

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

October 26, 2022
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Ferris, Vice Chair Bhargava, Commissioners Brown, Cálad, Goepple, Malakoutian, Morisseau

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Emil King, Jennifer Ewing, Department of Community Development; Matt McFarland, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER
(6:31 p.m.)

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m. by Chair Ferris who presided.

Chair Ferris stated that the meeting and future meetings would be held via hybrid format with both in-person and virtual options via Zoom.

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

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
(6:32 p.m.)

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Brown. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Goepple 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.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Comprehensive Planning Manager Thara Johnson took a few minutes to review the Commission's schedule of upcoming meeting dates and agenda items. It was noted the

Commission's annual retreat was slated for November 9.

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

A. Oral Communications

Alex Zimmerman with Stand Up America began with zeig heile and claimed to be an ordinary idiot while the Commissioners are all smart idiots. Too many smart idiots is the reason the country is failing. Amazon coming to Bellevue will not be good for the city and it will cost every Bellevue citizen about \$5000 per year. The Commission has been asked to stop Amazon from coming to town but has done nothing about it. The Commission was asked to make an official investigation.

By way of personal privilege, Commissioner Brown disagreed with the use of Nazi symbolism in a public setting.

B. Written Communications

Thara Johnson said no written communications had been received.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(6:42 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION
(6:42 p.m.)

A. Environmental Stewardship Plan Implementation Overview and Briefing

Environmental Stewardship Program Manager Jennifer Ewing said the last presentation to the Commission was in 2020 as the Environmental Stewardship Plan was being updated with new climate change goals, new goals related to energy use, new goals related to transportation, and updated goals around tree canopy and natural systems. The updated plan was ultimately adopted that year. The five-year plan includes 78 actions covering the entire city and city operations in light of the Council's direction to lead by example. The five focus areas in the plan are climate change, energy, mobility and land use, natural systems, and waste. Implementation is an interdepartmental effort. Some of the actions in the plan are related to outreach, some are more programmatic, and some are code or policy oriented.

The outreach efforts have included twice-annual town hall meetings, and an informal sustainability leaders group that meets quarterly. There are also some smaller working groups that are helping to shape the development of new programs. All progress reports are available via the online dashboard.

One of the main metrics is community greenhouse gases emissions. The emissions from all of the buildings in the city are monitored, and information is received from Puget Sound Energy regarding energy use. Vehicle miles traveled data is received from the Puget Sound Regional Council, and data is also received on the city's waste stream. Emissions have a tendency to go up and down over time, in part due to the mix of fuels used by Puget Sound Energy based on demand, but the general trend since 2011 has been a reduction of some 20 percent despite significant residential and job growth.

Jennifer Ewing allowed that the two largest sources of greenhouse gases emissions are energy and transportation. A fair amount of effort has been invested over the past year and a half on the energy side. Two new programs have been created. The Clean Buildings Incentive Program supports larger commercial buildings primarily in reducing their energy use and in complying with the new Clean Buildings Act, and helps with benchmarking, making assessments and creating energy plans. The Energy Smart Eastside program is a partnership with Kirkland, Redmond, Mercer Island and Issaquah along with the King County Housing Authority, Imagine Housing, Hopelink and SparkNW. The program is focused on outreach and education as well as on incentives for low-income residents to install energy efficient heat pumps. The federal Inflation Reduction Act also includes a number of incentives for different energy efficiency strategies, which the Energy Smart Eastside program has been promoting. .

With regard to climate change, an area that can potentially be strengthened in the Comprehensive Plan update, a climate vulnerability assessment is being conducted. The outcomes will be incorporated in the city's long-range planning. Other considerations around air quality and land use planning guidelines are being reviewed with an eye on factoring them into Comprehensive Plan policies. On the natural systems side, the big one is the tree code update. The work to develop the watershed management plan will focus on assessing the health of the city's open streams and strategies for maintaining and improving them.

The list of upcoming actions includes an sustainability district opportunity assessment, potentially in the Wilburton or Downtown neighborhoods. There could be policy or code implications associated with the work. There is an opportunity in Wilburton to focus on district energy by harnessing the waste heat from the sewer main line. Also on the horizon is work to look at creating an electric vehicle roadmap showing priorities for charging locations in preparation for seeking federal and state grants.

Jennifer Ewing noted that the Comprehensive Plan already has quite a few policies related to climate change. Going forward the intent is to review those policies with an eye on new best practice resources coming from the state, the county and the Puget Sound Regional Council. The policy language will be revised as needed.

The outreach efforts to date have shown that there is generally appreciation for the work that has been done, but also a desire to see the city do more and to do it faster. There is a need for the city to meet all environmental goals while also accommodating growth.

Commissioner Brown said it is inspiring that greenhouse gases emissions have been reduced by 20 percent since 2011. It helps that fewer people were driving during Covid. Light rail and other investments likely will also make a difference. Jennifer Ewing allowed that it will take a number of different actions to achieve the goals, particularly around energy use and transportation. On the transportation side, light rail, more walking and biking, better alternatives for getting around, and transit-oriented development will all help make new growth more sustainable. On the energy side, the focus will be on a mix of reducing energy use in existing buildings and having newer buildings be more energy efficient.

Noting that the city has no control over Puget Sound Energy's sources of electrical production, Commissioner Brown stated there have been some talk about creating a public utility district that might give the city more leverage. Jennifer Ewing commented that in conjunction with other cities and large entities, Bellevue does have a voice with Puget Sound Energy. The state Clean Energy Transformation Act will require Puget Sound Energy to transition to 100 percent

renewable energy by 2045. Bellevue is part of the King County Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C). Led by King County, there are some 20 partners. The city does not have an official position on the idea of forming a public utility district.

Commissioner Cálad asked about the city's focus on encouraging residents and business owners to use heat pumps. Jennifer Ewing said heat pumps are considered one of the most energy efficient heating and cooling solutions. Helping affordable housing properties transition to heat pumps is seen as a resiliency strategy. There are admittedly challenges in making the transition and the city is looking at ways to assist or advise.

Commissioner Cálad said the Clean Buildings Incentive Program gives existing buildings until 2027 to upgrade to become more energy efficient. Jennifer Ewing said the program applies to buildings that are 50,000 square feet and up. Commissioner Cálad pointed out that such upgrades could cost millions of dollars. Jennifer Ewing said there are penalties associated with the state law for buildings that do not come into compliance. The penalties are based on the size of the building. It is up to the property owner to get their building into compliance, not the tenants of the buildings. Many buildings have on inspection been found to be either very close to or in compliance already. Commissioner Cálad commented that even so, the approach could be setting some businesses up for failure and will negatively impact the city.

Referring to the fact that community greenhouse gases emissions have been falling, Commissioner Cálad pointed out that a major influx of vehicles will be coming to the city because of development and jobs. Using more energy raises greenhouse gases emissions. There is a push to get people to use electric vehicles, but that will mean using more electricity, which will increase emissions. Light rail will not go far enough to balance the equation. Jennifer Ewing said the desire is for the majority of the commute trips associated with all new office and commercial development to be by public transit or walking and biking. Commissioner Cálad said there will be thousands of new people coming to the city and they will not all take light rail or choose to ride their bicycles. The reality is that cars will continue to be part of the scene. Jennifer Ewing said the electricity used by electric vehicles is a much cleaner fuel than gas. The slight increase in electricity use and the associated emissions from electric vehicles will be offset by a significant reduction in emissions from gas-powered vehicles.

Commissioner Malakoutian pointed out that the yellow line in the community greenhouse gases emissions graph is not the trend line, rather it is the annual target. The total emissions are in fact slightly above the annual target.

Commissioner Malakoutian asked if there are plans in place to educate businesses and residents about what they can do. Jennifer Ewing said education is certainly a part of the program. A community climate challenge program was launched though to date the city has not had the capacity to fully invest in the program. The intent is to do more around that in 2023.

Commissioner Malakoutian asked if each of the 78 action items will be measured in terms of the impact they are having on improving conditions. Jennifer Ewing said some will be more difficult to measure than others. Outreach and education, for example, the impact of outreach and education is difficult to quantify. Things like light rail ridership will be much easier to measure. Many of the action items are initiatives the city wants to undertake.

Commissioner Malakoutian asked what the percentage of greenhouse gas emissions is residential. Jennifer Ewing said in 2021 residential stood at 24 percent and commercial stood at 25 percent. Commissioner Malakoutian noted that while residential is a large percentage of the

total and commented that the only thing the city plans to do to address it to encourage heat pumps. Jennifer Ewing said the city will start with heat pumps given that heating is the biggest energy user in homes. The program will be grown to include more than just heat pumps in the future. Implementation of the program will be via partnership with the other Eastside cities and a non-profit partner. Commissioner Malakoutian suggested that while education will be important when it comes to encouraging heat pumps, it should also be easy for residents to make the switch. Jennifer Ewing agreed and pointed out there is a partnership with a heat pump distributor that brings with it a \$500 discount, and the desire is to have a list of preferred installers who can take care of all the paperwork for the customers.

Commissioner Goepple thanked Commissioner Brown for her comment during oral communications about the use of Nazi slogans and agreed there is absolutely no place for them at Commission meetings.

Commissioner Goepple asked about the city's funding for the initiatives, noting that the materials referred to 2021 and 2022 funding and proposed 2023 and 2024 funding. Jennifer Ewing said for 2021 and 2022 the funding is a mix of city funds from the capital operating budget and grant funding. Not including salaries, there was about \$300,000 in city funds and \$200,000 in grants per year in 2021 and 2022. For 2023 through 2029 there is a significant increase in the preliminary budget to the tune of about \$10.1 million. The funds will be used in part to make city facilities more energy efficient and coming into compliance with the Clean Buildings Act. A solar array will be added to City Hall, and the existing array on the Bellevue Service Center will be expanded. Electric vehicle charging stations will also be part of the mix to facilitate greening the city's fleet.

Commissioner Goepple commented that the clean energy transition will take a lot of capital investment. The greenhouse gases reduction fund from the Inflation Reduction Act has about \$27 billion for state and local communities grants. The question was asked how much leverage the city is seeking to obtain federal dollars to help enhance the city's dollars for the effort. Jennifer Ewing said the city is well positioned to go after some of the funding. On the transportation side, the city is pursuing a \$40 million grant to expand ped/bike infrastructure. Federal guidelines are calling for a large percentage of funds earmarked for disadvantaged communities and what that means for Bellevue is being ferreted out.

Commissioner Goepple referred to the state clean building standards compliance date of 2027 and asked if the city is going along with that date or seeking to accelerate some of the requirements. Jennifer Ewing said the city is not looking to accelerate any of the requirements. The first compliance timeline is for buildings with 200,000 square feet and more; after 2027 it applies to buildings with 100,000 and more. A full year of data is required in order to prove compliance. The city launched its program early on in part to take advantage of the \$75 million set aside by the state for early adopter incentive funds.

Commissioner Morisseau asked where the city stands in 2022 with respect to the annual emissions goals. Jennifer Ewing said the data for the year is received after the year ends. Commissioner Morisseau noted from the chart that the 2021 goal was not met and with things returning back to normal in 2022 the goal may also not be met. Commissioner Morisseau suggested that because the chart shows the city is not meeting its goals, there should be a reconsideration of the way things are being done. Jennifer Ewing said the summary chart summarizes where things stand for the 78 different actions in the plan. It does not indicate any current barriers to implementing any of the actions. Only a year and a half into implementing the plan, the city is not at the stage of considering any re-strategizing any of the actions. There will

be opportunity down the line to review progress and consider making changes. Commissioner Morisseau voiced a concern about how realistic the city is being about meeting all objectives within the designated timeline. Milestones should be established to track progress, and there needs to be a system in place that allows for making changes accordingly as barriers are identified. Encouraging light rail and installing electric vehicle charging stations are good steps, but the fact is some people will not take light rail no matter what. It may be that an approach other than encouraging light rail should be taken. Jennifer Ewing reiterated that it will take some time to know which approaches are working and which are not. Progress in terms of the environmental goals are monitored annually, and every five years the plan is to be updated.

Vice Chair Bhargava asked if the targets were established for the city or by the city. Jennifer Ewing said they were established by the city based on best practices and what neighboring jurisdictions are doing. Vice Chair Bhargava commented that driving all 78 actions with the same ferocity will probably not be possible, suggested it is unlikely all 78 will have the same impact, and asked which five or ten initiatives will have the most demonstrable impact in the current resource-constrained environment. Jennifer Ewing answered that some of the initiatives will have more immediate measurable impacts while others will see results over time. The initiatives that reduce energy use in existing buildings, improve energy efficiency in new construction, increase the use of renewables, support vehicle electrification and reduce the number of vehicle trips will have the most impact. Vice Chair Bhargava suggested those specific initiatives should be tracked the most closely in terms of achieving the targets.

Vice Chair Bhargava voiced support for the notion of creating a local utility district. While not easy to implement, it is a very innovative idea. Jennifer Ewing said there are a number of examples where district energy has been established. The approach is more common outside of the United States, though they are common in regard to university campuses. Vice Chair Bhargava suggested the feasibility of implementing an energy district should be studied in light of the impact of the initiatives.

Commissioner Brown said the fact that there will be a delay in bringing light rail online is known, and it has been suggested by some that light rail should be run on the Eastside even if it does not initially connect with Seattle. Jennifer Ewing did not know if the city has evaluated that option.

Commissioner Brown commented that single family homes use energy at one rate and multifamily buildings use energy at another rate. Increased density in the form of multifamily structures tends to decrease the amount of greenhouse gases emissions. In order to meet the greenhouse gases emissions targets and save the planet, more density might be needed in cities like Bellevue.

Commissioner Calad suggested that transitioning people from using their cars to other forms of getting around will simply not happen. A mother with three children – two teens and a seven-year-old – will not leave her car at home on a rainy November day and use a bicycle to get around. That mother will continue using a vehicle. Vehicles are going to continue to be used by many, even as new travel choices are brought online. The new travel options will work really well for many, but not for everyone. As more people come into the city, there will be more vehicles on the streets.

Vice Chair Bhargava explained that reductions in greenhouse gases must be addressed in relative terms. The baseline is what would happen if nothing was done. Incentives to change travel options will have an impact. The idea is not to transition all people from one mode to another.

There are models in place that make predictions based on land use patterns relative to jobs and housing and available travel choices. As travel options are added, the predictions change. In some cases, auto trips do get converted to pedestrian trips for various reasons. The aggregate within a given space can be validated through various means with a fairly high degree of certainty.

Commissioner Malakoutian noted have previously lived close to Downtown Bellevue and using a bike to commute to work in the Downtown. Having moved further away from the Downtown, other factors conspire to favor using a car. However, now that the grocery store is closer to home, all grocery shopping is done via a pedestrian trip. Land use patterns factor in when it comes to the choices people make regarding travel.

Commissioner Cálad reiterated that even with additional travel options, there will be an increase in the total number of vehicles using the streets going forward. Jennifer Ewing agreed that by definition increased jobs and population will mean more trips in an around the city. However, by having new growth locate in the growth centers, workers and residents will have more walkable access to transit and other amenities, reducing their reliance on their cars.

Commissioner Goepple referred to the priorities and asked if attention is also being given to the temporal aspects of the impacts. When buildings are built, their impacts are long term. The ability to change what has previously been built is more limited. In the prioritization process, that element should be kept in mind. Jennifer Ewing allowed that the city is poised to see a lot of development occur over the next ten to twenty years. Those new buildings will be around for a long time and there certainly is a need to get it right up front. Much is happening at the state level in terms of improvements to building and energy codes that will continue to require more energy efficiencies and sustainability in buildings.

Commissioner Malakoutian suggested the problem with trying to determine the top five or ten initiatives is that there simply are not enough metrics, and thus it cannot be known yet which variable will positively impact greenhouse gases emissions. Jennifer Ewing said the specifics can be determined, but the work has not yet been done. Commissioner Malakoutian also noted that it remains unknown what should be done if the targets are not in fact met. Jennifer Ewing said a lot of that is being addressed through the budget process. There clearly is a desire on the part of the community to have more resources to implement the plan.

Commissioner Morisseau allowed that transportation, commercial and residential uses use the most energy. Jennifer Ewing was asked if consideration is being given to implementing policies and incentives encouraging people to transition away from gas cars, and to incentivize sustainability in commercial and residential uses. The answer given was that the team is looking into and considering all options. The commute trip reduction program does work with businesses in the city to implement programming on commuting alternatives. The city as an employer is required to implement the state mandates and thus employees are given discounted or free Orca cards and are encouraged to use different modes of travel to and from work. The city of Denver offers discounts on e-bikes. Commissioner Morisseau stressed the need for the city to be strategic in its approaches. The city needs to be both serious and realistic in its approaches.

Chair Ferris voiced appreciation for the comments made about transitioning away from the use of personal cars and the difficulties faced by many families in doing so. There are at the same time some low-income families that do not have a car of their own and that must figure out how to get around. In thinking about how to build the city, it will be critical to make sure all residents have access to different services. Light rail, while it will be beneficial to the city, will not get a

resident from their home to the Downtown. Employing electric shuttles in a hub and spoke pattern will be the most beneficial.

Chair Ferris asked who the citizens are that are serving on the sustainability leaders group. Jennifer Ewing said they are people who represent organizations and are involved in updating the plan. The represented organizations include Bellevue College, the Bellevue School District, the Chamber of Commerce, the Bellevue Downtown Association, and some private companies like Microsoft and T-Mobile. There also are some non-profit climate activists involved. Chair Ferris suggested it would be helpful to include regular residents.

Chair Ferris asked what buildings are being studied by McDonald Miller, and if the building owners are having to foot the bill. Jennifer Ewing said their focus is on commercial buildings given that they must comply with the state law. McDonald Miller is doing the benchmarking assessments work in-kind as part of the partnership, and the city is helping to subsidize the assessment work. The city is not subsidizing any actual capital projects.

Chair Ferris asked if the work that is focused on natural systems includes daylighting creeks. Jennifer Ewing said the watershed management plan is focused only on the open streams. There are separate efforts under way in terms of daylighting. Chair Ferris said daylighting is the right thing to do, in part because it eliminates some asphalt that serves as heat sinks.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Remote Participation Approval (8:18 p.m.)

Commissioner Morisseau requested to participate remotely for the November 9 Commission meeting.

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES (8:18 p.m.)

A. September 28, 2022

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Commissioner Brown. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Goepple and the motion carried unanimously.

11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None (8:19 p.m.)

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None (8:19 p.m.)

13. ADJOURNMENT (8:19 p.m.)

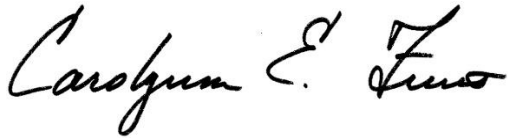
A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Goepple. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brown and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Ferris adjourned the meeting at 8:19 p.m.



Thara Johnson
Staff to the Planning Commission

12/15/2022
Date



Carolynn Ferris
Chair of the Planning Commission

12/15/2022
Date