

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

January 22, 2019
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Chelminiak, Deputy Mayor Robinson, and Councilmembers Lee, Nieuwenhuis, Robertson¹, Stokes, and Zahn

ABSENT: None.

1. Executive Session

Mayor Chelminiak called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m., and declared recess to Executive Session for approximately 30 minutes to discuss one item of pending litigation.

The meeting resumed at 6:32 p.m., with Mayor Chelminiak presiding. Mayor Chelminiak noted that Councilmember Robertson requested approval for remote participation during the meeting due to unforeseen circumstances.

→ Deputy Mayor Robinson moved to approve the remote participation of Councilmember Robertson during the Study Session portion of tonight's meeting. Councilmember Stokes seconded the motion.

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

2. Study Session

- (a) East Main Station Area Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) - Vision and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

City Manager Brad Miyake introduced discussion regarding the East Main Station Area Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA). He recalled that the topic was last discussed with the Council on December 10, 2018, at which time the Council deferred adoption of the CPA for

¹ Councilmember Robertson participated remotely via telephone.

further review. Staff is seeking Council direction to prepare for the second meeting on the topic in February.

Mac Cummins, Director of Community Development, recalled that the Council requested specific information relative to the East Main Station Area Planning Citizen Advisory Committee's (CAC) vision and the Planning Commission's recommendations. He noted that the CPA was initiated by the City to engage in land use planning for the area around the light rail East Main Station. Mr. Cummins said the presentation will address how the City wants to grow, managing the impacts of growth, balancing the economic development objectives that the City is trying to accomplish, and leveraging public investment to help spur private investment. The CAC was asked to consider the East Main Station area relative to the Downtown and the Wilburton area.

The first topic of discussion will address the differences between items that are appropriate for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan versus provisions that are more appropriately included in the Land Use Code. The second area of discussion relates to differences in the CAC's vision and the Planning Commission's recommendations. The CAC Vision was presented and accepted by the Council in 2017. That report was the basis for directing the work of staff and the Planning Commission on the CPA.

Mr. Cummins recalled discussions regarding the concept of creating a new neighborhood. The CAC's transmittal letter to the Council stated: "After much deliberation by the CAC, our recommended vision statement in Chapter 2 encompasses the community's expectations for preserving the character of existing neighborhoods, creating quality transit-oriented development in existing commercial areas, and providing pedestrians and bicycles with safe, well-lighted, and direct access to the light rail station and future development, and enhancing the pedestrian experience along major streets. We view the redevelopment area as a new mixed-use neighborhood that complements our existing neighborhood with quality design, retail goods and services, and placemaking spaces and events for people that live and work in the surrounding community." Mr. Cummins said the vision sets an expectation for creating blocks and streets in the East Main Station area to foster the development of a neighborhood.

Arun Jain, Assistant Director of Community Development, said the purpose of the discussion is to review the CAC Vision 2035 and associated Council guiding principles, compare that information with the Planning Commission's recommendations, provide a first look at what should be included in the Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA), and to identify items that will be addressed in a Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA).

Mr. Jain highlighted the six-year process that has resulted in a substantial body of work. The CAC met from 2013 through early 2016, when the committee provided its recommendations to the City Council. Mr. Jain described the typical planning process in which Comprehensive Plan policies lead to citywide regulations (i.e., determine what is allowed), plans (i.e., ensure the City has the capacity for specific planning), and programs (e.g., a transportation evaluation to ensure mobility flow and safety).

The CAC Vision 2035 is organized into three major components: 1) mobility, 2) public realm, and 3) urban form. Mobility includes pedestrian and bicycle access to station areas, mixed-use development, safe and inviting east-west connection for pedestrians and bicyclists, and internal streets with wide sidewalks and on-street parking. The public realm component focuses on new development with site and building designs to create a pedestrian-oriented environment with public spaces and landscaping. The location takes advantage of the light rail station, and retail and service uses are envisioned for those who work and live in the area and for the overall community.

The urban form component of Vision 2035 recommends that development east of 112th Avenue SE should be scaled to be compatible with the surrounding area. The Red Lion Hotel site is envisioned as a successful transit-oriented development (TOD) with mixed uses. Blocks are shorter and more walkable, with wide sidewalks and vibrant retail and restaurant activity. New residential buildings are located along 112th Avenue SE to provide housing for a variety of family sizes and income levels.

Mr. Jain said the Council's guiding principles provided to the CAC fall into three broad categories for the redevelopment of the area: 1) complementary to the community, 2) attractive to people who live and work in the area, and 3) complementary to the Downtown. The guiding principles address noise reduction, street frontages, pedestrian environment, mixed uses, parking facilities, urban form, economic development, and land use that is distinct from the Downtown.

The Council's direction to the Planning Commission was to implement the CAC vision, ensure that station area plans are compatible within the context of the Downtown, and to include a public engagement process. The Council identified a number of LUCA-related topics including asking the Commission to consider large floorplates, review height limits and building setbacks, address walking paths, and to assess whether the LUCA is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and East Main Station CPA.

Mr. Jain highlighted choices for the Council's consideration, noting that technology companies can work in urban settings (e.g., Seattle's South Lake Union area). He shared his involvement in the creation of Portland, Oregon's South Waterfront area, which successfully developed smaller blocks and public streets. He described examples of successful distributed grid parking configurations at Lincoln Square and the Bravern in Bellevue. Mr. Jain said that investments in public spaces add development value in terms of the return on investment for adjacent real estate.

Mr. Jain presented a comparison of the CAC's and the Planning Commission's recommendations. The CAC identified the construction of a new public street between 112th Avenue SE and 114th Avenue SE. The Planning Commission recommended replacing "public" with "publicly accessible." However, the concern is that the latter implies private and controlled access to the public realm.

The CAC suggested the installation of a crosswalk at Main Street and 110th Avenue NE. Mr. Jain noted that there was discussion about pedestrian bridges. However, the Planning Commission was concerned that would be contrary to the CAC's vision for street-level activity.

Mr. Jain addressed the issue of the appropriate network of streets in the redevelopment area as well as the issue of public versus private streets. He noted the CAC's recommendations for an active, people-oriented environment with landscaping and smaller blocks. The Planning Commission recommended changing the term "public streets and small block grid" to "streets and block grid." However, there is a concern that the language implies private and controlled access to the public realm.

Mr. Jain noted that small walkable blocks are intended in the CAC Vision. He highlighted the issue of large underground parking structures versus smaller parking facilities throughout the redevelopment area. There is a concern that the Planning Commission's recommendation to add language regarding the connection of large sites with underground parking garages. The concern is that the language will be used to justify having no streets or blocks in order to enhance the efficiency of parking facilities. The CAC recommended the development of public spaces. The Planning Commission recommends removing the word "public" in the creation of open spaces and pedestrian systems.

Issues related to the LUCA include the Planning Commission's recommendation to consider larger floor plates. Mr. Jain described the Seattle Planning Commission's method of comparing alternatives with different building heights, floor plate sizes, and building placements for specific developments. The Commission recommended a new location-specific, north-south street through the redevelopment area. Mr. Jain said the need for the street and its alignment will be evaluated as part of the LUCA process, and the final design and location would be approved as part of the design review process.

Mr. Jain summarized that there are distinct differences between the CAC Vision and the Planning Commission's recommendations. He questioned whether the Council would like to move away from the CAC Vision. He noted that the CAC Vision can be implemented without impacting financial feasibility. He said staff recommends against considering ideas that are not feasible or economically realistic. Mr. Jain said many of the Commission's recommendations can be fully addressed in the LUCA process. He requested Council input regarding the issue of which items should be included in the CPA versus the LUCA.

Mr. Cummins said there are numerous design solutions that have not yet been discussed because there has not been a technical analysis of specific development issues (e.g., grading and drainage, transportation, etc.). He encouraged the Council to consider broad language for the Comprehensive Plan.

Responding to Mayor Chelminiak, Mr. Jain addressed the issue of consequences based on Comprehensive Plan policies and LUCA elements. As an example, Mr. Jain cautioned against being too specific in the Comprehensive Plan, noting that developers value the flexibility to adapt to market conditions, financing, and shifts in development trends.

Councilmember Nieuwenhuis thanked staff, the CAC, and the Planning Commission for their work. He noted that the Council has heard from three CAC members and all of them, including the co-chair, believe that the CAC Vision is consistent with the Commission's recommendations.

He suggested maintaining the CAC Vision, which he said is consistent with the Council Vision as well.

Mr. Cummins noted that he was not working for the City when the CAC process was underway. However, terms like blocks, streets, and ample public space have fairly consistent meanings in planning terminology. He observed that what was advanced into the Comprehensive Plan appears to be a divergence from the commonly understood meanings of the terms.

Mr. Jain commented that the CAC Vision is inconsistent and inarticulate in certain ways, but it is exceptionally clear in other ways. He opined that it is clear in the most important way possible, which is the nature of the public realm at street level. He offered his expert opinion that the CAC Vision and the Planning Commission's recommendations are not entirely consistent.

With regard to parking, Mr. Nieuwenhuis suggested that the redevelopment could include surface streets and blocks as well as a large underground parking garage. Mr. Jain said he did not mean to suggest that the two could not coexist. However, he cautioned against providing a large parking garage at the expense of street-level activity. Mr. Jain noted that the Brewery Blocks in Portland include underground connections, but they are street dedications versus private streets. He said an important consideration is whether the surface streets are public or private.

Mr. Cummins said the City has licensing procedures that, should streets be dedicated in the most traditional sense, would allow the underground use of that facility. In the BelRed corridor, there is a conceptual idea of the street layout. However, development review determines whether streets need to be dedicated (e.g., for utilities). Mr. Cummins said the City can have licensing procedures to either take an easement for surface-level rights only or to take a full dedication and grant use rights below the streets (e.g., for parking or loading). He said the issue is whether or not the City will help control that discussion to ensure that the infrastructure needs are met, or whether the parking facility will be one large private property. Mr. Cummins confirmed that it is possible to have underground parking with dedicated ROW on the surface.

Councilmember Nieuwenhuis opined that there is a clear public benefit in providing an elevated skybridge over 112th Avenue SE. He would like to consider the language applied to the Bellevue Way skybridge. He believes a pedestrian bridge is consistent with the CAC's intent to connect transit and the neighborhood.

Mr. Nieuwenhuis asked about the Planning Commission's recommendation to replace "public" with "publicly accessible" in references to streets and gathering spaces. Mr. Cummins said there are a number of easements in cities that allow for public accessibility with certain restrictions (e.g., hours of the day). He suggested thinking about how the Downtown Park functions as a City-owned park facility versus events on private property with public access (e.g., Compass Plaza).

Councilmember Stokes said it is important to be clear about what the Council wants to accomplish through the CPA process versus the LUCA process. He acknowledged the need for the Council to address the differences between the CAC Vision and the Planning Commission's recommendations. Mr. Stokes said the City Council's direction to the Planning Commission is a

strong policy statement that covers a number of the issues. He suggested that the Council's direction to the Commission is the best expression of the policy decisions made by the Council. He would like to resolve the highlighted issues, including public streets/access versus private streets. He believes there are ways to make the East Main Station area redevelopment a great project in either case.

Mr. Jain noted that missions and purposes evolve as projects move forward over a long period of time. He opined that the CAC Vision is articulate and strong in terms of policy. He said the Council may choose whether to follow that vision or to deliberately choose another path.

Deputy Mayor Robinson said she would provide input via email regarding CPA versus LUCA items. She expressed concern about perhaps focusing too much on details such as block sizes and distributed grid parking. The CAC Vision reflects the goals of attracting people to the development and providing trees and green spaces, public spaces, infrastructure that supports pedestrian and bicycle use, connections to transit, iconic architecture, a gateway feature, mixed uses, and parking facilities located away from the edges of 112th Avenue and Main Street. Ms. Robinson said she would prefer to not be prescriptive in terms of how to achieve those goals. She encouraged a focus on the general themes of connectivity, public access, and mixed use activities.

Councilmember Zahn concurred with Deputy Mayor Robinson. Ms. Zahn expressed support for creating a new mixed use neighborhood with public spaces, an integrated natural and built environment, and a transportation system that ensures mobility and safety. She wants to preserve the CAC Vision and to work with developers without restricting development ideas and concepts. She acknowledged staff's advice to determine which items should be addressed through the CPA and LUCA processes in order to understand the potential unintended consequences.

Councilmember Lee expressed support for the CAC Vision. He spoke to the importance of determining which issues belong in the CPA versus the LUCA. He supports flexibility in the policy and regulatory language for developers. He believes the City should retain some control while working with private developers. He said the success of the redevelopment depends on a mutual agreement regarding the vision.

Councilmember Robertson said the issue of whether the CAC Vision and the Planning Commission's recommendations are consistent sets up a false dichotomy. She believes they are consistent with each other. The CAC spent two years on its review. She noted that three members of that committee have communicated with the Council in writing that they believe the two bodies of work are consistent.

Ms. Robertson raised the issue of whether the CPA is consistent with the Council's guiding principles adopted in December 2017. Looking at smaller blocks and connectivity, the common objective addressed by the CAC, Planning Commission, and the Council's principles is non-motorized access for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Councilmember Robertson concurred with staff that the CPA language should be more general in nature, while issues related to public access, public spaces, streets and blocks can be refined through the LUCA process. She suggested it is not necessary at this point to make specific decisions about public versus private streets and other topics. She believes a pedestrian bridge provides a significant public benefit, including enhanced safety.

Ms. Robertson questioned the City's long-term plans for 114th Avenue. She requested that the Transportation Department provide information for the next discussion on this topic.

Ms. Robertson said the Council's guiding principles suggest the consideration of the East Main Station area within the context of the Downtown and the Wilburton neighborhood. While the Wilburton commercial area planning effort is not completed, she said it would be helpful to have a quick overview of the status for the next discussion.

Ms. Robertson recommended adopting principles to guide the Planning Commission through the LUCA process. She thanked the Council for accommodating her remote participation in the meeting.

Mayor Chelminiak suggested that decisions should be based on good public policy. He does not see the CAC Vision as something that cannot be modified. He acknowledged that some of the items highlighted by staff tonight are not compatible with the CAC Vision. He said the CAC Vision indicates that there will be publicly owned and publicly accessible spaces at all times.

Mr. Chelminiak noted that a Planning Commissioner challenged staff at two different meetings regarding the concept of requiring that a private developer provide public space. He expressed support for referencing both public and publicly accessible spaces, which is consistent with practices citywide.

Responding to Mayor Chelminiak, Mr. Cummins said the Planning Commission recommended a skybridge between the light rail station and redevelopment area. Mr. Cummins said the Commission was also thinking there would not be any streets within the redevelopment area. He posed the issue of whether the Council wants to use the City's existing skybridge policy or to draft a new policy for the East Main Station area. Mr. Chelminiak said he is not opposed to a pedestrian bridge.

Mr. Cummins said he heard general agreement that LUCA issues can be addressed through the LUCA process. He said it is important to refine and to be clear about which issues are appropriate for the LUCA. With regard to the CPA, Mr. Cummins said he heard comments about wanting to be flexible and nimble to encourage good development and active street life. Mr. Cummins said staff will come back with a range of options to refine the CPA versus LUCA elements.

3. Council Discussion of Upcoming Items: None.

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At 7:59 p.m., Mayor Chelminiak declared recess to the Regular Session.

Charmaine Arredondo, CMC
Assistant Director, City Clerk's Office

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