

Costco applies for zoning change to build Kelsey Creek store

By James E. Bell, East Bellevue Community Council (EBCC) Chair

Costco applied in September 2007 to change the zoning at Kelsey Creek Center and allow construction of a 140,000-square-foot retail center where the old K-Mart sits vacant.

The first public meeting for this application was Dec. 4 before the East Bellevue Community Council. About 25 area residents heard presentations by the city and Costco. Everyone who spoke or submitted written comments became a party of record. They will receive notice of the upcoming Hearing Examiner's meeting.

You can become a party of record and comment /advise the outcome by contacting Mike Upston (452-2970 or mupston@bellevuewa.gov) at Bellevue's Planning and Community Development department.

If the Rezone, Design Review and construction permits are approved, work could start this summer with opening of a new retail Costco in late 2008 or early 2009.

Mike Upston, the city's lead planner for this application, described how the current property is zoned Community Business (CB) with a concomitant zoning agreement (CZA). This CZA has zoning requirements, land uses allowed and not allowed, and development standards that are specific to this site. It also requires Kelsey Creek to be opened if the retail area is increased.

Upston said that this application is different than the Costco Fresh proposal of several years ago. This application is for a standard store, albeit a little bit smaller to fit on the site. An average Costco is about 160,000 square feet. This one would be about 140,000 square feet.

In 2002-2003 Bellevue was talking about requiring Kelsey Creek to be opened. Now we are looking at leaving it to function the way it does but providing a better culvert that's clean and provides the necessary flow.

In exchange, the applicant would put the money and resources somewhere else. The first obvious option is to improve the Larson Lake area. The Parks Department has a project there that Costco could add value to and make it better than we have today. This includes pedestrian connections to the park and trail system and improved habitat.

Specifically the city is looking at the site zoning reverting back to Community Business. In exchange for taking away the concomitant agreement, Bellevue would ask for a binding agreement that would require a number of improvements to the site and a mitigation plan for improvements to Larson Lake. The list includes: reconstructing the culvert, providing storm water detention, putting filters in the catch basins, putting in landscape improvements, putting in a trail and doing the off-site mitigation. So, if for some reason the rezone were granted but the Costco store weren't built, there would be certain improvements to the property and mitigation improvements in the connection to the Larson Lake.

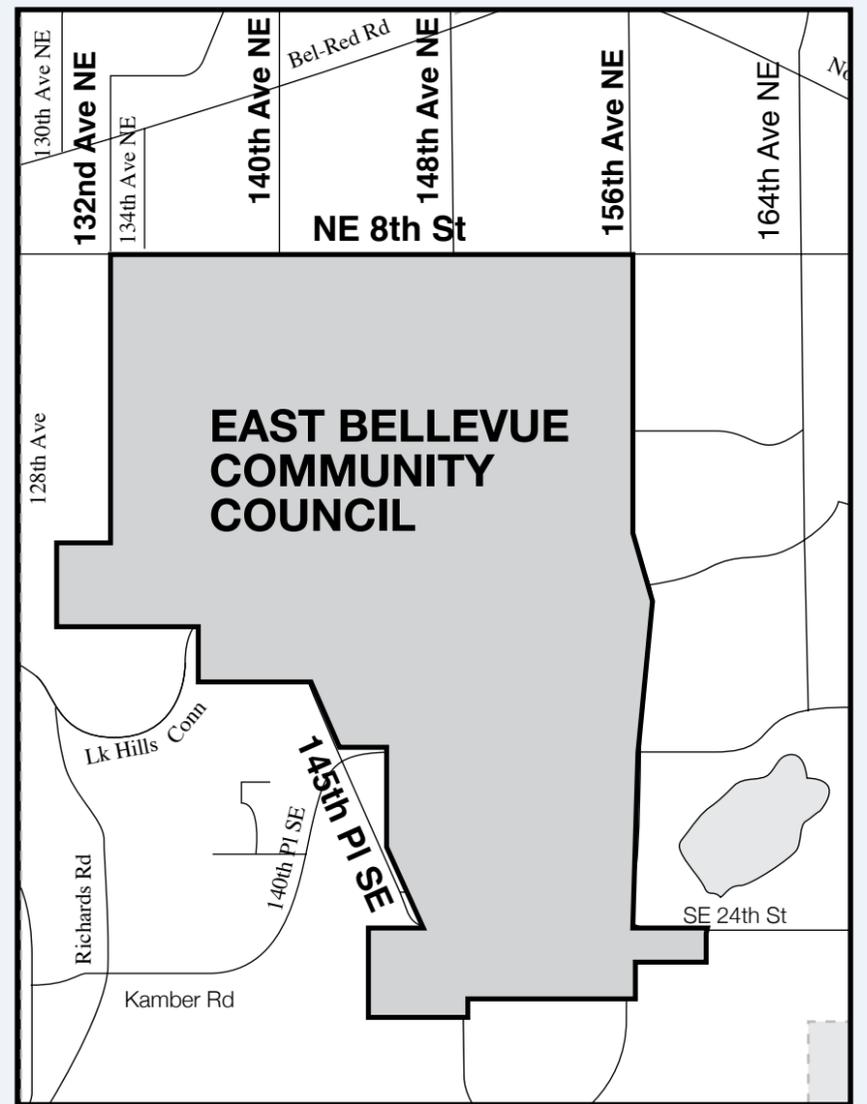
Andy Dempsey and Transportation Solutions Inc. (TSI) are the traffic engineers hired by Costco for this project. They are working with the Bellevue transportation engineers to develop solutions that minimize the impact of Costco traffic.

The initial part of the analysis was for concurrency. This indicated that the Costco store would have about 850 trips going in and out of the parking lot during the peak P. M. hours. That is 425 cars in and 425 cars out. About 25 percent of those cars were already on 148th or Main. This level passes the concurrency management standards for Bellevue during the week and shows that the overall road network in this area of Bellevue could handle the traffic that's expected from a Costco of this size.

TSI also did a Saturday traffic analysis because Costco generates more traffic on Saturday than weekdays. They estimate there would be about 575 cars in and 575 cars out during the busiest time on a typical weekend. Of course the normal level of traffic on 148th is lower on the weekend.

TSI also did a neighborhood analysis at the community's request. This was to determine whether there was a significant potential for folks travel through the neighborhood rather than using 148th. They found that it would take 1 1/2 to 2 times longer to go through the neighborhoods than to use 148th for access the site.

We welcome comments about the East Bellevue area. You can share your views with the Community Council via e-mail at EBCC@bellevuewa.gov. To find out more about the agendas and decisions of EBCC go to the website, http://www.bellevuewa.gov/EBCC_Homepage.htm and look under city government.



For information about the city's Community Council, call Deputy City Clerk Michelle Murphy, 425-452-6466, or contact the East Bellevue Community Council Chairperson, James Bell.

East Bellevue Community Council meets the first Tuesday each month at 6:30 p.m. at the Lake Hills Clubhouse, 15230 Lake Hills Blvd.

Members

James E. Bell, Jim Eder, Ross Gooding, Steven Kasner, Ken Seal

Next step is the Hearing Examiner

A public hearing by the Hearing Examiner is tentatively scheduled for March. The Hearing Examiner holds the public hearing for the City Council.

At the hearing, city staff will present their staff report with recommendations for the rezone and the required conditions for removing the concomitant zoning agreement. The Hearing Examiner will also take public testimony regarding the rezone application.

Following that, the Hearing Examiner will submit a recommendation to the City Council for approving the rezone.

Costco describes plans

Peter Kahn, the Costco representative, said that the company proposes to build a 140,000-square-foot Costco warehouse without the automobile amenities, without the tire center and without a gas station.

It will have the standard Costco one-way in and one-way out of the building access. Parking will increase from 742 to 856 spaces. Costco will also acquire the Shell Station property and convert that to parking spaces.

Currently there is no stormwater treatment on the site. Costco will provide stormwater treatment to substantially reduce the pollutants going into the creek. Some of this will incorporate low-impact development technologies in the landscaping plan.

Landscaping will increase to meet current Bellevue standards. Increased perimeter landscaping will soften the view of the site from 148th Avenue and Main Street.

Transportation is a big issue. Costco has three goals: 1) Keep the traffic moving on 148th 2) Get people in and out of the site and 3) Ensure member traffic doesn't cut through neighborhood streets.

Costco thinks the addition of this retail store will save overall travel trips on the road system. There are about 51,000 Costco members in the Bellevue zip codes area. Of these, about 33,000 shop the Issaquah and Kirkland stores about 34 times a year. The rest shop other area stores.

The travel distances to the Issaquah and Kirkland are 7.2 and 7.7 miles each way from the corner of 148th and Main. If this project moves forward and the average shopper drove 3.7 miles back and forth for a round trip, it could save an annual average of 8 million miles by Costco members. That would save just under 400,000 gallons of gasoline at 20 mpg.