

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
JOINT MEETING MINUTES

April 19, 2006
7:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

PLANNING

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

PLANNING

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Sheffels

TRANSPORTATION

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Bell, Vice-Chair Young, Commissioners Glass, Northey, Wendle, Yuen

TRANSPORTATION

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Holler

STAFF PRESENT:

Kathleen Burgess, Paul Inghram, Kevin O'Neill,
Department of Planning and Community Development;
Franz Loewenherz, Mike Ingram, Kevin McDonald, Eric
Miller, Goran Sparrman, Transportation Department

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Planning Commission Chair Bonincontri who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Planning Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Bach, who arrived at 7:06 p.m., and Commissioner Sheffels, who was excused. All Transportation Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Holler who was excused.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus.

4. STAFF REPORTS – None

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. David Plummer, 14414 NE 14th Place, said he has attended all of the public meetings for the Bel-Red corridor study and has read all of the project reports. He said he remains baffled as to why the city is undertaking the study at the budgeted amount of about \$1 million; the money is

being totally wasted. City staff has continuously advanced the notion that the study is needed because of a decline in employment, but no definitive or exhaustive study of any statistical significance has been conducted on employment in the Bel-Red area. Furthermore, staff's most recent employment estimates show the levels are roughly the same as they were in 1995, and the projections for employment in the area are significant. Staff has also suggested the study is needed because the land use planning is out of date. There is, however, a reasonable amount of investment being made by property owners, and properties in the area are not being allowed to fall down. The Coca Cola Company has stated publicly its intention to remain in the area. The city has also introduced the notion of a relationship between Sound Transit's plan for a high-capacity transit line through the corridor, but the technologies under consideration are not economic or cost effective. Hopefully the voters will turn down the nonsensical notion when they get the chance in a couple of years. The Bel-Red corridor study should be terminated.

6. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCILS, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Mayor Degginger reported that he and Deputy Mayor Chelminiak recently traveled to Washington, D.C. to speak with the congressional delegation about the city's legislative agenda and the city's appropriations requests. He said they met with Senators Murray and Cantwell as well as Congressman Reichert. The city has made appropriations requests for four major items, the first of which is the first phase of the West Lake Sammamish Parkway project. A request has also been made for funding equipment for the new 9-1-1 call center in City Hall, something Congressman Reichert took a keen interest in. The other two funding requests are related to the arts and the Mercer Slough Environmental Center project respectively.

Continuing, Mayor Degginger said they spent some time at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) talking about the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The city uses the CDBG funds it receives in part for housing programs, including home repair programs for the elderly and the ARCH partnership. There is a proposal to cut the CDBG program by 25 percent, which would reduce the city's funding to pre-1993 levels. There are those in HUD and the current administration who do not believe that cities with demographics like those of Bellevue in terms of income deserve funding for such projects, and it had to be explained to them that the needs are in fact significant.

7. STUDY SESSION

A. Bel-Red Corridor Project

Senior Transportation Planner Kevin McDonald shared with the Commissions a map outlining the study area. He explained that the study is intended to serve as a long-range visionary update of the land use and transportation planning for the Bel-Red corridor. The area has not been looked at in a comprehensive way for decades, and the Light Industrial (LI) and commercial districts in the area are not receiving the levels of reinvestment that are being seen in other areas of the city. Sound Transit Phase II is considering extending a high-capacity transit system from downtown Seattle across I-90 through downtown Bellevue and out to downtown Redmond, and the line will logically pass through the Bel-Red corridor, though no specific alignments or station locations have been described yet. The corridor project is intended in part to influence the decisions yet to be made by Sound Transit.

Mr. McDonald said all comprehensive land use and transportation studies involve extensive public involvement processes. When the project was approved by the City Council, a 16-member steering committee was appointed to help guide staff and the consultants in the

development of a final recommendation. Commissioner Mathews from the Planning Commission and Commissioner Glass from the Transportation Commission represent their respective commissions on the committee, and Planning Commissioner Sheffels is on the committee representing the Wilburton neighborhood. The committee meets on the first Thursday of every month.

There is a broader public involvement context as well. To date, two community meetings have been held, one in November 2005 near the beginning of the process, and one on April 18. In addition, property and business owners in the Bel-Red area will be engaged to share the visions they have for their properties in the context of an evolving corridor; that relationship needs to be understood before moving on to developing and introducing alternatives for the area. There will also be meetings with nearby neighborhood associations. A project website has been set up and is being kept up to date. When there are milestones to be discussed, the city's boards and commissions will be provided with updates.

Strategic Planning Manager Kevin O'Neill said the steering committee has been meeting monthly and to date has received a great deal of technical information regarding the market economic analysis, transportation conditions, high-capacity transit, the natural environment and environmental sustainability. The committee has also been working to develop the set of objectives that were adopted at its most recent meeting; the objectives will be used to help frame the land use and transportation alternatives.

Mr. O'Neill said the project is moving into the phase in which the future alternative visions for the area will be identified and deliberated. Once those alternatives are chosen to move forward for review, they will be evaluated in an Environmental Impact Statement. A preliminary preferred alternative could begin to emerge later in the year. The next Steering Committee meeting on May 4 will be devoted to engaging the business and property owner stakeholders; there will also be panel discussions with the stakeholders both before and after the alternatives get released. There will be a broad community meeting scheduled after the alternatives are identified.

Mr. McDonald said the objectives adopted by the Steering Committee are based on the input received from the community, and from information received from the consultants and staff. The objectives fall into the categories of market feasibility, land use, neighborhood impacts, environmental impacts, parks and transportation. The objectives include details from the market forecast provided by the consultants related to office, housing and retail, which showed that through 2030 there is expected to be a high demand for office and housing; there is a fair amount of retail in the study area already, and the market study does not forecast a demand for much more of it.

The Steering Committee has heard a lot about the existing services in the study area, especially from business and property owners, and from people who use those businesses.

The objectives highlight the importance of the jobs/housing balance. Currently on the Eastside, there is a general imbalance with more jobs than housing, which results in adverse transportation impacts as people try to get to and from their homes and work sites.

The scale of development within the study area is important to the Steering Committee. There is agreement that area should not attempt to compete with the Downtown in terms of height and density; there is agreement the scale should be more intensive than at present while retaining compatibility with the less intensive surrounding neighborhoods. High-capacity transit is programmed to go through the area, though the alignment and possible station locations remain a

matter of discussion. Potential locations have been identified: at Overlake Hospital, near 124th Avenue NE, around 130th Avenue NE or 132nd Avenue NE, or near 148th Avenue NE or 152nd Avenue NE.

There are a number of streams and wetlands within the study area. Mr. McDonald said a consultant was engaged to study the quality of the streams and to rate them. He shared with the Commissioners a map with the streams color-coded with respect to significant components of their ecology.

There is one park and community center within the area. As neighborhoods emerge in Bel-Red, they will need to be supported by amenities such as parks and trails. There are major parks to the north, south, east and west of the Bel-Red area, and as the area develops, park facilities will be needed to provide key linkages.

The committee has recognized the importance of integrating multiple modes of transportation within the corridor, to adjacent neighborhoods, and to the regional transportation system.

At the April 18 open house, those who attended were asked to offer feedback on the planning process to date and some of the topics that have emerged as important. They were also asked to share their visions for land use, transportation, parks and open space, and the environment. Much of the resulting discussion was focused on the environment. The comments made will be compiled and made available to the Steering Committee.

Commissioner Wendle asked if the committee has discussed the possibility of allowing for a sports arena in the study area. Mr. McDonald said the issue has been brought to the table both by members of the committee and the public. At its April 6 meeting, the committee declined the opportunity to include it as one of the objectives because it did not appear to them to be a viable alternative.

Commissioner Mathews said the committee members held that the expectation that the city would have to provide infrastructure for a stadium, and possibly the actual stadium, was more than they were willing to endorse. He allowed, however, that the topic has not been given full discussion. Mr. O'Neill said the committee chose not to specifically include a stadium in the development of alternatives, but it could certainly come back to the table in the future.

Chair Bell asked if a balance of comments has been received from business and residential interests throughout the process. Mr. O'Neill noted that at the November 9 scoping meeting there was a very good balance between neighboring residents and business and property owners. The sense earlier in the process was that representation from the business and property owner community was not as strong as it could be, and that was one of the reasons for the March 16 open house. The committee wants to make sure the process is balanced.

Commissioner Young asked to what extent the Bel-Red corridor project feeds into the Sound Transit Phase II vote. Mr. McDonald said it will be appropriate for Sound Transit to consider the alternatives the Steering Committee will develop as they lay out their package for the voters in November 2007. The alternatives will include recommended alignments and station locations. Mr. O'Neill added that the process provides the city an opportunity to express a preference relative to a future high-capacity transit line.

Commissioner Robertson commented that the Bel-Red area is one of the few areas of the city where there is any industrial-zoned land left. She asked if the consultant took into account the industrial market forecast and the intentions of the current industrial property owners. Mr.

O'Neill said the Steering Committee spent a lot of time at its most recent meeting talking about that. The Leland Consulting Group report suggested that the most promising market sectors for future new development are office, retail and housing. There is no forecast for future industrial jobs anywhere in Bellevue or on the Eastside currently. There are, however, a lot of existing industrial uses in the study area, and the committee is cognizant of the fact that many of them will want to stay in the area; Coca Cola has already made such a statement on the record. No one has suggested that the study will result in a 900-acre redevelopment plan. The forecast highlights the most promising new uses, but that does not mean the city should avoid accommodating existing uses.

Commissioner Mathews said during the last couple of committee meetings there have been business and property owners present to offer comments. Several have stayed after to talk with the committee members. The business and property owners have been encouraged to let others know about the meetings and the need for additional input. He added that the tour of transit facilities in Portland, Oregon, showed how service businesses can continue to operate in place as new development occurs; that is what the committee would like to see happen as redevelopment of the area takes place.

Commissioner Northey commented that if housing is developed in the area, transportation impacts will result. There will likely also be additional pressures to add access to SR-520 and she asked if the city's ability to meet the concurrency standards has been taken into account. Mr. McDonald said the no action alternative will not require much more transportation infrastructure, but allowing for office or housing density would. Several of the needed improvements have been identified, though they have not been quantified to date. The committee understands that some basic connections would need to be made within the corridor, along with new connections from the corridor to the regional transportation system, all scaled to match the intensity of development. There are currently very few arterials passing east and west through the study area, and there are only a few heading north and south.

Mr. O'Neill pointed out that an intensification of employment without much housing could result in worse transportation impacts; absent a jobs/housing balance, workers have to come to the area from somewhere else to get there.

Mr. O'Neill reiterated that the study is a planning project, not a rezoning project. That means future land use, transportation, parks, open space and environment are all being looked at together. Zoning is one way any adopted vision will be ultimately implemented and phased in over time. The Steering Committee is focused on the broader vision of how all the pieces must work together.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Lynde, Mr. O'Neill said the only residential zoning in the study area is around Lake Bellevue. There is an old residential neighborhood on the west side of 116th Avenue NE that was rezoned Office several years ago. There are no more than 160 residents in the entire Bel-Red study area.

Commissioner Wendle asked how the regional growth center designation in Redmond is impacting the study. Mr. O'Neill said the argument made by Redmond is that the urban center designation is simply a recognition of what has been in their plan since 1999. One concern the Council has is whether or not an urban center designation for Overlake will accelerate the growth rate; no one has an answer to that question, but it is fair to say that more growth generally and housing in particular can be anticipated.

Commissioner Northey noted for the record that her company was hired as the consultant for

Redmond on the Overlake study. She agreed with Commissioner Robertson on the need to retain areas zoned LI in the city. To do away with them will mean local residents will have to drive farther to get the services they can currently get in the Bel-Red area. The city should not lose track of the need to take care of its existing neighborhoods in the rush to plan for a new neighborhood in Bel-Red, an area that does not necessarily need to be a new neighborhood. She agreed, however, with the need the city has to be served by high-capacity transit.

B. Comprehensive Plan Amendment
– Wilburton / NE 8th Study

Senior Planner Paul Inghram said the Wilburton / NE 8th Study project area is bounded by NE 8th Street on the north, SE 3rd Street and Main Street on the south, 120th Avenue NE on the east, and I-405 on the west. The study objectives are to encourage economic vitality, identify appropriate redevelopment options, strengthen the auto retail uses, improve the urban design and identity of the area, and improve circulation.

Mr. Inghram noted that the old City Hall site is being redeveloped for retail auto sales. There are a mixture of uses on the west side of 116th Avenue NE, including two hotels, an office property, retail auto sales, the post office, and a wetland. The uses in Area B to the east of 116th Avenue NE are primarily retail auto sales. Running north and south through the study area is the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad corridor which in time could become a pedestrian corridor in combination with light rail. Area C, which is to the east of the railroad right-of-way, is home to several large format retail uses, Mutual Materials, a school bus parking area, Larry's Market, and a retail auto sales use. Area A to the west is zoned Office/Limited Business with an auto overlay, and Areas B and C are zoned General Commercial.

Four alternatives have been set up for the purpose of analyzing the range of possibilities from a land use perspective. The study provides an opportunity to create some design guidelines for auto row that will achieve a more attractive environment. Because 116th Avenue NE has been designated as a boulevard street, the street can be upgraded to meet those standards. The new ramp off of I-405 near the south end of the study area creates something of a gateway into the area; the entrance from NE 8th Street could also be considered a gateway. The sites currently in use for retail auto sales, along with the Mutual Materials site, have relatively high development potential based on their improvements-to-land-value ratios. The owners of two of the auto row properties have already contacted the city about redevelopment opportunities.

One option for Area B would be to retain the single-story structures currently in use for retail auto sales along auto row; another option would be to redevelop with multi-story structures mixing retail and auto uses. In Area C the retail village concept could come into play, with additional retail development and residential uses on the upper floors.

Mr. Inghram said in addition to the land use opportunities, there are also transportation issues, including the NE 2nd Street overpass, improvements to 120th Avenue NE, and the extension of NE 4th Street from 116th Avenue NE to 120th Avenue NE. The intersection of Main Street and SE 1st Street would benefit from having NE 4th Street extended; NE 8th Street would benefit as well in terms of reduced congestion. There are also opportunities to make changes to NE 5th Street east of 120th to prevent or limit impacts on the neighborhood to the east; the options include traffic calming measures and lane or street closures.

Mr. Inghram shared with the two Commissions schematic drawings of what the area along auto row could look like if the dealerships were brought into a more dense configuration and with the showrooms closer to the street, a combination of surface and structured parking behind the

structures, and street improvements aimed at enhancing the pedestrian environment. He included drawings of lighting schemes, a planted median along 116th Avenue NE, and what the Larry's Market site could look like with new retail developments having housing above the ground floor. Photos of the site as it currently is configured were shown overlaid with lines showing what the view impact would be with new development at 60 feet, 70 feet and 80 feet.

Mr. Inghram said staff and the market consultant have had talks with representatives of the real estate and development communities about the market potential. The findings question the continued viability of some auto dealers given the continued rise in property values. Those who own their own properties are in a much better position to control their destiny, but those who lease their sites will see their profit margins reduced as lease rates increase.

Mr. Inghram noted that the packet materials included a memo from the Finance Director outlining the fiscal impact that could result from the east side of auto row converting to new retail space. Using historical auto sales data, auto dealers can be expected to generate \$1.4 million more sales tax revenue during the next five year period than would 450,000 square feet of retail. Revising the land use pattern to keep the auto sales uses while allowing for new retail uses would increase overall revenues for the city. Some have looked at the possibility optimistically, believing that the arrangement would be healthier; others hold that two-story retail will be very difficult to make work in this area.

The extension of NE 4th Street is being looked at from the land use point of view in that it could increase the development potential for the properties in Area C. The project is not included in the current Transportation Facilities Plan; it will need to be if it is to go forward for consideration.

Mr. Inghram said the Planning Commission may be asked on May 3 to provide some initial reactions to forward to the Council. The Council will then be briefed, and any additional direction will be folded into the process.

Commissioner Young suggested that if Area C is allowed to increase its density, there will be a great deal more pressure put on SE 1st Street, unless NE 4th Street is extended and unless the intersection with NE 8th Street is improved.

Commissioner Lynde suggested that in its current configuration, 120th Avenue NE would not be able to handle the additional traffic brought about by extending NE 4th Street. Mr. Inghram said there are improvements planned for the intersection of NE 8th Street and 120th Avenue NE.

Commissioner Lynde held that there are opportunities in other areas of the city to develop auto dealerships, especially in the Bel-Red area. Moving the auto uses out would free up the area along 116th Avenue NE for retail uses, which would be more visible from the freeway. Mr. Inghram said the market consultant working on the Wilburton / NE 8th Street study is the same one working on the Bel-Red corridor study. He has noted that there is some auto sales synergy occurring along NE 20th Street in the Bel-Red area; the area would certainly be appropriate for an auto row. However, auto dealerships are very limited, both by corporate policy and state restrictions, on where they can locate relative to existing auto dealerships.

Department of Transportation Director Goran Sparrman said there were some key transportation project ideas included in the Downtown Implementation Plan update that were pushed out for further analysis; they included the Bel-Red corridor study and the Wilburton / NE 8th Street study. Traffic conditions forecasted for NE 8th Street and 116th Avenue NE are not rosy, and anything that can be done to relieve either street will have value. If NE 4th Street is extended

from 116th Avenue NE to 120th Avenue NE, it will relieve congestion on both NE 8th Street and 116th Avenue NE, provided improvements are concurrently made to 120th Avenue NE. What has been modeled is a five-lane arterial configuration for 120th Avenue NE all the way from SR-520 to NE 4th Street.

Commissioner Robertson highlighted the importance of retail auto sales relative to the city's revenue stream. She suggested the consultant should look into how many residential units on the hill to the east of Area C could potentially lose their views with redevelopment of the study area, and how many of the residential properties are considered view properties and thus have a higher tax base.

Commissioner Wendle said there is a high potential for both the NE 2nd Street and NE 4th Street projects to be very costly. He asked if the city could handle both investments. Mr. Sparrman said the current estimate for NE 4th Street is in the \$8 million to \$10 million range, some of which would likely be paid for by developer contributions. There are still feasibility issues to be worked out in terms of how to deal with the railroad right-of-way, but the project is considered doable. According to the Washington State Department of Transportation, to bring online the NE 2nd Street project with the planned ramps will require finishing the entire mainline segment on I-405 between NE 12th Street and Main Street at a cost of about \$600 million. The project is not a candidate for the Regional Transportation Improvement District vote in 2007, so it is probably 10 to 15 years out. The extension of NE 4th Street could happen much sooner and for a much more reasonable cost.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Orrico, Mr. Sparrman said the Downtown Implementation Plan update envisioned a new half diamond interchange at NE 10th Street and another at NE 2nd Street. The project includes a new overcrossing at NE 2nd Street and a northbound off ramp and a southbound on ramp, and widening NE 2nd to a three- to five-lane configuration from I-405 west to Bellevue Way.

Commissioner Orrico said the memo from the Finance Department concerning the sales tax revenue coming from auto sales in the study area is eye opening. She suggested, however, that redevelopment with retail uses would generate more property tax revenues than the current developments yield. Mr. Inghram allowed that there are caveats to be kept in mind that cannot necessarily be analyzed, such as the future of the current auto dealerships in the coming years, and whether or not the dealerships will decide to move regardless of what is done from a land use perspective.

Commissioner Orrico stressed the need to be kept aware of how changes to the Wilburton area auto row may cause an exodus to an area where they are really not wanted, such as Eastgate. Mr. Inghram said each of the alternatives being developed for the study area includes retail auto sales uses and incentives for retaining them.

Commissioner Northey said the NE 4th Street extension makes sense so long as it is done in conjunction with improvements to 120th Avenue NE. She suggested that while improvements could be made to 116th Avenue NE to make it more friendly to pedestrians, if it continues as an auto row there will be limited demand for any pedestrian amenities. There is no compelling reason to spend a lot trying to beautify 116th Avenue NE.

Chair Bonincontri asked if any of the dealership owners have been asked to comment on the notion of combining retail sales with auto sales in a denser development format. Mr. Inghram said he has talked with some and the reactions to date have been mixed; some believe the mix would provide greater exposure for their businesses, while others are more hesitant.

C. Comprehensive Plan Amendment
– Crossroads Center Plan

Comprehensive Planning Manager Kathleen Burgess said the study involves the commercial properties in and around the Crossroads Shopping Center. The land is zoned Community Business (CB), which is the most intense commercial/mixed use zoning outside of the Downtown. The Crossroads subarea plan does not permit multifamily housing to be constructed in the CB zone; in all other areas of the city, the CB zone allows multifamily housing.

The mission of the Crossroads Center Plan is to position the commercial areas in Crossroads for continued vitality. The area is strong currently, but it is known that commercial areas must change over time in order to remain healthy. The Crossroads area is also unique in that adjacent to the commercial district there is a 37-acre park that could physically and visually be linked to the commercial areas. There are also opportunities to create more community gathering spaces in the commercial area, which serves as the center of the community.

Ms. Burgess said a large community open house was held in mid-September 2005 at which three future development opportunities were presented. After the meeting, several local residents expressed reservations about the alternatives, each of which showed 900 units of multifamily development. Staff concluded that the opposition was such that it would be pointless to continue with the alternatives. Accordingly, the process has been restarted and the original alternatives have been taken off the table.

In March, the Council reconfirmed the focus on the commercial area and the general process, which is similar to the one used for the West Lake Sammamish Parkway project. The Council asked to have liaisons appointed from the Planning Commission, the Transportation Commission, and the Parks Board. Accordingly, Chair Bonincontri from the Planning Commission has been appointed, as has Commissioner Yuen from the Transportation Commission. The appointed Parks Board liaison is Merle Keeney.

An open house was held in the community on April 4; some 70 people attended. After an opening presentation, there was time for some very good small group discussion at stations. A number of very helpful comments were offered from which it is clear how much the local residents like Crossroads and how much they value the community gathering places. There were specific comments about what does not work well currently; the list was headed by traffic congestion and parking. When asked about the future, the attendees highlighted the need for more gathering spaces, both indoors and outdoors; more activities, especially during the evening hours; more activities for families and children; more cultural activities; and more walking connections.

The next phase of the project will include a group of self-selected people coming together in a series of workshops to help create new alternatives for Crossroads. The first workshop is slated for May 2 at the Crossroads Community Center and will be focused on parks and open spaces. The second meeting, scheduled for May 16, will be focused on different land uses and activities, and the third workshop on May 30 will be centered on transportation and integrating the ideas from the first two workshops.

Ms. Burgess said people are being asked to commit to attending all of the workshops and working together in small groups to develop ideas for the alternatives. The schedule calls for the preliminary alternatives to be in hand by mid-July and to hold a community workshop to unveil them. The preferred alternative will not be finalized until later in the fall.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Mathews, Ms. Burgess said 25 people so far have said they will attend the workshops in addition to the three liaisons. It is thought that more people will be interested before the first workshop.

Commissioner Northey asked if the workshops have been published in *Neighborhood News*. Ms. Burgess said the open house was announced in that publication but was not positive the workshops were. The publication is sent out the last week of each month, which is perfect timing to announce the workshops.

Commissioner Yuen said during the West Lake Sammamish Parkway project flyers were sent to all residents in the area; they drew a lot of people to the meetings. Ms. Burgess said staff has a fairly extensive mailing list, and everyone on that list was sent a flyer. Flyers were not, however, sent to all addresses in the Crossroads area. Information is available at the Crossroads Mini-City Hall, and all of the neighborhood organizations in the area have been notified.

Chair Bonincontri said most people she talked to at the open house were enthusiastic about the project.

Commissioner Robertson asked what it would cost to send postcards to the entire area given that the proposal to add multifamily housing is directly contrary to the subarea plan. She suggested that as many people as possible in the subarea should receive notice in order to increase community participation. Ms. Burgess clarified that the 2005 proposals for the site that included housing have been scrapped. There is currently no proposal of any kind on the table; the alternatives will be developed largely by those who attend the workshops and discuss the issues. With regard to the cost of mailing postcards to the subarea, Ms. Burgess said the project budget may be able to pick up the tab for one mailing during the process, so the very best time will need to be selected; that may be when the preliminary alternatives come out in mid-July.

Commissioner Wendle asked if there will be opportunity to provide the community with more education about the housing needs of the city overall without pushing any particular scenario. Ms. Burgess said there will be a presentation on issues given at the beginning of each workshop.

D. Great Streets

Senior Transportation Planner Mike Ingram said the Great Streets program is a joint effort of the planning, transportation and parks departments. Staff is at the stage of scoping out the process and determining what approach should be used. The notion behind the program is to carry forward the work that was done as part of the Downtown Implementation Plan (DIP). The DIP updated the Downtown Subarea Plan and outlined the functions of the different roads in the Downtown and set the stage for developing an urban design vision for each roadway type. The Great Streets program will build on that foundation.

Within the Downtown Subarea, there are close to 20 miles of street frontage. About two miles of that frontage already has some guidelines for how they should be built out; for the balance there is no specific guidance beyond the standards for sidewalk width or for street tree type and placement. The sidewalk width specification for most of the Downtown Subarea is 12 feet: eight feet of sidewalk and four feet of landscape area. In the Downtown core, 16-foot sidewalks are required by the Land Use Code: a 12-foot sidewalk and a four-foot landscape area. In many cases, the developers are meeting just the minimum standards; the sidewalk environments are adequate, but not very interesting.

Mr. Ingram allowed that there are exceptions. He highlighted NE 4th Street, which was done as a city project with a more extensive scope that included a lot of landscaping and pedestrian amenities. The corner of NE 4th Street and 112th Avenue NE has street trees, benches, and a trash can, and further to the west there are water fountains and other amenities. Some developers have opted to do more than the minimum, but generally that requires a lot of back and forth between the city and the developer, and afterwards there is always the issue of who is responsible for maintenance. In the case of Lincoln Square, the city agreed to maintain the street trees and the concrete pavement; all the rest is the responsibility of the developer. Under the current regime, it is easier for the city to tell a developer what cannot be accepted than what can be accepted.

The Great Streets program is intended to improve the character of the streets in the Downtown, both generally and along specific corridors in accord with the vision identified in the Downtown Subarea Plan. For the bulk of the streets, the program will develop a palette of street frontage improvement options; the options available for any particular frontage will depend to a large degree on the function of the street in question and the district in which it is located. In addition to giving developers more options, the city will achieve more coordination between adjacent developments.

Mr. Ingram said certain minor streets in the Downtown core are subject to specific design plans. A document developed in 1992 lays out exactly what the improvements should look like on these minor streets. When a developer comes in with a project, the development review staff pull out the document and read to the developer what street improvements will be required. There is a requirement for eight feet of concrete sidewalk and a four-foot landscape area that includes paver blocks between street trees. The guidelines also call for a few other elements, such as trash cans, benches and pedestrian-scale lighting.

There are also specific design guidelines applicable to the NE 6th Street Pedestrian Corridor. They specify the types and colors of materials to be used, the type of lighting, and other elements, and clarifies which component elements are required. The guidelines give direction as to form, but not design.

For Old Bellevue, there are only a few sentences in the Land Use Code indicating that frontage improvements should follow the example set by a specific block along Main Street. There is no document outlining what the frontage is to look like.

Mr. Ingram said the proposal for the Great Streets program involves a mix of approaches. Specific design attention will be given to the key corridors, and a toolkit of options will be developed for the rest, including conceptual designs. In the areas where there are design guidelines in place, they appear to be working well and there is no apparent reason to revisit them. As an ancillary effort, the Downtown street tree and landscape plan will be updated; the Parks and Community Services Department believes that some of the current street tree specifications are not working well.

The key corridors analyzed during the Great Streets process will be those identified in the Downtown Subarea Plan as signature streets. In the plan, Bellevue Way is shown as a grand shopping street; 106th Avenue NE is shown as an entertainment street; and 108th Avenue NE is shown as a commerce street. The Pedestrian Corridor and Old Bellevue areas are listed as shopping streets as well. The Great Streets program will pay particular attention to Bellevue Way and 106th Avenue NE. The challenge for Bellevue Way is that it needs to carry a lot of traffic and at the same time serve as a desirable and attractive shopping street; the challenge for 106th Avenue NE will be creating the perception of the area being a destination for

entertainment.

For the remaining areas of the Downtown, the Great Streets program will build on the districts identified in the Downtown Subarea Plan, some of which currently have more identity than others. The streets are the primary public realm and as such provide an opportunity to help define the character of an area.

Mr. Ingram said a balance will need to be found between what should be required and what should be left as options for the developers to choose. For example, the DIP recommended extending the 16-foot sidewalk requirement north on 106th Avenue between NE 8th Street and NE 10th Street, and south between NE 4th Street and NE 2nd Street, but the Land Use Code has not been amended to reflect the recommendation; the change could be made in conjunction with the Great Streets program.

Commissioner Young asked if there is sufficient right-of-way on 106th Avenue NE to allow for a 16-foot sidewalk. Mr. Ingram said there is rarely right-of-way available for sidewalks in the Downtown. The typical street right-of-way is 60 feet. Given a five-lane street profile, the minimum width is 56 feet. The street surface, the curb and a foot or two of the sidewalk is generally within the public right-of-way; the balance is accomplished on private property via easements. When developments are proposed, one of the requirements imposed by the city is the dedication of an easement for the sidewalk; the property remains in the ownership of the property owner and can be used in calculating the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) permissible for the development.

Commissioner Robertson suggested that if the standards are to be changed, the work should be done as soon as possible. The city is currently in a strong development cycle, properties are turning over, and land costs are skyrocketing, and the city should act quickly to catch the current development cycle.

Commissioner Orrico asked why 16-foot sidewalks are even needed. Mr. Ingram said 16-foot sidewalks are very common in urban areas where there is heavy pedestrian usage. He noted that in downtown Seattle it is common to find 18- to 22-foot sidewalks; very few are less than 16 feet wide.

Mr. Ingram added that there is potential for more retail developments in the Downtown that will not be associated with Bellevue Square; there has been talk of Saks and Nieman Marcus, and wider sidewalks not only accommodate more pedestrians they accommodate sidewalk cafes.

Commissioner Orrico commented that there are a number of amenities developers can choose to provide in exchange for additional FAR. She suggested fancier sidewalk treatments should be included in the list of bonusable amenities. Looking at the sidewalks in a vacuum would be a mistake. Mr. Ingram said PCD department is currently gearing up to conduct a comprehensive review of the bonus system for Downtown development, most of which was set up in the early 1980s. Ms. Burgess said the issue is making its way onto the work plan and will be coming before the Planning Commission in the very near future.

Mr. Sparrman assured the Commissioners that the Great Streets program will not be carried forward in isolation. The effort will be taken on jointly by the planning, transportation and parks departments.

Chair Bell stated that wide sidewalks in the Downtown core are necessary to encourage pedestrian movement. They give pedestrians a feeling of security and openness. He

underscored the need to consider transit stops and operations as part of the Great Streets program. The Great Streets program is not something that is unique to Bellevue; it is a program that is in play in many parts of the world, and as such staff should tap into guidelines that are already available to the extent possible.

Commissioner Glass stressed the need to have different design standards for each of the districts, at least as far as light standards and amenities are concerned. He added that more thought should be put into developing the district names. Mr. Ingram said PCD is hoping to kick off a study to better identify the character of each district. Ms. Burgess said the character work will need to be carried forward in conjunction with the Land Use Code amendments to the bonus system. She noted that the work will be a coordinated effort of the various city departments.

Commissioner Bach asked if the Great Streets program will take into consideration right-turn lanes. Mr. Ingram said they will need to be accommodated as called for in the DIP process.

Mr. Sparrman explained that Downtown Bellevue has only about half the public right-of-way that comparable cities have because of the superblock grid layout. Accordingly, the issues of right-turn lanes and conflicts between transit users, bicyclists and pedestrians, must be accommodated in much less space. It will be a challenge to find the right balance between the competing modes.

Commissioner Robertson asked if consideration will be given to all-walk options at certain intersections. Mr. Ingram said there is an all-walk intersection at the Bellevue Transit Center. The trade-off is a loss of green time on the vehicular signals and in congested areas they must be used sparingly.

Mr. Ingram said the Land Use Code requires mid-block pedestrian routes in certain districts of the Downtown; in other districts they are only encouraged. They are needed to break up the superblocks and give pedestrians shortcuts and alternative routes. There is, however, no specific guidance for what the mid-block connections should look like. The design review process can yield some very nice routes for pedestrians to use, but less than ideal approaches can also be developed. As part of the Great Streets program, consideration may be given to addressing design guidelines for the connections.

Within the superblock grid there are also mid-block roadway connections. There are were such links identified in the DIP process and adopted into the Downtown Subarea Plan; all of them would be private streets. The routes are primarily for parking access and deliveries, leaving the roadways free to better function for circulation. With design concepts in hand, it will be easier to achieve high quality links.

Mr. Ingram said the Great Streets program is planned for launch in the fall of 2006 and should be wrapped up by the summer of 2007.

8. NEW BUSINESS

For the benefit of the Transportation Commissioners, Chair Bell noted that the annual retreat is scheduled for April 27 at the Robinswood Cabana.

Ms. Burgess informed the Planning Commissioners that their retreat has been scheduled for June 14 at Winters House.

9. OLD BUSINESS – None

10. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. David Plummer, 14414 NE 14th Place, informed the Commissioners that opportunity for public input during studies like the Bel-Red corridor project is essentially zero. Those who want to speak are given three or five minutes only. He said the city says there are about 1600 businesses in the Bel-Red corridor, and to date only 30 or 40 have offered comments. The number of public comments from general citizens has been miniscule. The city's buildable lands report shows that no zoning actions are needed in order to meet the long-term job and population growth targets. The existing zoning in the study area has plenty of latitude for development. The transportation impact analysis done for the Bel-Red corridor study was done by CH2MHill and it was based on the year 2000 counts; why that year was picked is unknown. The hocus-pocus analysis they presented contains mostly charts and graphs; there is no text at all outlining how the numbers were derived. The same is true of the market forecast that was done by the Leland company; there is no dynamic analysis and no interaction with citizens.

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Bonincontri adjourned the meeting at 9:31 p.m.

Staff to the Planning Commission

Date

Chair of the Planning Commission

Date