

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION  
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

June 24, 2020  
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Michael Austin, Emil King, Department of Community Development; Eric Engmann, Department of Development Services

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Barksdale

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER  
(6:30 p.m.)

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Morisseau who presided.

2. ROLL CALL  
(6:32 p.m.)

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA  
(6:2 p.m.)

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Moolgavkar and the motion carried unanimously.

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None  
(6:33 p.m.)

5. STAFF REPORTS  
(6:33 p.m.)

Comprehensive Planning Manager Thara Johnson reviewed with the Commissioners the schedule of upcoming meeting dates and agenda items. She noted that according to the Commission’s bylaws, officer elections are to occur early in the summer. Given that the Commission has not been holding meetings, she proposed scheduling the elections for the July 22 meeting.

Ms. Johnson said the vacant Commission seat is being advertised on the city clerk’s website. The

application period will close on July 8 at 5:00 p.m.

6. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS  
(6:36 p.m.)

Ms. Johnson noted that since the last Commission meeting a total of four emails was received. In an email from Betsi Hummer, chair of the East Bellevue Community Council, appreciation was expressed for the explanation given by staff about the role of the Community Council in the Comprehensive Plan amendment process. Ms. Hummer also communicated support for and interest in the affordable housing C1 strategy that will be before the Commission in the fall. Ms Johnson indicated that a response to Chair Hummer had been provided. The second email was from a community member expressing interest in submitting an application for the vacant Commission seat. The third email voiced concern about the proposed funding priorities for King County and the city of Bellevue. The fourth email related to concern about a home occupation permit for sales of firearms.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None  
(6:39 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION  
(6:39 p.m.)

A. Grand Connection Sequence One Guidelines and Standards Update

Senior Planner Michael Austin took a moment to acknowledge that the land on which Bellevue sits is the ancestral homeland of the Coast Salish people and the traditional home of all tribes and bands within the Duwamish and Snoqualmie India tribe. He expressed his deep respect to the original caretakers of the land, a people who are still present. He added that such acknowledgements are not a new practice developed by colonial institutions, rather it is a traditional custom dating back centuries for many native communities and nations. For non-indigenous communities, land acknowledgment is a powerful way to show respect and honor the indigenous peoples and serves as a simple way to resist the erasure of indigenous histories and working toward honoring and inviting the truth.

Mr. Austin reminded the Commissioners that the Grand Connection is a people-focused, interactive and connected experience through the heart of Bellevue. It is intended to reflect the qualities of a vibrant and multicultural destination that offers an enjoyable and memorable experience for all users, and to function as an exceptional, timeless and human-scaled experience for all individuals.

The Grand Connection initiative has its roots in the Pedestrian Corridor infrastructure improvements and standards that link the transit center area with the Bellevue Collection area. The Grand Connection initiative was launched in 2015, and the Grand Connection framework plan was developed and adopted in 2018 with two elements, Sequence One and Sequence Two. Since then the focus has been on implementation through infrastructure improvements, code and policy updates, and activation in partnership with the Bellevue Downtown Association. A number of complementary projects are ongoing, including the activation strategies which in 2019 included the hanging of lanterns and the placement of outdoor furniture elements along the Grand Connection route. The Bellwether Arts Festival, which traditionally is an ongoing experience, and the design review of active projects are also ongoing, along with the Lake to

Lake design guidelines which have some overlap with the Grand Connection as it runs through Main Street in Old Bellevue. Planned activities include the Wilburton code and policy update work, the I-405 freeway lid feasibility study, refreshing the Grand Connection wayfinding, and development of the Sequence Two guidelines and standards.

The core team focused on the guidelines and standards for the Grand Connection is comprised primarily of staff members from Community Development and Development Services in partnership with staff in Parks and Community Services and Transportation. Subject matter experts from other departments are also being tapped.

Mr. Austin said the design standards and guidelines update process began in the articulation phase in which the Pedestrian Corridor and Downtown Design Guidelines were reviewed along with the Grand Connection Sequence One and Two framework plans that were developed by the consultant Balmori and Associates. The outreach and engagement that was conducted was revisited and compiled. All of the data and input will be flow into an updated set of design guidelines and standards. Later in the summer, the adoption phase will kick off with some testing of the standards and guidelines before the package is brought before the Commission once again and then on to the City Council for review and adoption.

Mr. Austin clarified that Sequence One runs from Old Bellevue to the transit center area, from the intersection of 100 Avenue NE and Main Street through Downtown Park and along NE 6th Street. Sequence Two continues further to the east and terminates at the future Eastrail in Wilburton.

The Commission was last updated on the Grand Connection project in early January 2020. The update included an overview of the scope of the effort and the intent and examples of design guidelines, which are implementation tools for the goals and values of the Comprehensive Plan. Their intent is to promote excellence in the design of the community and to provide a common language to enable efficient dialogue and review between the public, the city and developers of potential or active projects. Design guidelines are used internally and externally to communicate an ultimate vision.

Mr. Engmann added that standards and guidelines inform the framework and can be seen as bridging the gap between the micro and the macro of what actually gets built.

Mr. Austin said standards are specific items that must be accommodated, whereas guidelines offer direction but allow for certain levels of interpretation and different approaches. Design teams are allowed to request departures from either a standard or a guideline but must provide justification for doing so. He shared with the Commissioners an example project on the existing Pedestrian Corridor that is currently under review. The project on 106th Avenue NE involves the Pedestrian Corridor Design Guidelines and the Major Public Open Space standards. The Grand Connection standards and guidelines will be used to inform the look and feel of the project space.

The articulation phase recaptured a lot of the outreach and engagement done on the Grand Connection project. The voices of the community, even from years ago, still matter and remains relevant. For the Compass Plaza site, the public wanted to see it developed as a civic-focused accessible space for concerts and events. For Downtown Park, the desire was to include opportunities for seasonal activation and more seating. With regard to the transit center, now referred to as Transit Central, the focus was on improved wayfinding and place-serving elements with opportunities for food, play and technology. The outreach also sought to capture youth

voices and they highlighted a desire for more art, food and food trucks in the downtown, public games, water features, more playgrounds, and more vegetation and natural elements. The outreach specific to the Grand Connection garnered a strong sentiment to see natural landscaping incorporated. In addition to wanting to see more greenery in the downtown, there were comments about wanting to see the downtown be a place that is used 365 days per year, rain or shine.

Mr. Austin said in addition to the outreach and engagement, the core team is taking steps to ensure the incorporation of best practices into the standards and guidelines. A number of different precedents have been reviewed, including Mission Rock Design Controls in San Francisco, the Yesler Terrace Design Guidelines, the Seattle Central District Design Guidelines, and the Portland South Waterfront Design Guidelines. The focus continues to be on what is working and does not need to be changed, where there are language deficiencies in need of being bolstered to align with the framework plan of the Grand Connection, and on identifying any redundancies. The Grand Connection Framework Plan, the Pedestrian Corridor and Major Public Open Space Design Guidelines and the Downtown Design Guidelines have all been audited. From the precedents it was learned that simplicity is key, that there should be an emphasis on the unique experience of each “room,” and that additional asks and requirements from the developers and design teams should be considered to assist in showcasing their concepts. From the audits the need for a strong statement of intent is needed; that it is important to look at the existing Pedestrian Corridor Design Guidelines with an eye on what should be retained and what should be updated; that redundant code and policy language exists; and that the current Downtown guidelines cover a high level of Grand Connection content.

Mr. Engmann said the thing the core team is looking for ease of use. The audits and precedents were all viewed from the perspective of the end user, be it the public, the developers or the city staff. On the code writing side, simplicity is also key.

Mr. Austin said the intent statements are intended to get to the “why” and “what do we want” questions. The design guidelines and standards are focused on how to get there.

Part 20.25A of the Land Use Code includes the Downtown standards and guidelines and the Pedestrian Corridor Design Guidelines. While there is a need to adhere to that section of the code, there are also the Pedestrian Corridor and Major Public Open Space Design Guidelines that are housed in a separate document in a different part of the Land Use Code. They are important in that they influence how design review staff look at proposals. Mr. Engmann added that adopting something by reference gives it some authority, but does not give it the same authority as something in the code itself. While the current Pedestrian Corridor Design Guidelines do a great job of outlining what the corridor should look like, they do not necessarily translate well into specific code language. Accordingly, the team has proposed introducing a new section of the Land Use Code for the Grand Connection, though entirely within the Downtown chapter, 20.25A, and not a standalone document. As proposed for Grand Connection Sequence One, it would outline the design intent followed by guidelines and standards applicable throughout the entire Sequence One route while ensuring important and unique elements along each block. To that end, something called “rooms” are envisioned along the Grand Connection, which except for Compass Plaza and Garden Hillclimb are broken up by city blocks. Each “room” would have its own design intent statement and associated standards and guidelines. The sequence of “room” begins with Transit Central and moves next to Garden Hillclimb, Compass Plaza, Plaza as Street, Bellevue Way, Downtown Park and finally Old Bellevue.

The Commissioners were shown a sample draft intent statement for the Transit Central “room”

along with a sample draft character zone graphic showing how the standards and guidelines could play out for the area. It was stressed that any visuals to be included in the downtown Land Use Code will not be held up as a specific design outcome. Mr. Engmann said it is the intent statements that tie together the individual components.

Mr. Austin informed the Commissioners that before city hall was shut down in response to Covid-19, the core team convened for a charrette focused on resilience. Pandemics and other things happen, and the intent was to make sure that even at the scale of design guidelines and standards the focus will be on preparing for Bellevue's future. In general resilience is defined as the ability of the community to identify its highest shocks, which are acute, and stressors, which are ongoing, and to create strategies to reduce the impacts and/or to recover quickly. Resilience is also about prioritizing support for underserved and underrepresented communities. Acute shocks include things like earthquakes, wildfires, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis. Stressors are things like ongoing events such as periods of extended heat conditions, poor air quality, and other conditions that weigh down socially, economically or ecologically. A prioritization exercise was undertaken by the core team. It was predicated on the 100RC methodology supported by the Rockefeller Foundation which funded 100 cities across the world for the creation of resilience plans. Seattle was chosen as one of the cities. The prioritization exercise tool that was developed by through the 100RC process was used to identify Bellevue's highest shocks and stressors. Once the elements were identified, the focus turned to the strategies needed to overcome the shocks and stressors as they apply to the downtown. The recommendation favors placing an intentional emphasis on previously identified elements, such as multilingual signage, ecological health, pedestrian health, spaces that facilitate different civic and cultural activities, and improved wayfinding.

With regard to next steps, Mr. Austin said during the summer the core team will continue to gather input and conduct testing of the draft guidelines and standards with the community and with stakeholders. In September the draft materials will be brought before the Commission for review and refinement ahead of a public hearing in October, following which the Commission will act to recommend the document for Council adoption.

Commissioner deVadoss said he would like more information in regard to budgets and how the standards and guidelines will mean in terms of priorities for the city. Mr. Austin said staff could work with Department of Planning and Community Development Assistant Director, Emil King to provide clarifying information in terms of the overall budget. He said the current work is being done internally and without consultant input. The project does need to be wrapped up, however, in order to address active projects that are under design review along the Grand Connection.

Commissioner Ferris acknowledged the great work done by Mr. Austin and Mr. Engmann. She noted the intent to put the intents, standards and guidelines into the Land Use Code under the Downtown section and asked if Sequence Two will occupy a separate section or be incorporated into the same section. Mr. Austin said as the Wilburton land use initiative moves forward, the conversation will focus on how the Grand Connection fits together. One possible scenario is that the Grand Connection could have its own chapter within the Land Use Code updates. Another scenario would be for a portion of the Grand Connection to live in Downtown and the other in Wilburton chapters. It is not, however, known yet how things will play out. The Sequence One guidelines will have applicability moving eastward. Wilburton is a different experience in that it does not have the same buildout the downtown has and as such there are far more potential projects for that area, but the intent is to make sure the Grand Connection signature look will be embedded in Wilburton. Mr. Engmann added that people will be seeking Grand Connection

answers in the specific Land Use Code chapter where the segment of the Grand Connection is located. For the portion in the downtown, developers will look to the Downtown section, while developers in Wilburton will look to the Wilburton section.

Commissioner Bhargava said the intent statements go a long way toward making the vision for each “room” clear as well as for the corridor in general. He asked if there will be language relating to the framework for resilient cities which includes addressing accessibility and public safety for each “room.” Mr. Austin said there are existing guidelines and standards focused on universal access, particularly for the downtown. The Grand Connection is a specific program and will have specific policies, but the overarching practices will be carried through even if not articulated specifically in the Grand Connection code. Mr. Engmann added that attention will be given to those factors at the individual design review level.

Vice Chair Moolgavkar noted that there are numerous active projects along the Grand Connection and she asked about the timing involved in approving their designs and having the new Grand Connection policies online. Mr. Austin said until the Grand Connection standards and guidelines are adopted, they cannot be pointed to and referenced as something to be adhered to and enforced. The Bellevue design review community, from developers to design teams, and city staff has been very patient and have been willingly meeting with the core team staff about the current thinking. That allows for including as much early Grand Connection guidance as possible into active projects before they are permitted.

Councilmember Barksdale indicated appreciation for the presentation and did not have any questions.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

(7:38 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

(7:38 p.m.)

A. June 10, 2020

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

11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

(7:41 p.m.)

12. EXECUTVE SESSION – None

(7:41 p.m.)

13. ADJOURNMENT

(7:41 p.m.)

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

Chair Morisseau adjourned the meeting at 7:41 p.m.




7/10/2020

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Thara Johnson  
Staff to the Planning Commission

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Date

  
*Anne Morisseau*  
7/10/2020 12:51:29 PM PDT  
Anne Morisseau  
Chair of the Planning Commission

07/10/2020

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Date