efficiency in one form or another.

Councilmember Barksdale noted the quarter mile distance for jobs and housing and asked if the same has been considered for core goods and services. He said he also would like to know the demographic distribution of the survey respondents, and how the community might better be mobilized in support of the proposed actions. Ms. Ewing said the quarter mile distance was focused on employment and housing because that is the main focus in the Transit Master Plan. She allowed the notion could also be considered in terms of goods and services. She said the survey demographics information was included in the outreach summary. In terms of race, the diversity was not entirely aligned with the city's population, though answering the questions in the demographic section of the survey was optional and not everyone filled it out. There was diversity in age, with about a quarter of the respondents under the age of 25. Mobilizing the community in support of the plan will require some more strategizing.

Chair Morisseau commented that the number of survey respondents seemed quite small with respect to the population of the city who might be interested in responding to the questions. She asked what outreach methods were used and if there was targeting to specific subareas. She also asked what strategies are in place to continue with community outreach in light of the virus situation. Ms. Ewing said she would like to have seen more than the 600 respondents, though that number represents a decent response. The city's biannual residents survey sees around 2000 or 3000 responses. In terms of outreach, all available platforms and distribution lists were used, and the survey was kept open for quite a while. There were some ads run on Facebook and the survey was promoted on NextDoor to reach people not necessarily connected with the city's normal communication pathways. As implementation begins, additional community engagement will be launched.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. July 8, 2020

A motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner deVadoss and the motion carried unanimously.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

a. Election of Officers

A motion to nominate Vice Chair Moolgavkar to serve as Chair was made by Commissioner Ferris.

Deleted: Commissioner

No additional nominations were made

The motion to elect ~~Vice Chair~~ Moolgavkar to serve as Chair carried unanimously.

Deleted: Commissioner

A motion to elect Commissioner Malakoutian to serve as Vice Chair was made by Commissioner deVadoss.

No additional nominations were made.

The motion to elect Commissioner Malakoutian to serve as Vice Chair carried unanimously.

11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None

13. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner deVadoss and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Morisseau adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.