

East Bellevue Community Council
Summary Minutes of Regular Meeting

April 5, 2022
6:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Chair Kasner, Vice Chair Dhananjaya, Alternate Vice Chair Epstein and Councilmembers Hummer and Lai

ABSENT: None

STAFF: Brian Wendt, Assistant City Attorney, City Attorney's Office

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m., with Chair Kasner presiding.

2. ROLL CALL/FLAG SALUTE

Deputy City Clerk Karin Roberts called the roll and all Councilmembers were present. Councilmember Hummer led the flag salute.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Kasner suggested amending the agenda to switch the order of items 11(a) and 11(b).

Councilmember Hummer moved to approve the agenda as amended. Councilmember Epstein seconded the motion, which carried by a vote of 5-0.

4. COMMUNICATIONS: WRITTEN AND ORAL

Heidi Dean, a resident of the Newport Hills neighborhood, thanked the EBCC members for their service to their constituents. She said she was sorry to hear about the state legislation to sunset the two remaining community councils in the state. She said the passage of that legislation has caused many people to lose trust in the elected officials who sponsored and supported the bill. She said it was disappointing to know that five of the seven City Councilmembers expressed support for the legislation. She said the rationale for the legislation was that it was not fair for East Bellevue residents to have decision authority not available to other residents and neighborhoods. She expressed concern about the City Council's support of the Puget Sound Energy project along 148th Avenue and the concentration of low-income housing in East Bellevue on faith-based owned properties. She was not happy to hear former Mayor Claudia Balducci characterize the EBCC as obstructionist. Ms. Dean encouraged EBCC members to stay involved in the community.

John Bellay noted that he sent an email to the City Council regarding his research about trees and related proposals by community groups. He would like the City's policies to include solar panels as one way to address climate change. He expressed concern regarding power outages when it is

windy. Referring to the group Save Our Scale, he expressed concern about the use of tree policies to abate housing development and redevelopment. He said he disagrees with Trees4Livability's suggestion for Bellevue's tree policies to be consistent with surrounding jurisdictions. He suggested that Bellevue should take leadership on the issue and determine what clean electricity will look like in the future in order to reflect that in the tree code.

5. **REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS, and COMMISSIONS:** None.

6. **REPORT OF THE CHAIR**

(a) Public-Private Partnerships

Chair Kasner said his focus for the EBCC over the next few months is to have meaningful community input. He encouraged people to participate in the neighborhood conference scheduled for May 18 at City Hall and throughout Bellevue.

Mr. Kasner introduced Ben Brittingham to talk about the community partnerships involving MN Custom Homes to address the tree canopy.

Mr. Brittingham described MN Custom Homes' partnership with the Arbor Day Foundation. Activities include tree plantings, energy saving GIS lot mapping, and a local Tree City USA project. He said they remove as few trees as possible when building homes, and they attempt to leave significant trees as much as possible. He said they plant 10 trees for every home project they complete. He said the GIS lot mapping tool will help MN Custom Homes to design landscaping that reduces energy costs. He said they are working to identify a Tree City USA project for Bellevue. He said they provide solar panels on all of their new homes permitted since June 2021, as well as energy efficient appliances and smart home features.

Mr. Brittingham noted partnership programs with local schools and Jubilee Reach. He said they are always open to feedback. They are working with Imagine Housing this year and are interested in other affordable housing projects. He said MN Custom Homes wants to be a good neighbor and to have a positive impact on the community.

Responding to Councilmember Epstein, Mr. Brittingham said a number of factors affect the savings achieved using solar panels. Mr. Brittingham said it is still an emerging technology and efficiency is expected to improve over time.

Councilmember Dhananjaya thanked Mr. Brittingham for the presentation. Responding to Mr. Dhananjaya, Mr. Brittingham said the GIS lot mapping project is new and the first homes through that partnership will be completed in September and October. Mr. Dhananjaya encouraged MN Custom Homes to provide information regarding its environmental efforts on the company's website.

Responding to Councilmember Lai, Mr. Brittingham said they are putting electric vehicle chargers in all of their homes.

Chair Kasner thanked Mr. Brittingham for the information and their work in the community.

(b) Lake Hills Neighborhood Association (LHNA) Report

Chair Kasner introduced Randy Grein to provide an update regarding the Lake Hills Neighborhood Association (LHNA).

Mr. Grein said the association received a presentation regarding the Kelsey Creek culvert during the past year, and the Bellevue Police Chief and a retired 911 operator provided a presentation regarding public safety. He said the annual neighborhood Earth Day celebration is scheduled for Sunday, April 24, 1:00-3:00 p.m., at the Lake Hills Library. He said the association continues to have park walks. He encouraged the public to visit their website to make suggestions regarding park walks they would like to see (WeareLakeHills.org).

Councilmember Hummer said the LHNA president, a realtor, discussed the difference in profit between selling directly to a developer versus selling through a realtor. She said homeowners can make up to 50 percent more by selling through a realtor instead of directly to a developer.

7. **DEPARTMENT REPORTS:** None.
8. **PUBLIC/COURTESY HEARINGS:** None.
9. **RESOLUTIONS:** None.
10. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** None.
11. **NEW BUSINESS**

(a) 300 Trees Presentation

Don Marsh, co-founder of 300 Trees, said the group is interested in talking to MN Custom Homes about potential partnerships. Mr. Marsh said his home was one of the first in Bellevue to install solar panels in 2010. He said they added a second section of solar panels in 2015.

Mr. Marsh said 300 Trees is committed to preserving and expanding Bellevue's tree canopy, which is stressed by rapid development, warmer and drier weather conditions, and disease. The group is a fully volunteer non-profit organization funded by donations from the community and grants from the state and federal governments. The group offers trees at a fraction of the cost of other programs by local government. He said the group last spoke to the EBCC in the Fall of 2020. Over the past year, 300 Trees has distributed more than 2,000 trees. Last fall, the group helped the City of Bellevue distribute 750 trees. The group planted 300 trees in a new mini forest on the Sammamish High School campus and recently distributed more than 1,000 trees as part of the spring giveaway event. 300 Trees helped to initiate the City's upcoming tree canopy survey and researched tree codes in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Marsh noted 300 Trees' partnership with the YMCA Earth Service Corps. He described the planting of 300 trees at Sammamish High School, funded by a grant from the Washington Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Forest Service and by private donations.

Mr. Marsh said the City will update its tree canopy survey by the end of the year. The survey will help 300 Trees target the areas of the community with reduced tree canopies. He said the group wants to expand its support for specific neighborhoods and schools. He encouraged the public to access their website for more information.

Councilmember Dhananjaya thanked Mr. Marsh and 300 Trees for their work in the community.

Responding to Councilmember Epstein, Mr. Marsh said the City's tree canopy goal is an average of 40-percent coverage across Bellevue, which would require the planting of approximately 75,000 trees through 2050. Mr. Marsh said however that higher temperatures will continue to contribute to tree loss. In further response to Mr. Epstein, Mr. Marsh confirmed that the current average tree canopy is 37 percent. However, Mr. Marsh said the tree canopy varies greatly throughout the community. He said the recent tree giveaway included 12 types of trees.

Councilmember Hummer noted that 300 Trees originated in response to the Puget Sound Energy power line project on 148th Avenue. She stated her understanding that the City follows up after tree giveaways to ensure that trees are properly planted and thriving. Mr. Marsh said they do not have a similar program. However, they refer residents to resources for planting and nurturing new trees. He said there will always be some trees that do not survive despite the best efforts.

Ms. Hummer wondered whether 300 Trees volunteers have time to travel around Bellevue neighborhoods to identify residential lots that have been entirely cleared of vegetation. She noted the effectiveness of trees in keeping temperatures lower during extreme heat. She thanked Mr. Marsh and 300 Trees for all of their work.

Councilmember Lai said he appreciated the work of the 300 Trees volunteers. He suggested connecting individuals who have trees that need to be rehomed with other residents who might want them. Responding to Mr. Lai, Mr. Marsh provided additional details regarding the upcoming tree canopy survey.

Responding to Councilmember Dhananjaya, Mr. Marsh said 300 Trees focuses on native trees. The most recent supplier was Clark's Native Trees and Shrubs and the group, as a non-profit organization, was able to purchase the trees at low cost. Mr. Dhananjaya asked whether there are opportunities, for example in the Downtown, to place trees on rooftops. Mr. Marsh said one of the dilemmas is whether to use rooftops for solar panels or for vegetation. He suspects that solar panels will be the more common use of rooftops.

Chair Kasner thanked Mr. Marsh for the presentation and wished the group well.

(b) Trees4Livability Presentation

Chair Kasner introduced Ruth Lipscomb and Alex Hay representing Trees4Livability.

Mr. Hay, a Lake Hills resident, said he has lived in a number of Bellevue neighborhoods since 2003. He became involved with Trees4Livability after seeing the removal of trees in his neighborhood due to redevelopment. He described the group's research of tree codes in

surrounding cities and the development of recommendations for enhancing Bellevue's tree codes. He said the goal of the all-volunteer group is to protect and expand the tree canopy. He commented on the benefits of trees and Bellevue's identity as the City in a Park. Mr. Hay expressed concern regarding the removal of mature and large trees. With more people working from home, houses are becoming larger and vegetation is being removed. He expressed concern about the demolition of smaller homes and removal of trees to build much larger homes.

Mr. Hay said Bellevue has some of the most permissive tree codes in the region. He said the group hears from residents throughout Bellevue who express concern about large, healthy trees in their neighborhoods that have been removed. He presented photos of lots throughout Bellevue where trees have been removed. He said it is important for Bellevue to strengthen its tree codes.

Ms. Lipscomb said she became interested in Trees4Livability due to her concern about the removal of many majestic old trees in Bellevue. She was part of the working group that researched the tree codes in surrounding cities. She said the resulting tree code study and report provides recommendations for improvements and is available on the group's website. She said the recommendations are intended for single-family residential areas and not for commercial or multifamily development. She noted that the Bridle Trails area has stricter tree protections.

Ms. Lipscomb said Bellevue allows the removal of five significant trees without a permit and defines a significant tree as eight inches in diameter. Most cities define significant trees as six inches in diameter. She said Bellevue has no special protections for landmark trees, which are usually defined as more than two feet in diameter.

Ms. Lipscomb said Trees4Livability wants the City to create an urban forestry commission with a range of stakeholders. She said the City must act quickly to save Bellevue's largest trees. She said the group would like to see paid permits for all significant or landmark tree removals. She encouraged the City to find a balance between development and protecting the tree canopy. She noted the group's outreach and support within the community. She said a petition is provided on the Trees4Livability website for individuals to express support for the group's recommendations. The petition has gathered more than 500 signatures over the past five weeks.

Councilmember Epstein thanked the guests for the presentation. Responding to Mr. Epstein, Ms. Lipscomb said the Bridle Trails area has stricter tree codes and all tree removals require a permit.

Responding to Councilmember Lai, Ms. Lipscomb said Bellevue residents are allowed to remove five trees without a permit every three years. However, she said the three-year period resets when a property changes hands.

Vice Chair Dhananjaya expressed concern about planting trees too closely to sidewalks because the roots can damage the sidewalks over time. He said it is important to plant the appropriate trees in specific locations. Ms. Lipscomb said there are a number of trees recommended for planting next to concrete. She noted that a number of developers are only providing grass but no new trees with new homes.

Chair Kasner concurred with the concept of the right tree in the right place. He said the City Council should develop a landmark tree policy as soon as possible to prevent the loss of mature

trees. Responding to Mr. Kasner, Ms. Lipscomb said the Trees4Livability group has provided public testimony to the City Council on a few occasions. She agreed that saving landmark trees is the most critical immediate issue given the level of development and redevelopment. Ms. Lipscomb noted the recent situation in which a developer was attempting to remove a landmark tree that had been marked for preservation and the neighbors were able to stop the crew. She expressed concern that the City does not enforce its regulations for tree removals. She said it is important to have consistent regulations citywide.

Chair Kasner encouraged participation in the City's May 18 neighborhood gathering to advocate for stricter tree codes. He suggested a moratorium on the removal of larger trees until new tree codes are put in place. Ms. Lipscomb concurred.

(c) Sammamish High School Environmental Activists (EnAct) Club Presentation

Amber Curtis said she is an Americorps volunteer/program instructor for the YMCA Earth Service Corps. The group was started in the 1980s when a group of youth from Garfield High School in Seattle reached out to the YMCA to support their tree planting event. The group hosts outdoor stewardship activities, environmental conferences and events, and supports school-based clubs. She noted the group's involvement with the large tree planting event held by Sammamish High School students and other events and workshops. The group currently works with the Seattle, Shoreline, Lake Washington, Bellevue, Mercer Island, Edmonds, Highline, Issaquah and Renton school districts. Ms. Curtis noted that students at Interlake High School are currently working on building a garden. Ms. Curtis said Sammamish High School's EnAct club is working on a number of projects following its large tree planting event last fall.

Councilmember Lai thanked Ms. Curtis for the presentation. Responding to Mr. Lai, Ms. Curtis said there is currently one middle school in the program. However, she knows that more middle schools are interested in partnerships with the YMCA.

Vice Chair Dhananjaya said it is good to see the youth involvement in environmental issues.

Councilmember Hummer thanked Ms. Curtis for her work throughout the community with youth. Ms. Hummer suggested exploring the City's Well Kept program to determine potential partnerships. She said the City also has a tree ambassador program and a master naturalist program. Responding to Ms. Hummer, Ms. Curtis confirmed that the YMCA Earth Service Corps uses social media to promote its activities.

Responding to Councilmember Epstein, Ms. Curtis highlighted additional activities and group events. Mr. Epstein thanked her for the presentation.

Chair Kasner thanked Ms. Curtis for her work. Responding to Mr. Kasner, Ms. Curtis said she will provide extensive information to help the next Americorps volunteer after her own service ends in July. In further response, Ms. Curtis said that each school club has a teacher-adviser.

(d) House Bill 1769 Next Steps

Chair Kasner said that under House Bill 1769, the community council will sunset on July 9. He asked EBCC members to suggest topics they would like to discuss over the next few meetings.

Councilmember Lai suggested that the EBCC might want to take a formal position regarding the recommendations of the Save Our Scale group.

Councilmember Hummer expressed an interest in more information regarding a new boarding house in East Bellevue. She said the Planning Commission is currently studying the permanent and supportive housing LUCA.

Councilmember Dhananjaya asked about what happens to the EBCC's legislation after the group no longer exists. Brian Wendt, Assistant City Attorney, said he would follow up with more information in May.

Mr. Dhananjaya suggested that the EBCC focus on livability issues such as the tree canopy and housing/affordable housing. He noted concerns regarding the purchase of a hotel in Kirkland for permanent and supportive housing.

Ms. Hummer said she spoke with a representative of the King County Housing Authority in December and they indicated they would be willing to provide a presentation to the EBCC regarding their activities and their impact on East Bellevue. Ms. Hummer said there are three low-income housing complexes next to each other on 148th Avenue as well as others in and adjacent to East Bellevue. She would like to learn about King County's plans for purchasing more hotels, including potentially in Bellevue.

At 8:30 p.m., Vice Chair Dhananjaya moved to extend the meeting for 15 minutes. Councilmember Epstein seconded the motion, which carried by a vote of 5-0.

Chair Kasner said he would like to invite Puget Sound Energy (PSE) to an EBCC meeting to answer questions they did not address during their last visit. Mr. Kasner said he would like to work with others to create a proposal regarding landmark tree policies. He further suggested a presentation from the City's neighborhood outreach staff.

Councilmember Hummer suggested that the EBCC draft a resolution to be presented during its last meeting that outlines the EBCC's accomplishments and priorities for the future.

Vice Chair Dhananjaya suggested determining whether the EBCC could plant some trees on public land within its jurisdiction. Chair Kasner said it would be great to be able to plant one tree for each person who served on the EBCC since its inception in 1969.

Councilmember Hummer suggested requesting a couple of benches around Larsen Lake in honor of the EBCC's history. Mr. Kasner suggested perhaps a plaque at the Lake Hills clubhouse where the EBCC has held its meetings.

12. **CONTINUED COMMUNICATIONS**: None.

13. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

(a) Summary Regular Meeting Minutes of March 1, 2022

Councilmember Lai moved to approve the minutes of the March 1, 2022 Regular Meeting. Councilmember Hummer seconded the motion, which carried by a vote of 5-0.

14. **ADJOURNMENT**

At 8:43 p.m., Chair Kasner declared the meeting adjourned.

Karin Roberts, CMC
Deputy City Clerk

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