

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

September 21, 2005
7:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Bonincontri, Vice-Chair Mathews, Commissioners Bach, Lynde, Robertson

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Orrico, Sheffels

STAFF PRESENT: Kathleen Burgess, Steve Cohn, Kevin O'Neill, Department of Planning and Community Development; Kris Liljelblad, Department of Transportation

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Chair Bonincontri who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Orrico and Sheffels, both of whom were excused.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus.

4. STAFF REPORTS – None

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Pamela Toelle, 14545 NE 13th Street, said those who live in the 148th Avenue corridor call the roadway “Alternative I-405” or “I-405 East.” She said she was one of the citizens invited to meet with staff and Ron Sher to kick off the Crossroads Center Plan. The first Crossroads subarea plan was brought about in the late 1970s at the instigation of the community in part because of the human services impact resulting from dense multifamily housing in the area. The citizens committee of ten or twelve members that was formed to review and update the original Crossroads plan met twice a month for nine months. All of the policies were carefully scrutinized, and the policy restricting additional multifamily housing in the area was upheld. The proposed Crossroads Center Plan, which the select group of citizens who met with staff and Mr. Sher had not seen, includes as many as 900 units of multifamily housing. The Crossroads Shopping Center serves currently as a community gathering place; the area does not need additional multifamily units in order to become a more cohesive community. There are hundreds of multifamily housing opportunities in Crossroads, including just across the street from the shopping center.

Ms. Jane Paige, 245 Lake Hills Boulevard, said she was one who was involved in developing the

original Crossroads subarea plan. She said one of the reasons she chose to get involved was because of her concern regarding the lack of parks space and social services in the densely populated area. At the time, Crossroads had the highest percentage of single-parent families in the entire state. The city inherited the zoning pattern of Crossroads when it annexed the area, and the original and subsequent subarea plans have all said the area already has enough multifamily housing. The community members worked hard to get the park and the community center, and Mr. Sher has worked closely with the local residents in building up the Crossroads Shopping Center, all of which has made Crossroads a real community. In the meetings with Mr. Sher and staff, the community representatives allowed that up to 200 units of multifamily housing on the shopping center site might be acceptable, but 900 units is over the top. The impacts would be significant. The city needs to look beyond the mere commercial aspects. While there appears to be a trend toward including multiple uses in commercial developments, less than ten years ago the push was toward big box stores, a trend that has run its course and appears to be moving in another direction. The amenities that neighborhoods need in order to become and remain stable do not change over time. Microsoft is at one end of the 148th corridor, and at the other end is I-90 and the Boeing complex. Crossroads and Lake Hills is in the middle, and residents are concerned that 156th Avenue will become a major thoroughfare between the two centers and bisect the neighborhood. What happens in Crossroads will have impacts on the larger area, and that must be taken into account.

Mr. Ken Schiring, 16223 NE 28th Street, said he also served on the citizen advisory committee that crafted the original Crossroads subarea plan. At the time the group was very concerned about the number of multifamily housing units in the area. The stance against allowing additional multifamily was reaffirmed in the 1990s. Mr. Sher has a very good reputation in the Crossroads area; his efforts have helped to make the area what it is. However, the proposal to allow multifamily housing as part of the commercial establishment does not fit with Crossroads as it does in Factoria. Nine hundred multifamily units is simply too many; one multifamily unit would be too much. The Crossroads subarea plan policy that prohibits additional multifamily housing should be upheld.

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

7. STUDY SESSION

A. Comprehensive Plan Amendment
– *Crossroads Center Plan*

Comprehensive Planning Manager Kathleen Burgess said staff has received quite a number of comments from the public about the process to develop the Crossroads Center Plan moving too fast. She said the current plan calls for spending the next month going out into the community to have conversations about the plan. The turnout for the community meeting held on September 13 was good; about 60 people attended the meeting, which was held in Crossroads Shopping Center. There was a good cross section of the community present, and as many as 20 persons who attended just happened by or were attracted by some of the pre-meeting publicity and newspaper articles.

Ms. Burgess said direction to develop the Crossroads Center Plan was given by the City Council in January. The focus is only on the commercial areas in Crossroads, which serve as the town center for east Bellevue. The Crossroads subarea plan which since its adoption in the late 1970s has guided development in the Crossroads area, and which was readopted in 1988, is now 17 years old. Staff believes it is time to take another look at the commercial section, but not the residential sections of the subarea plan. Shopping and living habits have changed over time.

Associate Planner Steve Cohn showed the Commissioners a bird's eye drawing of current conditions in the commercial area of Commissioners. Ms. Burgess noted that the connections between the residential areas and the community center, the park and the Crossroads Shopping Center are substandard; some attention during the study will be given to improving those connections along with creating gathering places.

Ms. Burgess said three concepts for redeveloping the commercial area have been developed in conjunction with the architectural firm GGLO which has been contracted to serve as the consultant for the study. Property owners think the current 730,000 square feet of commercial is the right number, so each option contains the same amount but in different configurations. Little new development of the area is anticipated within the next two or three years, and full redevelopment of the area likely will occur in phases over the next ten to twenty years. Each option also includes 900 units of multifamily housing which could take the form of apartments, condominiums or senior housing. The idea behind including housing units is to create more of a critical mass, an actual town center where people can live, shop, work and recreate. The number of housing units shown is not a magic number; the number is used because it is a number that would fit on the site over the long term. About half of the housing units shown in the concepts are anticipated to be located on the Crossroads Shopping Center property; the balance of the units are located on adjacent properties within the retail core of Crossroads. Each option includes additional open spaces and gathering places, and improved connections to the park, the community center, transit, and shopping.

Mr. Cohn said Option 1 has been termed "Formal" because of its more formal circulation layout and the way in which the different pieces are placed in a formal pattern around the circulation system. The option includes a major open space in the form of an amphitheater, large green spaces in the middle of the site, and a large green connection to the park and community center. A grand entrance is envisioned to the site from NE 8th Street. The layout includes buildings with commercial uses on the ground floor over which there are housing units, primarily in the northern and eastern areas of the study site. More formal buildings are arranged around the amphitheater and along the east side near the park, as well as between the cinema and grocery store uses.

Option 2 has been named the "District" concept. It breaks the overall area up into separate districts. The option includes a couple of major roadway crossings through the proposed residential area to the north, and slightly larger connections to the park. A covered parking garage is included as part of a greenway that connects the park with the shopping center on the second level. Several green areas are scattered around, the largest of which is in the residential area. The land uses for the District option are very similar to those in the Formal option. In each option, parking for the commercial uses would be either underground or in structures.

The third option is called "Informal." Instead of having straight lines, the layout includes curves with large green swaths through the residential and commercial areas. The concept includes a grand green entrance to the park. The land uses are similar to the first two options, but the buildings are arranged in a less formal fashion.

Mr. Cohn said each of the options show on-grade parking remaining at NE 8th Street and 156th Avenue NE, at least for the timeframe stretching out 20 years. Mr. Sher believes that maintaining visibility for the center from the main thoroughfares will continue to be very important.

Ms. Burgess said most of the public comments offered at the community meeting concerned various parts of the three concepts. The public was not asked to select one option over another,

but they were asked to identify what they like and dislike about each option. Some suggested the process is moving too quickly, and concerns were raised about the 900 units of multifamily housing, though some thought including residential would be a great idea. People liked the open spaces, especially the idea of having different open spaces scattered around the overall site. Most liked improving connections to the park. Because how parking on the site will be accommodated did not come across well in the drawings, a number of questions were asked about parking. There were concerns voiced over doing anything to change the character of Crossroads.

Ms. Burgess reiterated that a number of community meetings will be scheduled over the next month to allow the public to view and comment on the various options. The Commission will have the issue on its plate during the months of October and November. A second open house will be scheduled later.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Lynde, Ms. Burgess said the various concepts are still wide open; nothing has been settled yet. Ultimately, the Crossroads Center Plan will have specific outcomes; the Commission will be involved in determining what the outcomes should be.

Commissioner Bach asked if consideration is being given to expanding the community center. Ms. Burgess allowed that the community center is currently being expanded, but there is no consideration being given to connecting the center directly with the commercial center, other than with green space. The transportation department and the parks department are both working with Department of Planning and Community Development to develop the concepts.

Mr. Cohn said there have been conversations about having an additional 5000 square feet of development in the study area having some kind of civic use. The initial assumption was that it could be an expansion of the library, but additional civic functions would be appropriate.

Commissioner Bach asked what building heights are under consideration. Mr. Cohn said the overall commercial area covers nearly 60 acres. The underlying zoning is Community Business (CB) which allows 45 feet outright; with amenity bonuses, up to 60 feet can be permitted. The discussions to date have been focused on somewhere between 55 and 60 feet to allow for four stories.

Commissioner Robertson asked who came up with the three options. She was informed by Ms. Burgess that the concepts were developed collaboratively by staff, GGLO and Mr. Sher. Commissioner Robertson observed that each option, while laid out differently, has essentially the same things. She asked if consideration has been given to a concept that would have different uses, such as no residential units and different kinds of retail uses. Ms. Burgess said the concepts were developed to show examples of how the same level of development can be arranged. Nothing is set in stone yet, however, including the number of housing units, if any.

Commissioner Mathews asked what the team members have said what other uses might be substituted for the residential uses. Ms. Burgess said there is no urgent cry for additional retail square footage in the Crossroads area. The area is not a good candidate for big offices, though small professional office uses could be a good fit. Members of the community during the open house suggested uses such as art museums, an aquarium, and an amusement park.

Commissioner Robertson asked how the proposed multifamily housing units fit in with the newly adopted Comprehensive Plan vision for meeting the city's housing goals. Mr. Cohn said there is capacity in the downtown to handle an additional 12,000 to 13,000 new housing units, which exceeds the housing goal of 10,000 new units over the next 20 years. The units that will

be constructed in the Downtown, however, will appeal to individuals who will want to live in the Downtown area. Ms. Burgess added that beyond that timeframe the city will have more of a difficult time finding areas in which to accommodate additional housing. Allowing housing units in Crossroads would be one option to consider.

Commissioner Lynde asked what undeveloped and redevelopment capacity exists in the areas surrounding the Crossroads commercial center. Ms. Burgess said staff will bring back to the Commission information about the redevelopment potential. She said there is very little vacant land in the area.

Chair Bonincontri agreed that the three concepts offer the same mix of uses in different arrangements. She suggested that additional public comments should be gathered concerning the mix. A town center should be an employment center, a recreation center, and a retail center; the latter two are shown in the concepts, but nothing is said about employment opportunities other than those jobs associated with retail. She said she hopes that 20 years down the line residents will be less dependent on automobiles; if that happens, the proposed layout will work very well in line with the European models.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Robertson, Kris Liljeblad, Assistant Director, Transportation Planning, said the Crossroads area is very well served by transit. One of the highest ridership routes in the city is the one that goes out NE 8th to Downtown, and goes north on 156th Avenue NE. The transit stop on the corner of 156th Avenue NE in front of the Crossroads Shopping Center is very heavily used and serves as the transit front door for the development. There have been formal talks over the past several years with King County Metro about turning the route into a formal bus rapid transit corridor. It has not happened for lack of resources, but it is likely to happen within the next ten years.

Commissioner Robertson thought it would be helpful to have in hand maps showing the zoning of the areas surrounding the study area along with an indication of how the areas have actually developed.

Commissioner Bach said he needs more information about the parking scenario. He noted that having parking for multifamily housing in association with parking for commercial uses raises security and other issues. He said the live/work/shop concept has not been proven for the Bellevue area as yet; live/shop would make far more sense. He questioned whether retail on the first floor of structures along the northern section of the study area may not work well.

Chair Bonincontri suggested that it might be helpful to have the people attending the next community meeting draw lines on a map indicating where they live and the areas to which they walk, and record ideas for what should be included in the center and what should not be included.

B. Bel-Red Corridor Project

Strategic Planning Manager Kevin O'Neill said the Department of Planning and Community Development and the Department of Transportation are co-leads for the Bel-Red Corridor Project. That is because the future land use and the future transportation system for the study area are intricately linked. The project is focused on the long-term vision looking out to the year 2030. The object is to determine future land uses and their associated transportation needs.

Mr. O'Neill said transportation planning will be looked at not just from a general purpose standpoint but also from the standpoint of high-capacity transit, local transit, and a whole range of modes. Sound Transit has been working for some time to update its long-range plan. They

are looking at several corridors in which to expand high-capacity transit into east King County. One of those corridors extends from I-90 into the Downtown, and another extends from the Downtown to the Overlake Transit Center, which would go right through the Bel-Red corridor. The study will help to inform that process by evaluating the impacts and opportunities such a route would present.

The project will also identify community amenities that can contribute to and support the preferred vision for the area. To that end, staff from the Department of Parks and Community Services and the Utilities Department are part of the project team. The impacts of future development within the Bel-Red corridor will also be studied as they pertain to adjoining areas, both commercial and residential.

The corridor study area is bounded by I-405, SR-520, 148th Avenue NE, and a jagged line roughly tracking to the south of Bel-Red Road. In addition, there is an area extending to 156th Avenue NE to the north of NE 20th Street. The extended area was originally anticipated to be part of the Crossroads study, but the determination was made that the area actually identifies more with what is going on in Overlake and the Bel-Red corridor. The study area is framed by two of the most significant employment areas in the entire Puget Sound region: Downtown Bellevue, and Overlake where the Microsoft campus is headquartered. It is also framed by residential neighborhoods to the north, south and east.

Mr. O'Neill said there are four major employment centers in the city: the SR-520/Bel-Red area, Downtown, 116th Avenue SE/Belfield, and Factoria/Eastgate. Crossroads is not considered to be a major employment area, but it is considered to be a major community commercial area. There are several Comprehensive Plan policies that support reviewing commercial areas over time to make sure they are vital and productive. Taken together, the SR-520/Bel-Red corridor area has more employees than the Downtown does, though the employee densities are much lower given that there are no highrise buildings in the area.

The study area incorporates some 900 acres. About half of it is zoned Light Industrial (LI) and is the largest remaining LI area in the city. Of all the LI land in the city, two-thirds of it is in the Bel-Red corridor. The balance of the zoning in the area is a combination of office and retail in the form of General Commercial (GC) and Community Business (CB), and a very small amount of multifamily.

Commissioner Robertson asked how much of the land zoned for LI in the study area is actually developed with LI uses. Mr. O'Neill answered that in the entire study area manufacturing represents about eight percent of the overall employment and about five percent of the businesses. Warehouse/distribution represents about 12 percent. Over time there has been a transition from LI uses to other uses such as retail and office. The corridor study will include a market analysis and the production of an actual map of the land uses on the ground. There are a lot of healthy businesses in the area, especially retail. However, between 1995 and 2003 employment in the city as a whole grew by 18 percent, while employment in the study area declined overall by about six percent. Manufacturing and warehouse/distribution lost the most jobs, but services and retail jobs actually increased during that time.

Mr. Liljeblad allowed that the study area presents some complex and difficult transportation problems to address. The infrastructure that is in place currently is immature in many ways despite the fact that it is centrally located between the Downtown and Overlake and is home to several regional facilities. Access into and out of the area is somewhat problematic. Northrup and Bel-Red Road, 124th Avenue NE, 148th Avenue NE and 156th Avenue NE serve as the major arterial routes, and each will be key in looking at the impacts of the secondary study area. In addition to an incomplete infrastructure, transit services in the study area are almost non-

existent. The pedestrian and bicycle facilities in the area are also seriously lacking.

Continuing, Mr. Liljeblad said the largest share of planned transportation projects for the study area are either regional system projects or are part of the Bel-Red/Overlake Transportation Study (BROTS) program. The BROTS agreement was adopted in 1999 with a 2012 horizon year. It is more than likely that the project will trigger a reopening of the agreement with Redmond to extend the planning horizon, identify additional projects, and reevaluate some of the projects that have not yet been constructed. On the regional front, Sound Transit is engaged in planning its next phase of high-capacity transit projects. The link across Lake Washington is substantially funded. The SR-520 and I-405 improvements are very important, and much of the work has already happened. The project for NE 10th Street is substantially funded, though the question remains whether the recently passed federal funding will remain in place and whether or not the voters will elect to overturn the gas tax increase.

Mr. O'Neill said the Council supports studying the Bel-Red corridor area for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the de facto land use transitions that have occurred in an unplanned piecemeal way. The area has not been thriving from an economic standpoint to the same degree as other parts of the city. There is an interest in considering how the land uses in the area should contribute to the city's overall growth management, economic development and transportation strategies. The Council also understands that the timing of the study is such that it can be used to influence decisions being made by Sound Transit regarding its Phase II package.

A market and economic consultant firm has been contracted to analyze the study area. A land use and urban design consultant has also been brought onboard and they will be working with the steering committee and the community to develop future land use alternatives. A consulting firm will also be hired to focus on the transportation system and the environmental review.

Mr. O'Neill said there are several challenges the study will have to face. They include identifying the right niche for the area, developing consensus for a land use vision, and identifying necessary transportation systems to support the land uses.

There will be two prongs to the public involvement process. The Council has approved the creation of a steering committee to guide the study. The committee will consist of former City Council members, representation from the Planning Commission, the Transportation Commission and the Parks Board, and representatives from the surrounding communities. The Council is tentatively scheduled to appoint the steering committee members on October 3. There will also be ample opportunities for all stakeholders in the broader community to engage in the process. Four large public meetings are currently in the work program; more can be added as necessary. Staff will also meet with neighborhood associations and business groups in the area.

Mr. O'Neill said consideration is being given to putting together an advisory group to focus on the issues involved in getting high-capacity transit from I-90 to the Downtown, then through the Downtown to I-405. That group will need to coordinate with the Bel-Red corridor steering committee and Sound Transit.

The first big public meeting will occur in late October or early November. A second large public meeting will be scheduled for the first quarter of 2006 after some conceptual land use alternatives have been identified. Two additional large public meetings will be held, one as the preferred alternative is starting to emerge, and one after the preferred alternative is more defined. The steering committee will likely meet on a monthly basis all through the process, which realistically will probably be in 2007. If there is a transit vote in 2006, however, the study should be far enough along to have a preliminary preferred alternative generally defined so that Sound Transit and the community can understand the issues.

The City Council established a list of broad principles to help define the study. Mr. O'Neill noted that the ten principles were included in the Commission packets beginning on page 17.

Mr. O'Neill said the website is mostly developed and should be active in a couple of days. The economic market analysis is underway and should be completed in October or early November. Development of the preliminary land use alternatives will begin later in the fall. The Transportation Commission has been informed about the study, and staff will be going to the Parks Board soon. Each body will be kept informed as the project proceeds. When the project is finished, the steering committee will be forwarding its recommendations on to the City Council and to the commissions which will then be invited to formally weigh in. Depending on what the final report recommends, there may be amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and subarea plan which the Planning Commission will have on its plate in 2007.

8. NEW BUSINESS – None

9. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Burgess reviewed the Commission schedule.

With regard to receiving notes from the audience during regular Commission meetings, Ms. Burgess said the accepted protocol is for the Chair to acknowledge the receipt of any such note. The public should be encouraged to offer their comments during Public Comment.

Ms. Burgess reminded the Commissioners that anyone wishing to attend the October 31 APA short course and the following luncheon should let her know.

10. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Bonincontri adjourned the meeting at 9:04 p.m.

Staff to the Planning Commission

Date

Chair of the Planning Commission

Date