

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

April 4, 2018
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Barksdale, Commissioners Carlson, deVadoss, Laing, Malakoutian, Morisseau, Moolgavkar

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Terry Cullen, Bradley Calvert, Department of Planning and Community Development

COUNCIL LIAISON: Mayor Chelminiak

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER
(6:35 p.m.)

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. by Chair Barksdale who presided.

2. ROLL CALL
(6:35 p.m.)

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Laing who arrived at 6:51 p.m.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
(6:35 p.m.)

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

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None
(6:35 p.m.)

5. STAFF REPORTS
(6:36 p.m.)

Comprehensive Planning Manager Terry Cullen briefly reviewed the Commission's schedule and list of agenda items. He noted that the pinch points in the schedule would occur during June and July, and again during September and October.

With regard to the meeting on April 25, Mr. Cullen noted that a large number of persons from the public are expected to attend as the Commission deliberates geographic scoping for the privately initiated Comprehensive Plan amendments. He reminded the Commissioners that while

the public may think otherwise, the Commission will not actually debate the merits of each application during the threshold review phase, rather the focus will be on determining whether or not each application meets some narrowly defined criteria. The merits of each proposal will be debated during final review.

Mr. Cullen said the walking tour of the East Main transit-oriented district on March 31 was attended by Commissioners Moolgavkar and Malakoutian.

Mr. Cullen reminded that during the last Commission meeting where the discussion centered on the proposed policy work for the project, a number of residents from the Surrey Downs neighborhood made the claim that Sound Transit had changed its plans to include four tracks along 112th Avenue SE rather than two, and that the tracks would be elevated rather than at grade. By way of follow up, staff did some research both with city transportation staff and Sound Transit staff. Under ST-3, there is a light rail line under consideration that would run from south Kirkland to Issaquah. Actual construction of ST-3 is anticipated to occur between 2036 and 2041. The planning work for that segment is scheduled for between 2027 and 2032. Sound Transit has proposed and considered a number of different possibilities in regard to possible routes, one of which does include coming up 112th Avenue SE. Nothing, however, is yet set in stone. Any preferred option would be subject to the environmental impact process, including a huge public involvement process and action by the City Council. None of that, however, has any bearing on the work of the Commission, which only has the responsibility to look at the East Main transit-oriented district site. Staff intends to reach out to folks from Surrey Downs with this information.

6. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS – None
(6:45 p.m.)

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(6:45 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION
(6:45 p.m.)

A. Grand Connection Comprehensive Plan Amendments

Community Development Program Manager Bradley Calvert said the concept behind the Grand Connection is a non-motorized pedestrian/cyclist route connecting Meydenbauer Bay with the Eastside Rail Corridor. The route connects many of Bellevue's green assets, the commercial business district and the transit center, and it is expected to be a catalyst for the future vision of the Wilburton commercial area, which is a companion planning effort. The two projects are, however, distinctly separate.

Mr. Calvert outlined the Grand Connection route, noting that an alternative route for cyclists and other transportation options has been identified. The two routes diverge from each other in part to deal with topographic challenges and the challenges involved with NE 6th Street, which is a much tighter urban environment. An additional recommendation is under consideration that involves Main Street as a secondary route of the Grand Connection, possibly creating a loop connecting the green assets of the Eastside Rail Corridor and the Botanical Garden.

In part, the vision of the Grand Connection is to create a unique urban identity distinct to Bellevue while also improving connectivity and mobility. Livability and quality of life are key

aspects in terms of the Grand Connection being an asset for residents, an experience for visitors, and a recruitment and retention tool for businesses. Equally important is the notion of reconnecting the urban fabric of the downtown and the Wilburton commercial area by crossing the freeway and creating a more contiguous urban environment.

The project kicked off with a charrette in partnership with the Bellevue Arts Museum. Some 75 architects, planners, urban designers and artists volunteered their time over three days to help craft a number of concepts. The approach was taken in part to fulfill the desire to incorporate art and culture into the project, and to allow people to imagine just what the route could become.

Once the visioning process was launched, it was separated into a phased approach. In the first phase, the focus was on the existing infrastructure of Meydenbauer Bay to City Hall/Civic Center district. With streets and infrastructure already in place, attention was given to how to make improvements that would help define the Grand Connection. The second phase was centered on how to cross I-405 and connect to the Eastside Rail Corridor and the Wilburton commercial area, all of which will involve new infrastructure. The visioning process began with identifying a route, which was followed by outlining an overarching identity using cohesive design strategies and specific public placemaking improvements.

The process resulted in three cohesive design alternatives relative to paving. The notion is to have a singular thread moving through the urban environment. It may include variations in concrete and other materials, but through it all there will be some form of common thread consistent through the entire route. To date the focus has been on high-level visioning; the next step will involve working out those details.

Mr. Calvert said during the public engagement process a lot of people said they want to be able to use the route when it rains. To accommodate that, several different cohesive design strategies involve weather protection. In some locations it may be linear, while in other locations where there may be play spaces or outdoor dining/seating areas single canopies may be used.

From the start, art and culture has been seen as a primary element. An artist team was brought on as a consultant to work with the designers. An art and culture plan has been incorporated. Art and culture certainly can serve as a cohesive design feature, but it can also serve to make the artistic and creative economy of Bellevue more prominent. Of course, the features can also serve to create whimsy and discovery in the urban environment while speaking to cultural diversity, history, technology and environmental performance and sustainability.

Mr. Calvert said Compass Plaza represents one of the most significant public space improvements along the route. It lies at the geographic center of the downtown, but when the consultant team looked at it they identified a number of challenges, including topography and spaces that are too large to be intimate and too small to be programmed. They turned their focus on how to make the space more flexible to allow for placemaking and programming in the center of the downtown. The vision outlines a plaza four times its current size with the street continuing to run through the middle of it, though with raised intersections. The plaza could then host things such as the art fair by functioning as one large plaza. The main way to open the space will be through consolidating all movement to an integrated ramp and stairway.

Connectivity is a primary element. It involves improving mobility for users of all ages and abilities, and embracing Bellevue's technology economy. Transportation alternatives are being considered as part of the project, including group rapid transit and how it could be incorporated along with enhanced cycling lanes. The group rapid transit options travel at the same speed as

bicycles, and can operate in various different modes ranging from an Uber-style application to a fixed-route system. The model has been deployed in Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Las Vegas and a couple of cities in California.

Mr. Calvert allowed that crossing the freeway will represent a big change requiring new infrastructure. A set of guiding principles have been created to guide the process; they include creating a safe and comfortable connections, creating opportunities for public spaces, seeking cohesion with future development opportunities on both sides of the freeway, and a signature form, design and experience. The ultimate goal is to tie together the downtown and the Eastside Rail Corridor and the Wilburton commercial area. Other cities have either already made such connections or are currently looking to do so, including Atlanta, Dallas, Denver, Glendale, Portland and Washington, D.C.

The consultant was tasked with producing three alternatives. The first is a sculptural bridge that seeks to repurpose some of the existing infrastructure at NE 6th Street and adding onto it a new crossing that is curvilinear and sculptural in nature, landing in a public plaza and open space on the Wilburton side. An aerial crossing would connect with the Eastside Rail Corridor. As envisioned, the bridge would incorporate cross-laminated timber, which is reclaimed wood that has been packed so tightly it has the same fire resistance as steel or concrete.

The second alternative envisions more of a linear approach that incorporates a safe, easy and comfortable crossing. The design involves essentially two pathways, one coming from NE 4th Street and the other from NE 6th Street, and a potential midblock crossing elevating to connect to a future development, all converging in a modest public plaza on the west side of the freeway via a ramp descending from the bridge, and a connection with the Eastside Rail Corridor.

The third alternative involves a lid over the freeway between NE 4th Street and NE 6th Street. The designers came up with a sculpted form that would partially cover the onramps while maximizing the amount of open space. The elevated crossing connects with the Eastside Rail Corridor. The lid would create a park of about 206,000 square feet with a large public plaza in the center.

Mr. Calvert informed the Commissioners that no decision has been made relative to which of the three alternatives should move forward. The Council has seen the alternatives but has not yet been asked for direction. The draft environmental impact statement for the Wilburton commercial area included an assessment of the three crossing alternatives. A full report will be before the Council in May.

The Council adopted the Phase I plan in December 2017 and initiated the necessary Comprehensive Plan amendments, Land Use Code updates, and the development of design guidelines. As part of the work, the public space concepts will be refined, including the Compass Plaza. The fact that movement is being seen on some of the properties around Compass Plaza, it is a good time to move forward and collaborate on ideas. Work is also under way to commission a piece of art for the northwest corner of Downtown Park, and the design process for raising the intersection of 106th Avenue NE and NE 6th Street is under way.

The Commissioners were informed that the Comprehensive Plan amendments are expected to touch the Downtown subarea, the Urban Design Element, and the Wilburton subarea. Workshops with stakeholders will kick off on April 9. Work on the Land Use Code and design guidelines will be ongoing in the background but will not be finalized until next year. The Land Use Code updates will include recalibrating one of the elements of the FAR incentive system, and filling

the placeholder left by the work on the Downtown Livability Initiative. The work on the design guidelines will focus on updating and expanding the existing pedestrian corridor design guidelines to cover the distance between Meydenbauer Bay and the Eastside Rail Corridor.

Mr. Calvert said the policy statements will be drafted between April and May, and the issue will be before the Commission several times between May and September. A public hearing will be held in October, and adoption of the updates will occur in December. The Land Use Code and design guidelines updates will be held over to 2019.

Commissioner Carlson commented that the process to date has resulted in a lot of good work. He asked if there are any price tags yet. Mr. Calvert said there have been estimates made regarding the crossing of I-405 that range between \$60 million and \$110 million. Elements like raised intersections can be accomplished through grants, and improvements to paving and vegetation can come about through the Land Use Code as properties redevelop.

Commissioner Laing asked if any consideration has been given to including all-weather ball fields anywhere along the route. Mr. Calvert said that would be a challenge to fit them in. There were public comments made about including ball fields as part of Downtown Park. Depending on the crossing alternatives, any kind of programming would be wide open. The idea is to be open to adapting the plans as the needs are made known.

Commissioner deVadoss said he was pleased to see art, culture and diversity considered. He suggested that with regard to Goal 3, the work of the First Peoples should also be highlighted.

Commissioner Moolgavkar noted the sketches for Compass Plaza did not include the California Pizza Kitchen and asked if that is imminent or just wishful thinking. Mr. Calvert said ultimately all of the properties around that intersection will change given that they are not currently at their highest and best use. The current focus is simply on getting concepts out there. No attempt will be made to force anything out, but it will be important to have a plan in place once things do begin to change.

Commissioner Morisseau asked what the advantages and disadvantages are of the three crossing alternatives. Mr. Calvert said there are differences in the size of the public space associated with each. The EIS looked at some seven different metrics, including how much public space can be created and how much of it would be usable, how much of Sturtevant Creek could be daylighted, and how much by way of storm water features could be created. An actual economic analysis has not been done because it is too early in the process, but consideration has been given to what might happen to the surrounding properties. The first two alternatives necessitate creating the open space in the Wilburton commercial area, which would take properties out of play for development; the third alternative would leave those properties in place.

Commissioner Morisseau said she liked the idea of incorporating whimsy as a way of creating landmarks for Bellevue. Mr. Calvert said the creation of landmarks has very much been a part of the planning work done to date. The position has been taken that art and culture programming should continuously rotate and thus always be drawing new attention, along with having permanent installations.

Commissioner Moolgavkar said it was her understanding that cross laminated timber is a fairly new technology. Mr. Calvert said a bridge using the technology has been designed for a site in Copenhagen, and one will be going to construction later in the year in Colorado. The beams are easier to install, which reduces construction time. Portland has a 14-story building going up

using the technology, and Toronto has a 22-story building. The technology is gaining momentum.

Chair Barksdale asked about additional outreach efforts and Mr. Calvert said more outreach is planned, including tactical urban events. The plan will be finalized in about a week.

Mr. Cullen directed the Commissioners to bring up bellevuegrandconnection.com and invited them to bookmark the page. Mr. Calvert walked the Commissioners through the website, noting that the framework plan can be downloaded by chapter. He pointed out that the information in regard to the I-405 crossing was not too in-depth given that the final report is still being drafted, but there is information about all three alternatives, and there is a poll in which viewers can select their preferred alternative. Some survey results are also available from the site along with the work accomplished during the design charrette.

Commissioner Moolgavkar asked when the Eastside Rail Corridor is scheduled to open. Mr. Calvert said the full trail will be open in 2023 but certain segments will move ahead more quickly with an interim trail. All of the rails will be removed during 2018. The Wilburton section will continue to offer a challenge given that the East Link project will run through a portion of it.

Commissioner deVadoss asked if the online polls and surveys can be restricted to just Bellevue residents and the immediate area. Mr. Calvert said that was not generally possible for the one poll surveys. The art and culture survey did include those mechanisms to better focus the responses.

Commissioner Carlson commented that over the last 25 years or so Bellevue has done a great job of increasing mobility by bridging I-405. A pedestrian overpass is desperately needed, especially one with all sorts of features built into it. He said he saw the proposal as a solid attempt to do things right.

Chair Barksdale asked if there are any numbers available regarding pedestrians and cyclists crossing the overpasses that are in place. Mr. Calvert said there are no counters in place but consideration has been given to interviewing those who are using them.

Commissioner Morisseau asked what data is available about pedestrians and cyclists using overcrossings that have been constructed in other cities. Mr. Calvert said the best way to answer that question would be from an observation perspective, specifically what have they done for their communities. In the case of Clyde Warren Park in Dallas, the project has exploited billions of dollars of development. The bridge constructed in Atlanta unlocked the potential of the west side of midtown and integrated the campus of Georgia Tech with the city. He said case studies will be included as the project moves ahead.

B. Guiding Principles Part II (7:36 p.m.)

A motion to approve the guiding principles as amended was made by Commissioner Laing. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Morisseau.

Commissioner deVadoss noted that it was three or four years ago when he and former Chair Walter wrote the first draft of the principles. There was a certain set of circumstances that led the Commission to conclude guiding principles were needed. He said the current version of the principles were clearly the result of a lot of time and effort, but he suggested the Commission

may have lost its way. It is not clear what problem needs to be solved with the current version, which feels like a manifesto with a bit of how, what and why. Bellevue city code outlines why the Commission exists, and the Mayor and the Council gives the Commission guidance for what to work on. The staff have protocols to follow in terms of how to collaborate with the Commission. With all of that in place, it is confusing as to why guiding principles are also needed.

Commissioner Laing said his initial reaction to reading the current version was much the same as Commissioner deVadoss' reaction, in part because of the visceral reaction he still gets in thinking back to the circumstances that sparked the discussion and spawned the document. The circumstances came out of the review of the Shoreline Master Program, which was contentious given the various competing interests and public engagement. There was a significant change in direction on the part of the Commission during the process in part because there was change in the composition of the Commission during the process. Then as the Commission's final recommendation was handed off to the Council, the staff opted in some instances to not present the Commission's recommendation in favor of what the staff had initially come up with years earlier, an approach the Commission had resolutely rejected. That did not breed a lot of trust and good will. The Commission is miles and years away from what happened then, and the Commission is fortunate to have Mr. Culien on board. The most important item in the proposed guiding principles is the very last item, namely what should happen on the rare occasions where there are differences of opinion between the Commission and the staff. For the Commission's recommendation to not be fairly presented to the Council is disrespectful of the huge amount of public process that goes into getting to a final recommendation. He said he was comfortable with the guiding principles and would support their approval.

Commissioner deVadoss said he had no argument against how the document was written. He stated, however, that it comes across to him as a hodgepodge exercise in bureaucracy. He said he struggled to see the relevance of the document at the current point in time, in particular the current draft.

Commissioner Malakoutian asked Commissioner deVadoss if he was talking about the general guidance and the fact that the current calmer atmosphere means the principles are not needed, or about the current softer version. Commissioner deVadoss said the original version was written at a particular point in time to reflect a certain set of circumstances. The proposed document, while very well written, is a bit like what the Brit's call a dog's breakfast. The document is part manifesto, part protocol, part direction for how the chair will interact with the Council. What is not clear is the message that will be sent with the seemingly confusing set of ideas. The original version was focused more on how to collaborate and work together. The code outlines why the Commission exists and there is no need to repeat that in the guiding principles document. The Council gives direction as to topics to be addressed, so there is no need to repeat that in the document. There are established protocols in terms of public hearings and the like which the staff drive, and there is no need to repeat them. The problem to be solved by the document is not clear. A problem that needed to be solved led to the original draft of the principles three or four years ago, but the current problem is not clear.

Commissioner Morisseau said she appreciated the work that was done by former Chair Walter and Commissioner Laing. She said she understood the reasons that led to the drafting of the principles a few years back said she believed there were some reminders the Commission needed in terms of how the Commission is to work together as a Commission, work together with the community and work together with the staff, all the while keeping mind what is to be accomplished. She said for that reason she developed her proposal for revising the principles.

Because there was a dissonance between the guiding principles that were approved and what she proposed, she and Commissioner Carlson were asked to put the two documents together. She said she had no quarrel with retaining the original document but felt a need to add her list of items.

Commissioner deVadoss clarified that he had nothing against the previous version but believed it to be irrelevant in the current environment. It made sense three or four years ago but it no longer does absent having a problem in need of being solved.

Commissioner Laing said over the years he has served on a number of boards and learned that a structure designed to fit the a snapshot of the body at a particular point in time will fail as soon as the makeup of the body changes. The revised version of the guidelines are softer than the original, and that is good because the Commission is not in crisis mode. It retains the things that were expressed very clearly on and which drove the need to have adopted guidelines in the first place. The principles are needed as a reminder and to serve as parameters. The principles offer an institutional framework that will work irrespective of the makeup of the Commission going forward.

Chair Barksdale said he found the proposed guidelines to be more consumable. They speak to the tone and the spirit of how the Commission should work together and less to just serving as a checklist.

Commissioner Malakoutian allowed that he was not involved in the issues that led to the creation of the guiding principles. He commented that in reading through the original guidelines it is possible to feel a certain tension. The new version is far more general and does not frame for a specific occasion. It certainly will be informative for new Commissioners coming on board.

Commissioner deVadoss agreed that having a document to guide future Commissions would have value. He said, however, that the updated version is just not very coherent.

Commissioner Carlson said the formation of the Commission was the first act of the City Council when the city was incorporated. That means the Commission has been operating for more than 60 years without a set of guiding principles. If the proposed principles were to fail in being approved, nothing would fall apart and life would go on. The argument in favor of having the guidelines, however, is that there undoubtedly will be controversial smackdown issues in the future. It is when issues of that sort arise that guiding principles are needed.

Commissioner Morisseau said the Commission as a body needs guiding principles to remind it how the work of the body is to progress. The principles can evolve and change over time as needed. The community is changing and the Commission has the responsibility to be educated about that and to challenge itself in terms of thinking about how that impacts the work of the Commission.

The motion carried with Chair Barksdale and Commissioners Laing, Morisseau, Carlson and Malakoutian voting yes; Commissioner deVadoss voted no, and Commissioner Moolgavkar abstaining from voting.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None
(8:03 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

(8:03 p.m.)

A. March 14, 2018

A motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Laing. The motion was seconded by Commissioner deVadoss and the motion carried without dissent. Commissioners Laing and Morisseau abstained from voting.

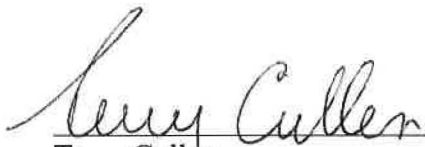
11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None
(8:04 p.m.)

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(8:04 p.m.)

13. ADJOURN
(8:04 p.m.)

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

Chair Barksdale adjourned the meeting at 8:04 p.m.


Terry Cullen
Staff to the Planning Commission


Date


Jeremy Barksdale
Chair of the Planning Commission


Date

