

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

October 11, 2017
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Walter, Commissioners Barksdale, deVadoss, Laing, Morisseau

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Carlson

STAFF PRESENT: Terry Cullen and Emil King, Department of Planning and Community Development; Carol Helland, Department of Development Services

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER
(6:50 p.m.)

The meeting was called to order at 6:50 p.m. by Chair Walter who presided.

2. ROLL CALL
(6:50 p.m.)

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Laing, who arrived at 7:25 p.m., and Commissioner Carlson, who was excused.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
(6:51 p.m.)

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Barksdale. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Morisseau and the motion carried unanimously.

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None
(6:51 p.m.)

5. STAFF REPORTS
(6:51 p.m.)

Comprehensive Planning Manager Terry Cullen briefly reviewed the Commission's schedule of upcoming meetings and agenda items.

The Commissioners were reminded that they needed to update the operating system on their iPads, and that they needed to be using only their Bellevue-issued email addresses for Commission business.

Mr. Cullen said the move into a new phase of construction at City Hall has dramatically reduced the amount of visitor parking. In response, the employee parking garage on P2 has been opened.

Mr. Cullen informed the Commissioners that the notes regarding the third quarter check-in with the Chair, Vice-Chair, the Council liaison and staff had been included in the packet. While the third quarter is typically quieter overall given that there are no meetings in August, the changeover to digital format was accomplished along with the election of new officers. Training was offered on the Open Public Meetings Act and the Public Records Act, and quite a lot of organizational work was done in the form of new bylaws and the guiding principles. The Commission also conducted a study session on the package of Comprehensive Plan amendments.

Mr. Cullen said he has reserved the room adjacent to the Council Conference Room for five dates in 2018 and has asked the staff who work with the Planning Commission to consider scheduling any public hearings they may have on those dates to allow for more public seating.

6. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS - None
(7:00 p.m.)

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(7:00 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION
(7:01 p.m.)

A. Downtown Livability Initiative Land Use Code Amendments – Post Project Survey

Mr. Cullen explained that the agenda item was focused on developing a post-project survey template using as a test case the Downtown Livability Initiative code amendments. The notion of conducting post-project evaluations is to better understand how the Commission and the staff can improve their effectiveness and efficiency. The self-evaluations are contemplated to be done shortly after the role of the Commission on projects is completed. The hope is to use the tool as a template for future projects, allowing for the building up of a base of data to understand performance efficiency and effectiveness, and how it can be monitored over time. While the desire is to yield a tool that will be consistent project to project, a part of each evaluation will be customized to the project under consideration. The tool will hopefully yield measurable results and outline what worked well as well as the areas in which improvements could be sought.

Commissioner deVadoss cautioned against using the term “performance evaluation tool.” He said that could become a slippery slope in terms of how and where the data may be used. If the intent is just to learn, the focus should be kept on what went well and what did not go well. He asked if a similar tool is being used by the Council or other boards and commissions. Mr. Cullen said no other boards or commissions are using such a tool. There is a quality of life survey conducted for the city as a whole that includes feedback on how well the city as a government is responding on many different fronts. People are asked to comment on where things worked well and where things could be improved. Commissioner deVadoss said if there are similar tools or processes being used, they should be tapped to avoid reinventing the wheel. If no similar tools are in use, the Commission should, in developing the tool, reach out to other boards and commissions for feedback. In the interest of productivity, it should be kept simple by focusing just on what went well, what did not go well, and what can be learned.

Commissioner Barksdale pointed out that a lot of survey tools include a fee both to use the tool and for responses. There are some that are free to use.

Chair Walter asked if the tool is intended to serve as a replacement for dialog in a Commission type of public meeting. Meetings in which comments launch other thoughts and comments are preferred to a format that generates comments in a vacuum. If the survey approach is used, there should be opportunity provided to discuss the input. She also suggested that there should be no anonymity allowed in the survey responses; those with thoughts on process should own them. Mr. Cullen said the intent was that where a survey tool is used, the results would be brought before the Commission at the retreat for a full discussion. Anonymity cannot be allowed in what constitutes a public record.

Commissioner Barksdale suggested that a survey would help identify themes before the Commission engages in discussion, making discussions more productive by providing focus to begin with.

Chair Walter expressed concern over the amount of productive time spent on the issue. She noted the Commission talked about it on October 4, was talking about it then, would fill out the survey, and then discuss it again at the retreat. The Commission is very busy and should be using its time as productively as possible. Commissioner Barksdale countered that having the Commissioners fill out their raw comments earlier and then coming to a discussion with themes in hand will improve productivity. Chair Walter said the issue was not a city initiative, rather it was a reflection of Commission activity. It will wind up spanning several meetings. The questions have been tailored to the specific process as opposed to a more global process. It feels very long.

Commissioner Barksdale said there were two points, first the approach of completing a survey and coming to a full discussion starting with specific themes to address, and second the questions and survey topics. The two should be separated. The overall approach should not be tossed out just because of the overall length of the survey, which could be tailored differently.

Commissioner deVadoss reiterated keeping things as simple as possible. He also noted that where there are a priori questions there is the likelihood of biasing the dialog. There are side effects of having something templated as opposed to holding an open dialog on what went well and what did not go well. He said his preference was for the latter approach. Commissioner Barksdale suggested that having the conversation live can introduce bias by having responses affected by the responses of others, whereas a survey offers the opportunity for individuals to provide individual responses.

Land Use Director Carol Helland pointed out that at the Commission's last retreat there was uniform interest in reflecting on projects and their transit through the Commission's processes. She suggested the approach is the first thing the Commission should decide on. If a survey is not the right tool, staff needs that feedback. The historic approach has been for the Commission to have dialog about what has gone well and what has not. If the survey is not the way the Commission wants to go, there is no need to spend time wordsmithing the survey.

Commissioner deVadoss concurred. He said a post-mortem review is the way the Commission learns, but again suggested it should be kept as simple as possible and focus on what should be done with the feedback.

Commissioner Barksdale said he wanted to make sure the language was clear and said he felt

like the survey was framed in a way that was not actually true. It will not decrease productivity, rather it will give the Commission a head start. Otherwise the Commission will have dialog around things that could have been flushed out by the survey.

Chair Walter said she would prefer to talk about downtown livability rather than about developing a tool to be used to talk about downtown livability. The tool is not necessarily wrong, it is just not steering the dialog.

Commissioner Morisseau agreed that being efficient was one thing that came out of the last retreat. She said what she likes about the tool is that it circles the Commission back to its scope. A focus on what went well, what did not work and lessons learned is very broad. The survey takes the Commission back to the directives from the Council and the Commission's specific work. Unless things are focused, the Commission will not be efficient in doing its work. She said as an engineer she likes having templates. The Commission has already suggested that applicants for Comprehensive Plan amendments should have a template to follow in making presentations before the Commission. Having a template will help the Commission become more efficient. The time to focus on developing the template is while the Commission's schedule is lighter than usual.

Mr. Cullen pointed out that the Commission's 2017 calendar was dominated by downtown livability for a full five months. He said the opportunity to revisit issues from the 2016 retreat simply had not previously been possible from a scheduling point of view.

Mr. Cullen said staff chose a post-evaluation survey as the method because it was seen as something that can be easily developed into a template for future applications. Once a template is in hand, it can be used for all projects in which the Commission engages. The evaluations over time will yield information about what works best. Some Commissioners are interested in specific datasets to inform processes, and at the retreat the Commission indicated a desire to have input into scoping right up front. The post-evaluation survey will yield additional information about how to better tune information, how it is delivered and how it is presented in ways that will work best for the Commission. Things will undoubtedly change over time. The approach will be cost effective and easy to administer, and has room to provide objective and quantifiable results as well as subjective results. As drafted, the survey allows for adding in specific comments about the process. He allowed that the test case sample survey included in the packet was lengthy in that it was intended to highlight the universe of possibilities. It certainly is possible to amend it however the Commission sees fit.

Mr. Cullen said the survey was broken into three sections, with the first section focused on addressing business results. He stressed that the client is the City Council. The Council asks for a product and gives the specs in the form of guiding principles. The section seeks to answer the question of whether or not the Commission delivered the required results.

Commissioner deVadoss argued that the Commission is not a vendor providing a service to a client. The Commission is a group of volunteers selected and appointed by the Council. The view the process in terms of vendor and client reeks of an analyst mindset. Going down the path of asking whether or not the Commission delivered is a fundamental flaw. The real question to be asked is whether or not the Commission did the right thing for the city. Clearly a great deal of work has gone into developing the survey, but it is focused on a vendor/client model, which is a flawed mindset.

Commissioner Morisseau asked if the question is one of semantics or if there is a fundamental

disagreement with the principle that the Commission is following the directives of the Council to do the due diligence the Council does not have the time to do. Commissioner deVadoss said the Council lays down the principles and directives, and the staff serve as the domain experts in terms of data and otherwise providing input. The Commission as a body serves in an advisory capacity to the Council. It is about delivering outcomes for the city in a timely fashion, what went well, what did not go well, and what was learned about how to do things better next time.

Commissioner Barksdale commented that whichever direction the Commission takes, there needs to be clear thinking involved. There can be disagreement about whether or not to proceed with the survey, but it should be not framed in terms of the survey creating a heavy process and supporting a mental model of a vendor/client relationship. The approach should be the focus and all other issues should be kept separate. The survey itself does not dictate the mental model; the questions, which are changeable, affect that view.

Commissioner deVadoss said the language about performance evaluation and the language around setting service levels in terms of delivering a product makes it feel as though each Commissioner is being evaluated by a set of principles. Having a performance evaluation framework is not part of the charter of the Commission.

Chair Walter agreed and said whether or not the Commission has met the guiding principles is for the Council to answer. The Commission will not send forward a recommendation if it feels it does not meet the guiding principles.

Commissioner Laing suggested it is a bit premature to even be talking about a survey regarding downtown livability when the Council has not yet even acted on it. The project is in fact not complete and it cannot be said with surety what will come out of it. The Commission cannot be genuine in saying it has been purposeful unless it is also self-reflective. A lot of work went into crafting the survey. It is very detailed and it asks on some level the logical questions about things, but the questions cannot really be answered until after the Council has acted. If the survey is intended to serve as an evaluation of the planning process or the CAC process, there are voices beyond just the Commission that should be heard. The rule of probabilities dictates that ultimately staff will be on one side pointing fingers at the inefficiencies or the issues they perceive relative to the CAC and the way in which the Commission comported itself. On the other side will be the CAC members and the Commissioners pointing at staff for perceived approaches that slowed down the process or created problems. Ultimately, nothing helpful would result.

Commissioner Morisseau said it was her understanding that the post-project process was intended to zero in on how the Commission with the help of staff can work efficiently going forward. She said she did not even take into consideration anything about the CAC. Commissioner Barksdale said that was his concern as well. The survey has drafted takes too wide a view instead of keeping things focused. It is true there is a timing question given that the Council has not yet acted, but that does not go to whether or not the survey is the right tool or whether the questions need to be modified.

Chair Walter said it was her understanding that there had already been agreement about the survey as a tool, and that the discussion would be focused on the content. She said the content of the survey was so broad that it was triggering a negative response to the tool itself. As drafted, the survey is not an efficient tool. She suggested focusing first on whether or not the Commission wants to utilize a survey, and if the answer is yes then focus on how long it should be and what type of survey should be used.

Commissioner deVadoss said he could see no reason to be overly formal in conducting post-project revaluations. If the real scope is just the Commission and the staff, the best approach would be to just talk about it at the retreat without creating a process that has a lot of bureaucracy associated with it. He agreed that because the Council has not closed out on the downtown livability issue yet, it cannot be known yet where the goalposts are.

Mr. Cullen said he chose the vendor/client analogy because it is relative to the Commissioners in the worlds in each operates professionally. He said it was not meant to be taken entirely as just that given that the Commission's relationship with the Council is not strictly just a client/vendor relationship. The survey was designed as it was because in the words of the Commission, the Commissioners are self-professed data wonks. The idea was to collect data that would help staff better deliver things to the Commission. Section 2 was designed to be the core template of all evaluations. It is fairly standard and runs along the standard project elements of scope and schedule, data and analysis, written reports, communications and presentations. The ultimate intent is to deliver information to the Commission in an understandable format, and all the information needed by the Commission. With regard to the downtown code amendments, the Council is slated to wrap up its work on October 16, and the intent was to administer the survey after that date. Even so, the survey is focused on the Commission's portion of the life cycle of the project irrespective of the final outcome at the Council level. He reiterated that the language of the survey is comprehensive and allowed that it certainly can be changed.

Commissioner Morisseau said one thing missing from Section 2 is anything having to do with the community. With regard to communication, she noted that the downtown livability project was a prime example of inefficient communication with the public. In several instances people came forward saying they had never even heard about the code change, which often meant having the same conversation over and over again. A way to better communicate with the community needs to be found.

Commissioner deVadoss noted that the work of the Commission is not carried out in a vacuum; it involves the four pillars of the Commission, the Council, the staff and the community. To scope down the post-project evaluation to only the role the Commission plays would be ineffective. He pointed out that during the downtown livability project, there was clearly input from the mayor and the Council at various points, even to the extent of how long the public comment period should be. The evaluation process must take into account not only the Commission but also the staff, the Council and the community. Any survey in which the Commission participates should also go to the Council, the staff and the community. Mr. Cullen said the intention is to have both the Commission and the staff take the survey.

Chair Walter said drawing in the public who had an incentive to present their positions might be problematic, but a survey could go out to the people of record. Surveys can be overdone but they can also be adapted to get the most compliance from respondents. Reflecting on the process will be helpful, but it will be important to stay away from anything that is critical without a focus on making improvements. She said she did not even know what Section 2.f is about.

Mr. Cullen sought from the Commission a clear consensus as to whether or not the survey is a valid instrument that is worthwhile to use. He said if a survey is the favored approach of the Commission, he would need from the Commissioners suggestions as to the outline. He reminded the Commission that the survey was previously agreed upon as a tool to be used in improving the relationship between staff and Commissioners. Expanding it out to become a community survey is probably not going to be feasible. Expanding it to include the Council is not going to happen

either. The focus is solely on what the Commission feels it could do better and what the staff could do to help the Commission be better. The survey can be crafted to be much more general and subjective if that is what the Commission wants.

Commissioner Laing thanked Mr. Cullen for his comments and said they helped him better understand the intent of the post-project review. With that in mind, he noted that Section 2 paragraphs (a) through (e) speak directly to what the Commission can do to improve and what the staff can do to help the Commission with its work. He said he had to strongly agree with everything in Section 1 to avoid either hanging himself or his fellow Commissioners out; the section does not focus on improving efficiency or effectiveness. Section 3 does not really fit the concept of improving the work of the Commission. He suggested limiting the survey to Section 2 paragraphs (a) through (e) and paragraphs (g) through (j).

Commissioner deVadoss suggested that Mr. Cullen's summary on how the staff and the Commission can work better together was diametrically opposed to the slides containing language around performance evaluation and service to the client. If the goal is to determine how to work better together, a lightweight way should be utilized. He additionally strongly recommended finding a way to get input from the community and the Council, otherwise only a small part of the bigger system will be in play.

Chair Walter said the premise for the presentation is that staff and the Commission have not worked well together. Such issues should be worked out in real time; where things are identified as not going well, they should be talked about then and there, even if it means breaking a meeting for a pause. Everyone is in it for the best of reasons, and each has different levels of expertise. It all complements the whole and builds together. She said her preference would be to have four questions and then talk.

Ms. Helland said from the conversation it was clear that two Commissioners did not like survey approach as a post-project evaluation too. She asked how the other three Commissioners felt about it.

Commissioner Morisseau said she saw a bigger issue than just using the survey as a tool. Ms. Helland agreed and suggested that larger discussion would be appropriate for the retreat. She said she heard questions about what outcome the approach is driving to, and the expectations between the Commission and the Council. Staff does not believe anything was broken and needs to be fixed. The Commission is the client for the staff and the staff benefit from feedback from the Commissioners. There is a fundamental question around how to close the loop on scope. The staff and the Commission collectively work at the bidding of the Council, and the context of the scope of work is a broader retreat topic. With respect to the tool and the questions, it was the intent of staff to follow up on the direction given at the last retreat to help the Commission evaluate how the operational system is working, specifically whether or not staff is giving the Commission what it needs to do what the Council expects, and how things can be done differently to improve the process and the results.

Commissioner Morisseau said she liked the idea of accomplishing the desired outcome, and that said she would go along with whatever approach will yield the desired results. She agreed with the comments of Commissioner Laing about what portions of the draft survey to focus on. In the end, if the Commission does not go back and reflect on the scope, the whole exercise will be pointless. There is value to Section 3 in that it allows for making an analysis for each project differently. The three questions in the section are really just examples applicable to downtown livability. The process as outlined will not prevent the Commission from stopping to address

issues during the process; that door has always been open.

Ms. Helland allowed that the desired outcomes for the Commission are really tied to the evaluation made by the Commission at the point in time staff was given direction with respect to crafting a recommendation. Section 1 is not irrelevant to a post-mortem that is focused on the operational system of code and Comprehensive Plan amendments, it just occurs at a different time in the process. The time to have the deliberate conversation about whether or not the Council's objectives have been met should be at the end of the Commission's deliberations and during the exercise of going back over the recommendations and checking to make sure all boxes have been checked. The post-mortem then could be more focused on how the operational system worked.

Commissioner deVadoss said that would help to offer some clarity to the what and the how. He reiterated the need to involve all four pillars in some way around the how. There can be no meaningful debate and consideration of the how by only focusing on two pieces.

Chair Walter said she would be very interested in hearing the perspective of the Council on the process. There have at times been questions on the part of the Council about how the Commission arrived at certain decisions. There should be a more seamless interaction in getting all the communications from one body to the other, from a CAC to the Commission and from the Commission to the Council. A survey will not necessarily get to that, but a focus on seamless handoffs and effective and simplified communications can.

Ms. Helland said she saw nods from Commissioners relative to removing the Section 1 questions and having them apply at a different point in the process. She proposed going forward with Sections 2 and 3 as a test case and talking about it further at the retreat.

Commissioner Laing said he did not find value in answering the Section 1 questions relative to the downtown livability project at the current juncture. He said he also saw no value in the Section 2 questions in paragraphs (f) and following. An argument could be made for much of the balance of Section 2, and there are some things about the Section 3 questions that are fine but not critical.

Commissioner Laing left the meeting.

Ms. Helland said she was hearing from the Commissioners an interest in testing the survey tool, but that the draft questions were not necessarily the right ones. She said she was clearly hearing the draft was far too long. She reiterated her understanding that Section 1 is not the same as the rest of the survey and should be addressed at a different point in the process.

Commissioner deVadoss returned to the higher level points made around the scope, purpose and ambition of the survey. He said for him it was not only about the survey itself or the questions. The language in the slides are what he was opposed to, along with the framing and the mental model. He called for going back to the drawing board and ask what led to the framing. Survey or not, to have a client/vendor mindset is fundamentally wrong.

Chair Walter she is a believer in feedback loops. To get to the feedback loop, however, requires knowing the intention. She proposed opening the floor to discussion about intention and goals. She said in her view the goal is to give the best possible product to the city utilizing the direction from the Council and the expertise of staff. The other Commissioners concurred. Chair Walter the question, then, is what mechanism will best determine if the Commission did what it set out

to do. The Council is in the best position to say if a particular recommendation from the Commission met their principles. In the case of downtown livability, it can be assumed the Commission's recommendation did meet all of the Council principles else it would have been sent back to the Commission. From there the question is how the Commission does its work, which is certainly a retreat conversation. She acknowledged the Commissioners were all nodding their heads.

Mr. Cullen said given that direction, staff would bring the issue back at the retreat in the form of some sort of survey as a point of discussion around the how to. Chair Walter asked staff to refer back to Commissioner Laing's comments about what to include and what not to include.

Commissioner Barksdale said it was his understanding that the survey would be brought to the retreat for discussion. Chair Walter said that was correct and clarified that the intent of the survey is for the Commission to reflect on how it does what it does.

Commissioner Morisseau highlighted the need to also discuss at the retreat the scope and purpose of what the Commission seeks to accomplish in line with the comments made by Commissioner deVadoss. Chair Walter asked Commissioner deVadoss to draft a global statement of intent for discussion.

B. Planning Commission Guiding Principles
(8:20 p.m.)

Mr. Cullen reminded the Commissioners that at the previous retreat questions were raised as to why the existing guiding principles were not being daylighted in the Commission's practices and with staff. He said staff researched the guiding principles and Commissioners Walter and deVadoss sat down together to work on developing the principles. The Commission agreed at their 2016 annual retreat that guiding principles are important, and the intent was to revisit them in 2017 even though there was agreement that the Commission was already implementing the principles in various ways. The question is whether the principles work as they are or if they should be modified. Mr. Cullen said the original intent was to be able to bring the issue to the 2017 retreat for discussion and approval.

Commissioner deVadoss argued against going into detail regarding the guiding principles absent a full complement of Commissioners. Chair Walter concurred. She suggested the smaller group could, however, suggest edits to the text.

Commissioner Morisseau said it was her understanding after the last meeting that the principles were to be sent out to everyone with a request for input, and to bring the input to the retreat for discussion. She said the principles are very important and that the Commission as a team needs to buy in on them. The work of Chair Walter and Commissioner deVadoss serves as a good foundation.

Mr. Cullen said one option would be for the Commission to endorse the guiding principles as drafted and have them serve as the base until such time as the discussion can be concluded. It could be well into the new year before the item can be put back on an agenda for discussion. Of course it could also be added as an agenda item for the retreat. He said he could seek comments via email and send those comments out as part of the retreat packet.

Commissioner Morisseau asked if discussion on the principles would again be postponed in the event that not all Commissioners are present at the retreat. Commissioner Barksdale suggested

the discussion could proceed at the retreat regardless, provided the Commissioners all are given the opportunity to provide comments either in person or in writing.

Commissioner deVadoss proposed putting a stake in the ground and say the principles as drafted are acceptable and then seek input from every Commissioner in terms of changes they would like to see made. Subsequently, only the proposed changes would need to be discussed. Chair Walter said she could agree with that approach, adding that she would like to see the principles discussed annually by the Commission at the retreat.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None
(8:26 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None
(8:26 p.m.)

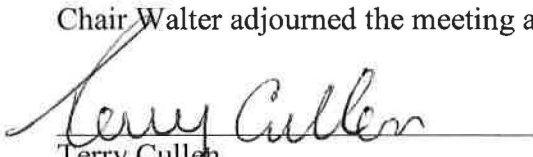
11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None
(8:26 p.m.)

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(8:26 p.m.)

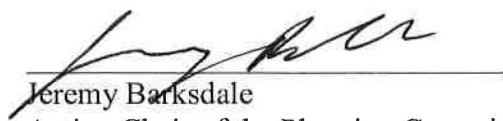
13. ADJOURN
(8:37 p.m.)

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Morisseau. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Barksdale and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Walter adjourned the meeting at 8:37 p.m.


Terry Cullen
Staff to the Planning Commission

1/25/18
Date


Jeremy Barksdale
Acting Chair of the Planning Commission

1/24/18
Date