CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

February 13, 2013
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:	Chairman Carlson, Commissioners Hamlin, Laing, Sheffels, Tebelius, Turner
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:	Commissioner Ferris
STAFF PRESENT:	Paul Inghram, Department of Planning and Community Development;
GUEST SPEAKERS:	None
RECORDING SECRETARY:	Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m. by Chairman Carlson who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Tebelius, who arrived at 6:41 p.m., and Commissioner Ferris, who was excused.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Laing. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Turner and it carried unanimously.

5. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCILS, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None

6. STAFF REPORTS

Comprehensive Planning Manager Paul Inghram informed the Commissioners that the Shoreline Master Program transmittal memo was not yet complete. Once it is before the City Council, they can just send the document on to the Department of Ecology for a review, or they can elect to conduct a more in-depth review on their own before sending it on to the Department of Ecology.

7. STUDY SESSION

A. LUCA: Retail Auto Sales in the Office/Limited Business (OLB) District

Senior Planner Mike Bergstrom said the proposed Land Use Code amendment regarding retail auto sales in the OLB district was initiated by the Council in late January. Because the proposed amendment would apply citywide, the East Bellevue Community Council is involved in the

review.

Mr. Bergstrom noted that along with comments received from the public regarding the proposed amendment, the co-chairs of the Eastgate/I-90 land use and transportation study CAC each forwarded to the Commission a memo regarding the proposal.

The proposed amendment is very simple in itself, but it is not without related issues. The permitted uses chart in the Land Use Code for the OLB district permits outright or by conditional use some retail uses while disallowing others. Auto retail is permitted but is subject to Footnote 6 which essentially says the use is not in fact permitted everywhere in the district. The use is allowed in Wilburton on the west side of 116th Avenue NE, and along SE 36th Street in the Factoria neighborhood in the Eastgate corridor where Honda of Bellevue is located. If approved, the amendment would indicate auto sales as a use is also allowed to the west of 148th Avenue SE between Eastgate Way and Bellevue College, subject to design review and associated vehicle inventory storage occurring predominantly within a building or buildings.

Mr. Bergstrom said an auto dealer has expressed an interest in purchasing the Bally Fitness building, the garage to the north, and what was the Candy Cane motel and office to the south. They propose to reuse the fitness building and garage and part of the two buildings on the site to the south for auto sales. There are two parcels to the north of the garage which the dealer is not interested in but which share similar locational characteristics.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Sheffels, Mr. Bergstrom explained that if approved as proposed, the amendment would not permit auto sales to occur in all OLB zones in the city; auto sales in OLB would be limited to the area along 116th Avenue NE, along SE 36th Street, and along 148th Avenue SE between Eastgate Way and Bellevue College.

Commissioner Laing asked why the proposal is not to allow auto sales along 148th Avenue SE as a conditional use. As outlined it makes it appear as though the city recognized an opportunity and is engaged in something akin to spot zoning, and will be asking for design review for the use along 148th Avenue SE but nowhere else in the OLB district. Mr. Bergstrom said the Eastgate/I-90 study included a detailed review of the auto sales uses in that corridor. The results of that study have not yet been fully embedded in the Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Code language and when they are there will be additional design review requirements throughout the corridor. By including the design review requirement in the proposed amendment, the results of the corridor study are being respected. The two OLB areas where auto sales are already allowed do not have the same design review requirements, but aside from that the permitting requirements for all locations where auto sales are allowed in OLB will be the same.

Mr. Inghram allowed that as the Eastgate/I-90 study results are implemented there may be a more eloquent way to address the use. That process, however, is still 18 months out, so to accommodate an immediate interest the proposed amendment was initiated.

Commissioner Turner pointed out that ingress and egress could be a challenge for the site along 148th Avenue SE, a fact that may call for some level of additional review. Mr. Bergstrom said one common characteristic of the parcels along 148th Avenue SE is that they all front that arterial, though the southernmost site does not actually gain access from 148th Avenue SE. Staff from the transportation department have expressed the view that the parcels that access from 148th Avenue SE are ideal from an operational standpoint because the loading and unloading issue would not have to occur on Eastgate Way.

Chairman Carlson asked why the auto dealer interested in the 148th Avenue SE location is not

interested in locating along 116th Avenue NE instead. Mr. Bergstrom said the Eastgate location is near other well-established auto sales businesses, and auto retailers like to co-locate.

Commissioner Turner asked what the plans are for the east side of 116th Avenue NE. Mr. Inghram said there are a number of vacant parcels along the old auto row that are held in common ownership. The property owner has been investigating the notion of creating a significant retail development there and has been actively trying to court some retail tenants. There have also been inquiries from other developers with interests ranging from office to medical uses in the corridor. A hotel use has expressed interest in locating on the west side of 116th Avenue NE. It seems likely that some significant redevelopment will occur along the corridor.

Mr. Bergstrom said an auto dealerships study is under way to look at the issue citywide. The study has identified all of the existing dealers and has interviewed all of them. One preliminary study conclusions are that some dealerships are doing very well while others are not. There are pressures on some dealerships to relocate because of changes in land use patterns, while the more successful dealerships are looking to expand and will need a larger site. Mr. Inghram said auto retail as a use is difficult to locate. They are not the most neighborhood-friendly use and not everyone wants to see one over their backyard fence. The fact remains, however, that people buy cars and there is a convenience in having them located in the city. Auto sales also general substantial tax revenues for the city and as such are a benefit.

Commissioner Sheffels commented that several years ago Ferrari and Maserati wanted to locate a dealership along Bel-Red Road but ultimately chose not to. Mr. Inghram said the use was allowed where the dealer wanted to locate, though there were a number of restrictions, including the longstanding restriction that auto sales cannot face Bel-Red Road. He added that there was for a time a green car dealership in the downtown and a Tesla dealership in Bellevue Square. The Porsche will need to be relocated with 120th Avenue NE is widened and there are discussions about where it should go.

Commissioner Hamlin said it was his understanding that a new location for the Porsche dealership has been located on NE 8th Street.

Commissioner Laing commented that while the proposed amendment was initiated by the Council, in fact what happened is a car dealership saw an opportunity and worked to get things going. Mr. Bergstrom said the Council expressed a range of opinions about initiating the proposed amendment, including questions about whether it should be initiated ahead of completing the auto dealerships study and implementation of the Eastgate/I-90 study. In initiating the amendment, the Council made it clear that ultimate approval was not a foregone conclusion.

Mr. Bergstrom briefly reviewed with the Commission the conclusions reached by the Eastgate/I-90 study relative to land uses, particularly in the area near the park and ride.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Laing, Mr. Bergstrom noted that there were a couple of realtors on the CAC who had differing opinions as to whether or not residential would work close to the freeway.

Commissioner Laing asked about the expected life cycle of the existing structures along 148th Avenue SE in which the dealership is interested. The general opinion of the other Commissioners was that the except for the garage, the buildings are about 40 years old and have been vacant for more than a year.

Mr. Bergstrom reviewed with the Commission the proposed schedule for the amendment culminating in final action by the Council early in April. He said if the Council ultimately approves the amendment, the East Bellevue Community Council will be asked to act on it as well, even though the property is not actually within their jurisdiction.

Commissioner Hamlin said the CAC spent more than a year working through the issues and coming up with a final recommendation. A great deal of time was spent envisioning what the area should be. There were never any specific discussions about what should happen should another auto dealer were to come forward. The auto dealers in the corridor indicated their intent to remain where they are and the CAC honored that. Some of the CAC felt that the site on which the Toyota dealership is situated would be appropriate for a use other than an auto dealership, but the group understood that dealerships tend not to move around too frequently.

Commissioner Hamlin said he was ~~disturbed~~ surprised to see the proposal made regarding the site along 148th Avenue SE. The CAC had identified the site as an excellent opportunity for a transit-oriented development, particularly in conjunction with the expansion of Bellevue College and the need for residential units. The park and ride undoubtedly will remain where it is and expand over time, and it is likely that light rail will eventually serve the corridor. He said the economic benefits of having another dealership are clear, but the site is almost in the heart of where the Eastgate/I-90 plan is focused and it feels out of place. The plan met with approval by residents and developers alike, and the Council expressed support for it as well.

Commissioner Turner asked if the auto dealership could in fact be integrated into the Eastgate/I-90 plan given its location on the edge of the study area. Commissioner Hamlin said the Council entertained the same question~~.~~, noting that~~-~~ Councilmember Wallace suggested some kind of a break could be created between the dealership and a transit-oriented development. If things move forward, it will be necessary to figure out how strike the right balance. It is not, however, what the CAC envisioned.

Commissioner Sheffels asked if the dealership wanting to locate on the old Bally site would be new to the city or would be relocating from another part of the city. Mr. Bergstrom said the dealership would be relocating to the site and backfilling their existing space with a new dealership.

Chairman Carlson observed that one of every seven tax dollars generated in Bellevue comes from car sales. Commissioner Hamlin said that is what makes the decision such a difficult one. From a planning perspective the dealership is not part of the vision, but from an economic perspective it is good for the city.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Laing, Mr. Bergstrom said the Eastgate/I-90 plan has a planning horizon of about 20 years, and implementation of the plan and is envisioned to be phased in over time. There is a certain capacity reflected by the plan, but the projections are held back because it is unlikely the full capacity will be realized within the timeframe of the plan.

Commissioner Laing said the comments of Commissioner Hamlin were well taken. The CAC process was thorough and resulted in buy-off from a variety of stakeholders. He said it is disturbing that the first issue raised now that the ink is almost dry runs counter to the findings of the plan.

Mr. Bergstrom said until the Bel-Red plan came along, development intensity in the city was focused on the downtown and everything outside that area was equally pushed down. Bel-Red

broke with that tradition with a vision for a different kind of economic center. The Eastgate/I-90 study took a similar tack, though not to the same degree of development intensity.

Commissioner Tebelius said her concerns relative to the proposed amendment mirrored those already raised. She asked if consideration had been given to traffic issues that might result from having the amendment approved. Mr. Bergstrom said the proposal was reviewed by the transportation department, and the conclusion reached was that from an overall system operations and traffic generation standpoint, the impacts could be mitigated. Transportation staff indicated support for the fact that access to the site would be from 148th Avenue SE instead of from Eastgate Way.

Commissioner Tebelius asked what representations, if any, were made to the neighborhoods regarding future auto dealerships in the Eastgate area. Mr. Bergstrom said the Michael's Toyota and Chaplains dealerships are situated in Community Business and are permitted as conditional uses. He said he did not know what the neighborhoods were told about any possible future dealerships, but added that recently the city received a complaint about the exterior lighting at Michael's.

Commissioner Tebelius said she initially did not warm to the notion of having another dealership in that corridor, but allowed that after recently visiting the site concluded that a dealership on the old Bally site may actually be a good fit. She asked if ultimate approval of the amendment could, however, result in a snowball of more and more dealerships. Mr. Bergstrom said there are never any guarantees. He stressed that implementation of the Eastgate/I-90 plan will involve a review of the zoning throughout the corridor.

Commissioner Tebelius said there used to be a bus line near her home that people used frequently to get to and from downtown Seattle. The route was eventually discontinued so people must first drive to the transit center. However, the buses going to downtown Seattle no longer go through the tunnel, and it takes considerably more time for commuters to reach downtown Seattle. As a result, more people have given up riding the bus in favor of taking their cars. As things change, unanticipated consequences can and often do occur.

Commissioner Turner said he was not opposed to siting the new dealership as outlined. He acknowledged the good work done by the Eastgate/I-90 CAC and suggested having the dealership will not adversely impact the plan. It certainly is a good fit with the surrounding uses.

B. 2014 Comprehensive Plan Update

Mr. Inghram commented that the Comprehensive Plan forum held on January 24 went very well and generated some positive responses from those who attended. It was healthy to have representatives from all of the city's boards and commissions meeting together to see and feel the connection of how the various elements connect. The public meeting held on January 29 was also well attended by people who were more than willing to share their thoughts and opinions.

Mr. Inghram said staff are still working to compile their notes into a document summarizing the different themes. He said he heard at the public event a strong interest in community and ways to facilitate that. There were comments about the time it has taken for the Lake Hills Shopping Center to redevelop. The community is also frustrated about what is happening in Newport Hills. There was a broad concern about being able to shop and meet friends near to where they live. Some noted that in urban Europe people meet with people at a park, but in Bellevue parks are for sports and playgrounds. Some at the forum voiced the opinion that the city should play a leadership role in addressing water quality as opposed to addressing things incrementally as

redevelopment occurs. Others praised the plan the city has in place, but questioned whether or not the city always follows the plan.

Mr. Inghram said there was solid support for having a plan for healthy, quality and protected residential neighborhoods, strong economic centers, particularly in the downtown, healthy open spaces, places to recreate, and the arts and culture. Those notions have long been at the heart of the Comprehensive Plan, and people clearly continue to buy into them. There was clear support in favor of preserving neighborhoods, but there were some differences of opinion as to what that actually means.

Commissioner Sheffels commented that all too often people do not even know what the plan is for the neighborhood in which they live. She said what is needed is a way to get people to know what the plan is for their local neighborhood.

Commissioner Laing agreed. He noted that the subarea plans are essentially the neighborhood plans for the various divisions of the city, and it would be a good thing as part of the Comprehensive Plan update to have targeted meetings within each subarea to review the specific plan for each.

Mr. Inghram said for planners whatever is on the map is real, and when a development occurs it is necessary to determine whether or not it is consistent with the plan. Often, however, a local community will say the development is not what they were expecting, which is a clear indication that they are not fully aware of what the plan says.

Commissioner Hamlin agreed that every effort should be made to make sure people have the opportunity to find out what the plans are for their local neighborhood. Often, however, people do not fully grasp what plans are even for and how they translate into projects. It is always valuable to allow the public to talk through their issues, which did occur at the public meeting.

Mr. Inghram said the work to update the plan will include the challenge of getting the public to put its focus on the future rather than the present. During the scoping phase the task is to define for everyone what the update will cover and what issues will be focused on over the next six months. The work will involve distilling what the public had to say at the public meeting, what the Council's views are, what the Commission's views are, and the observations of the staff. Those who are best suited to focusing on the future include those who are still young, and to that end there is a junior class at Sammamish High School working on a class project involving future plans for the city; their project may include making a presentation to the Commission.

A couple of dates in March are being considered for taking the scoping and outreach efforts to the City Council. On March 13 the Commission is slated to meet jointly to begin looking at the housing element.

Continuing, Mr. Inghram said there are many in the city, including in some city departments, who believe the Comprehensive Plan and the land use plan are essentially the same thing. He said that notion needs to be dispelled. The Comprehensive Plan is the overall plan for the city, and land use is only one aspect of it, though it certainly is key to the work of the Planning Commission.

The Commissioners reviewed the land use plan as it currently exists in the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Inghram noted that the text is missing a number of key things that were not in existence the last time the document was updated. There are several instances in which the document is out of date; it states that there are 28,000 jobs in the downtown whereas currently there are actually

closer to 42,000 jobs in the downtown, and the forecast is that by 2030 there will be more than 70,000 jobs in the downtown. The document indicates there are about 4000 residents living in the downtown, but in fact there are closer to 10,000, and the 2030 forecast is for 19,000. The land use challenges highlighted by the current plan include the notion that the city is running out of available land; the fact is the available land is gone and all real development in the city is redevelopment. The household and job targets for the new period, which covers 2006 to 2031, anticipates an increase of just over 17,000 housing units and 53,000 jobs.

Mr. Inghram noted that the current land use plan lists Bellevue's population as 117,000, but currently the population stands at close to 130,000. Interestingly, the employment figure in the current document is 130,000, but during the recent economic struggle that figure increased, then decreased, and then increased again to the current figure of 131,000.

The Commissioners briefly reviewed the Land Use policies and pointed out where some small tweaks may be needed. Policy LU-4, which relates to new subdivisions, may no longer be relevant, but it may also be harmless to keep it in. Policies LU-7 and LU-8 were modernized somewhat during the last update but still hint at the traditional approach of keeping residential uses in residential areas and commercial uses in commercial areas. Policy LU-12 is a bit vague in its call to retain land availability for specific commercial uses which are important to the community. Policies LU-14, LU-15 and LU-16 are all about parks and open space and may be more appropriately housed in the parks element. Policy LU-23 is about housing and may fit better in the housing element. Policy LU-34 directs exploration of the appropriate long-term direction of the location of light industrial businesses in the city; the issue has in fact been explored in-depth through the Bel-Red and Eastgate/I-90 studies. Policy LU-36 encourages the continued development of office uses in designated districts, which is exactly what is done when an area is zoned for office uses.

Mr. Inghram said the list of issues missing from the Land Use Element include safe routes to schools; strategies for commercial mixed use development; maintaining the livability of areas in which development is to be concentrated; the relationship of land use to light rail; supporting Bel-Red in becoming an urban center; and encouraging local centers.

Commissioner Laing asked if the procedural issues involved with Comprehensive Plan amendments will be looked at as part of the update process. Mr. Inghram said that is one question yet to be answered.

Commissioner Turner suggested every opportunity should be taken to provide for more freedom and flexibility in the plan. Mr. Inghram allowed that much of the city's zoning structure was put in place in the 1950s and 1960s and is Euclidian in style in that the various uses are assigned areas and nothing is allowed to mix. That approach served the city very well for a long time, but the forms of development that will be faced in building for the future involves redevelopment, infill development, and mixing various uses. The Neighborhood Business zoning in Newport Hills is a classic case in point where very specific types of businesses are allowed and nothing else. Commissioner Turner said that approach is totally wrong.

Commissioner Hamlin said while the current approach may be ~~too~~ restrictive, to be too flexible would be to err in the direction of fewer protections for the neighborhoods. Commissioner Turner suggested the way to protect the neighborhoods is not necessarily through super-strict regulations. Things are tipped too far toward strict regulations, an approach that is not offering value and is killing business opportunities.

8. OTHER BUSINESS - None

9. PUBLIC COMMENT - None

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. October 24, 2012

A motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Hamlin. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Turner and it carried unanimously.

B. November 28, 2012

Some corrections were made to the draft minutes following which a motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Commissioner Hamlin. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Laing and it carried without dissent; Commissioner Turner abstained from voting.

C. January 16, 2013

A motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Tebelius. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hamlin and it carried unanimously.

11. NEXT PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

A. February 27, 2013

12. ADJOURN

Chairman Carlson adjourned the meeting at 8:32 p.m.

Paul Inghram
Staff to the Planning Commission

4/10/2013
Date

John Carlson
Chairman of the Planning Commission

5-8-2013
Date

* Approved March 13, 2013