CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

September 28, 2005 | Bellevue City Hall
7:00 p.m. | City Council Conference Room

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Kathleen Burgess, Matt Terry, Cheryl Kuhn, Department of Planning and Community Development; Patrick Foran, Department of Parks and Community Services; Brad Miyake, Department of Utilities; Dave Berg, Transportation Department

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 p.m. by Vice-Chair Mathews who presided until Chair Bonincontri arrived.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Chair Bonincontri who arrived at 7:10 p.m.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus.

4. STAFF REPORTS

Comprehensive Planning Manager Kathleen Burgess provided the Commissioners with copies of the book *Bellevue Timeline*.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

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

7. STUDY SESSION

A. Environmental Philosophy

Department of Planning and Community Development Director Matt Terry explained that the environmental philosophy statement was created to help the four departments and the City

Council gain clarity with regard to the underlying values and philosophies that drive the various programs the city has that affect the environment in one way or another. The statement is intended to serve as the glue that ties together the various actions of the different departments and is based on the philosophy that the city should be a single entity with its diverse parts all pulling in the same direction.

Mr. Terry shared with the Commissioners a series of "travel" posters that were developed as another way of touting Bellevue's natural environment.

The city has a broad array of environmental programs, a number of which have activities that cross departmental boundaries. There are programs that deal with the continuum between recycling and garbage collection. The stream teams are centered on stream quality using a variety of programs focused on water quality and protecting and enhancing fish habitat. The city has on its books regulations that protect streams and wetlands, and programs for planting street trees and protecting vegetative borders on the major arterials. The parks development programs include activities that manage native growth protection areas and create trails through those areas for residents to use. There are also programs implemented by the utilities department that deal with environmental issues. The environmental philosophy statement ties it all together.

The Council, and to some extent the city's boards and commissions, will be dealing with a variety of environmental initiatives in the future. One of them is the critical areas work on which the Planning Commission has completed its work and is now on the Council's agenda. There is also the regional effort to develop a common approach to salmon recovery, and the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit requirements the city will be addressing soon. The philosophy statement is intended to help the city evaluate where it should go with respect to the emerging initiatives.

Mr. Terry said City Manager Steve Sarkozy talks about Bellevue as a one-city organization. By that he means the city should present a common face with each department working together to achieve common objectives. The philosophy was first articulated in the development services arena, but it also makes sense in the environmental arena.

The Comprehensive Plan talks about the environment in a variety of ways. It calls for the city to be the chief steward of Bellevue's environment; that is a lofty charge, one that is taken seriously by the departments. The plan is focused on the future and stresses the need for environmental strategies to fit local values and circumstances. The plan also states that protecting the environment is one objective among many, some of which appear to be competing with each other; the different objectives must be balanced when developing an integrated approach.

It is quality of the local environment that leads many to choose to live in Bellevue and to site their businesses in the city. That position is buttressed by the survey work done by the city every year; residents who live in Bellevue stress the importance of the natural environment as a chief reason behind their decision to make Bellevue their home. To a large extent, Bellevue has chartered its own path with respect to environmental initiatives. Bellevue is one of the few communities in the region that has consciously decided to pursue an open stream policy, and the parks system has been developed around natural environmental amenities. The notion of Bellevue as a city in a park is a philosophy that has been with the city for two or three decades and has served as the underlying motivation for building the parks system in its current configuration. The city's regulations recognize the importance of protecting critical areas, but does so in a way that recognizes competing objectives.

Utilities Department Director Brad Miyake said his department has a number of programs in the

area of storm water. The stream team is manned by volunteers who work to enhance streams and improve fish habitat; they also are engaged in watching and counting salmon entering Bellevue stream systems. The oil recycling program is operated in partnership with service stations and auto supply stores and promotes oil recycling. The goal of the storm drain stenciling program is to prevent illegal dumping of hazardous materials into streams. The water conservation program coordinates with the Cascade Water Alliance; the program includes a rebate program for citizens who purchase water-efficient washing machines, and educates people with regard to the need to conserve water in a variety of ways and to reduce their use of harmful pesticides.

Mr. Miyake said his department operates the solid waste recycling program. The department also manages Bellevue's fleet of vehicles, and in an effort to reduce the city's reliance on fossil fuels a number of hybrid vehicles have been purchased and added to the fleet. A number of educational programs are offered to the Bellevue School District that are focused on resource conservation. The department constructs capital projects, including fish passage projects.

Bellevue has set the bar high by being one of the first storm water utilities in the United States to address flooding and fish habitat. Many jurisdictions across the nation have elected to follow Bellevue's lead. Both water and fish naturally cross regional boundaries, and Bellevue recognizes the need to have strong partnerships aimed at developing a common future.

Dave Berg, Assistant Director, Capital Projects in the Transportation Department, agreed that the Transportation Department is best known for building roads, widening streets and adding more pavement. However, the department does a lot to benefit the environment by focusing on the way projects are designed and built, by planning for the transportation future of the city, and in the way the transportation system is operated.

Mr. Berg allowed that when roads are constructed or widened, streams and wetland systems are affected. By following the established rules and guidelines, transportation projects done in Bellevue result in an enhanced wetland environment by bringing them to a much higher level. In addition, interpretive areas are often included in addition to the required mitigation. Water quality enhancement is a major focus for every transportation project. Where the runoff from many existing roadways drains directly into streams and wetlands, when new projects come online they include improved collection and treatment of runoff pollutants. Stormwater retention facilities often represent a very large portion of the costs of transportation projects; such facilities reduce erosion, which is a prime factor in the elimination of salmon habitat. Noise mitigation is also included with many transportation projects.

During the design phase for transportation projects, careful consideration is given to aesthetics by addressing landscaping and decorative or artful touches. Low-impact development principles are used wherever possible. Modeling is done on all projects and plans to make sure all applicable federal and state air quality and noise standards are met.

Mr. Berg said the Transportation Department has as one of its primary focuses planning for a multimodal system. Citizens need choices besides just the single-occupant vehicle; they need transit options as well as non-motorized options. The department works diligently to maintain the link between transportation needs and land uses.

Mr. Berg commented that traffic operations plays a key role in preserving the environment. Staff works very hard to make sure traffic on the main corridors is kept moving. Cars stopped at signals spew out a lot of emissions; if they can be kept moving, air quality is improved. A lot of high-tech tools have been implemented over the past few years, including cameras in the field that allows engineers to observe the traffic flow and to make adjustments to signal timing as

needed in real time. Transit signal priority is a tool that allows buses the maximum amount of green time at signalized intersections.

Department of Parks and Community Services Director Patrick Foran commented that in 1953 there were some 5,000 people living in Bellevue; the city at that time had 1.5 acres of publicly managed space. The population of the city has grown to approximately 120,000 residents, and there is now 2,500 acres of publicly managed space. The growth curve has been incredible for such a short period of time. The foundation of the city's park system is a structure of connected greenways; the approach provides real opportunities to build ecosystems within the urban environment resulting in a city in a park. In moving from a rural to an urban environment, Bellevue has used a necessary regulatory response to create greater opportunities and added layers of benefit.

Mr. Foran said there are four basic programmatic areas in which the parks department is involved: land acquisition, land management, development and maintenance of greenways and trails, and environmental education. Underlying each program area is a strategy of leveraging the regulatory response in ways that result in additional benefits for the community. The acquisition programs are focused on waterfront access, expanding the greenway systems, and sensitive areas that can be translated into additional public benefits. The parks department is the city's largest manager of public space, and the land management practices that are in place are based on an approach of implementing environmental best practices. The integrated pest management system always opts for the approach with the lowest impact on the environment. The golf course has been certified by the Audubon Society as managed for wildlife. The department is charged with translating the city's sensitive area ordinances into best management practices. By 2006 the blueberry farm will be certified as organic and the produce will be available through Whole Foods.

There are 60 miles of trails in Bellevue's park system. The trails open the greenways and parks to appropriate use by the public.

Mr. Foran said the parks department operates in partnership with city departments and other entities. The waterwise program is operated with the utilities department. The Mercer Slough is operated in partnership with the Pacific Science Center. The Lake Hills Greenbelt ranger station operates in partnership with the King County Master Gardeners Program. Natural Resources Week is carried out in partnership with the Bellevue School District. Stewardship Saturdays utilizes volunteer groups in conducting environmental stewardship activities. Well Kept, a youth employment program, gives youth opportunities to be engaged in environmental stewardship activities and construction within the greenbelt system.

Mr. Terry said there were many nods on the part of the Councilmembers when the environmental philosophy statement was presented to them. One Councilmember asked what relevance the document has to the Council, and staff suggested that it can be used as a touchstone in evaluating proposals that come before the Council.

Commissioner Lynde suggested that the statement will prove useful in evaluating the environmental benefits of project alternatives.

Commissioner Mathews said he would like to see the environmental philosophy packaged for distribution to the general public. He said too often the citizens see only bits and pieces but not the whole picture. When a project is proposed for a particular neighborhood, steps should be taken to educate the public how the different departments have contributed to upholding the environmental policies in bringing about the project.

Commissioner Orrico agreed. She noted that while the Commission was developing the critical areas ordinance it was important to understand how much the city already does in the environmental arena. The city should do more to toot its own horn; it needs to let the populace know about all the great things being done to preserve and enhance the environment.

Commissioner Sheffels concurred that the information needs to be made available to the community. She suggested the presentation should be put into a format that could be shown on BTV, in waiting areas in City Hall, and in the schools.

Chair Bonincontri said when the information is presented to the public it should include an indication of the various watersheds in the city. That could help people see the bigger picture. She said the philosophies are wonderful and asked if they will be incorporated into some document or serve as a stand-alone checklist. Mr. Terry said the Council has a series of interest statements it uses to guide departmental activities, particularly in the regional environmental. They also use them to articulate a common city philosophy. The environmental philosophy statement is somewhat different in that it is more global in nature. The thinking is that the family of interest statements could over time be used to guide the organization as it considers different subject areas.

Chair Bonincontri asked if the environmental philosophies come into play as the city works with other jurisdictions. Mr. Miyake said the city has an adopted interest statement that pertains to the conservation of water that meshes very well with the principles of the environmental philosophy statement.

Mr. Terry allowed that when the notion of developing the statement was put on the table, it was thought that there would be a fair amount of debate among the departments regarding what the content of the document should be. As the document came together, however, there was a remarkable level of consensus, especially in terms of underlying values and the importance of environmentally appropriate actions.

Commissioner Bach said he has heard many very positive comments from citizens about what the city has done, especially in the area of acquiring new park lands and preserving and enhancing the natural environment. He agreed with Commissioner Orrico that the city should do more to let the citizens know about everything that is being done.

B. Neighborhood Investment Strategy

Neighborhood Outreach Manager Cheryl Kuhn explained that the mission of neighborhood outreach is to help people understand their local government and to encourage them to become involved. The program also helps city leaders stay in touch with the various neighborhoods, and provides residents with the tools they need to improve their own neighborhoods. A portion of the capital budget is set aside each year for use by neighborhood improvement projects through a number of programs. A couple of educational programs are offered as well as neighborhood workshops on specific topics, such as how to engage with boards and commission and the City Council. A number of publications are available for distribution, and the information goes out in *Neighborhood News*, *It's Your City*, and *Bellevue By the Numbers*.

Neighborhood outreach will be given a visible face in the new City Hall. The office will be on the main floor and will host the neighborhood resource center, a place where citizens can come to get information about Bellevue neighborhoods and city services and projects. The entire neighborhood outreach staff will be available to meet with people and help them solve their

problems. There will be space available to accommodate small group meetings as well. The aim is to make the space very inviting to the public.

Ms. Kuhn noted that in 2001 as Bellevue was approaching its 50th anniversary, neighborhood outreach changed its approach. Issues that were facing some of Bellevue's older neighborhoods were being brought forward, and it was seen that new ways of thinking would need to be applied to resolving some of the problems. In that light, the Neighborhood Investment Strategy was developed. The program marries intensive grassroots efforts to identify neighborhood issues with a focus on the part of city departments on addressing those issues. The program was designed to focus on a single neighborhood at a time and to include neighborhood character. Methods that had not previously been tried to get people involved were brought into play

The first foray was in the West Lake Hills area. A 22-member CAC was appointed and met in the West Lake Hills area. The seven-month planning effort eventually involved some 500 residents in coming up with a series of recommendations that were forwarded to the City Council. The recommendations were focused on maintaining and improving the quality of the neighborhood. The CAC developed a number of priorities around which they based their recommendations. They highlighted the need for retail vitality, safe and attractive streets, improved arterials, maintaining neighborhood character within the areas of growth, and improving area parks. The key areas of concern to the CAC were addressing issues of neighborhood quality and appearance and building a sense of community.

Based on the recommendations of the CAC, the City Council approved an implementation plan. Nearly 30 projects funded by the operating budget have already been completed. A total of 18 capital projects were funded by the Council with a special allocation of $6.5 million; most of those projects have been completed as well. There remain some significant projects that have not been completed, largely because of environmental issues, complicated community involvement processes and design challenges; most will be constructed within the next year or so.

Ms. Kuhn said the Neighborhood Investment Strategy program proved to be a very successful first step. Many good things happened because of the intense focus given to an area in need of an extra boost. The program did not, however, fully address the issues of neighborhood quality. In developing NIS-2, it was concluded that the focus should be narrowed to address the persistent problems seen in older neighborhoods. A number of data were reviewed, such as the relationship of crime rates to the age of neighborhoods, and the level of investments being made in remodel. The data clearly showed that some Bellevue neighborhoods, particularly those in east Bellevue, are not seeing a lot of private investment in property upkeep; those same neighborhoods are generating a significant portion of the city's code enforcement complaints.

The data was shared with some neighborhood groups. Most who participated in the groups said they love their neighborhoods but are feeling very vulnerable, by which they meant that many private properties and neighborhood shopping centers appear to be in decline. Many of the properties that are in decline appear to be rentals. As neighborhoods decline, the perception grows that east Bellevue is becoming less desirable, an image that is bolstered by the fact that Lake Hills elementary has lower test scores than other schools on the Eastside. Needed improvements in pedestrian infrastructure were also highlighted by the neighborhood groups.

Ms. Kuhn said Councilmembers get a lot of mail about property maintenance issues, particularly from the east Bellevue area. However, by focusing primarily on property maintenance and neighborhood appearance the city could run the risk of making matters worse by branding areas as unattractive or undesirable. All Bellevue neighborhoods, including those in east Bellevue,

have a wealth of assets: they are green, they have parks, open space, trails, recreational opportunities, an inventory of affordable housing, and great location.

A wide range of tools for addressing the issue have been considered. In an attempt to have the city act as a catalyst for change, staff has put together a toolkit of creative common sense ideas. The first tool is a windshield survey that will rate neighborhoods and the housing stock against a set of objective criteria. Another tool would focus improvement efforts on rental housing and the landlords. The toolkit also includes some programs that are already available, such as the Home and Neighborhood Maintenance Resource Guide, the Home Repair Program, Remodel Tip Sheets, and the Weatherization Pilot Program. To those programs will be added a program aimed at providing free home evaluations and inspections; homeowner education classes to teach residents home repair and upgrade techniques; a neighborhood marketing effort to follow up on the West Lake Hills neighborhood identity project; and a landlord responsibility project, a major outreach effort aimed at garnering landlord cooperation with city codes and community-based maintenance standards.

Commissioner Orrico asked if the plan is to conduct the homeowner classes and workshops in the neighborhoods. Ms. Kuhn said for the most part the workshops will be held in the neighborhoods. She added that Master Builders has offered to partner in the training, as have some of the larger hardware chains.

Commissioner Robertson observed that Lake Hills' new elementary school building should go a long way toward improving the image of that school. She pointed out that low test scores do tend to negatively impact home values in a neighborhood. Ms. Kuhn said the new school facility at Phantom Lake has had a very positive impact on the level of involvement in the school. Lake Hills elementary has for the past few years had low test scores and the highest incidence of families within its catchment area that send their children to other schools. The school also has a very high percentage of children in the free and reduced fee lunch programs. The issue of educational quality is under the purview of the school district and not the city. The school district is, however, open to efforts on the part of the city to improve the reputation of neighborhoods in which schools are located.

Commissioner Sheffels asked if there are any established programs in which renters can work with landlords to do some of the maintenance in exchange for a break on their rent. Ms. Kuhn said she is aware of the practice occurring on a case-by-case basis but not as an organized program. Commissioner Sheffels suggested developing a recognition program that touts the efforts of a particular property owner or an entire neighborhood that takes steps to bring about improvements. Ms. Kuhn said there has been little discussion about recognition as an incentive.

Commissioner Mathews heralded the idea of creating a volunteer program along the lines of Habitat for Humanity. Instead of building new houses, however, the volunteers would work to improve individual properties and beautify neighborhoods. Local businesses could be encouraged to get involved as well. Ms. Kuhn said a similar program was included in NIS-1 as a pilot project. It proved to be very staff intensive. She allowed, however, that the team approach is one that should be embraced.

Commissioner Mathews said NIS-1 has resulted in very positive impacts for the West Lake Hills neighborhood. There have been transportation improvements, pedestrian facilities improvements, a new neighborhood association has been formed, and the Lake Hills Shopping Center is closer to being redeveloped with mixed uses. There are two new elementary school facilities, which have and will continue to raise the area's reputation. The efforts of the city and the citizens who chose to get involved have made a big difference.

Commissioner Bach suggested contacting the Cascade District of the Boy Scouts of America as a possible source of volunteers. Those who are working to achieve Eagle Scout status must take on and organize projects.

Commissioner Lynde concurred and pointed out that every student in the high school must contribute 40 hours of community service. They offer a source of labor that should also be tapped. Some service clubs should be contacted to see if they would be interested in sponsoring the staff person it would take to organize a massive volunteer program.

Chair Bonincontri commented that it takes a lot to bring a neighborhood back to its former glory. In most cases, the real root of the problem is that residents and property owners are so busy making a living that they do not have the time necessary to deal with repairs and upkeep. Doing it all for them may not be the best approach because that would effect only a temporary fix at best.

Commissioner Robertson commented that as property values in the city continue to rise, there will eventually be a turnover of problem properties.

Commissioner Mathews allowed that while that may be the case, too much turnover could have a negative impact on neighborhood character, especially if along with the turnover comes massive redevelopment. Many in the Lake Hills neighborhood are concerned about that very thing. The residents like the small ramblers and want to see them retained.

8. NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Sheffels said she recently attended the APA leadership meeting in Buffalo, New York. One of the major topics of discussion was Hurricane Katrina and how it has affected planning and planners all around the region. Many small cities have lost everything, all their computer files, their maps, and all of their planning tools. The APA has a number of policy and philosophical statements posted on its website. Many cities are electing to send planners to the region to do pro bono work. Some jurisdictions are choosing to adopt communities in the devastated area much like sister cities. In many cases the storm has left in its wake opportunities to start again, and to do it right without making the same mistakes. The APA has set up a program to accept hardware needed by planners.

The APA feels strongly that all planning needs to be done at the local level. The organization stands ready to provide assistance and to give suggestions for best planning practices.

Ms. Burgess said the City Council has approved some new personnel policies that allow Bellevue employees to volunteer to help with the disaster recovery. To date, both police and fire personnel have traveled to the area to help. The IT department has been contacted to see if there is any equipment the city can donate.

9. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Burgess reported that the critical areas presentation to the City Council has been moved to October 10. She checked with the Commissioners to see who will be able to attend. It was agreed that Commissioner Lynde will take the lead in the presentation.

Ms. Burgess also asked the Commissioners interested in attending the APA short course and luncheon on October 31 to let her know.

10. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Bonincontri adjourned the meeting at 9:08 p.m.

_____ _____
Staff to the Planning Commission Date

_____ _____
Chair of the Planning Commission Date