May 3, 2007
4:00 p.m.
Bellevue City Hall
Conference Room 1E-113

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mike Creighton, Co-Chair; Terry Lukens, Co-Chair; Kurt Springman, Joel Glass, Doug Mathews, Norm Hansen, Earl Overstreet, Faith Roland, Bill Ptacek, Dean Rebhuhn, Ken Schiring, Laurie Tish, Pat Sheffels

MEMBERS ABSENT: Sue Baugh, Steve Dennis

OTHERS PRESENT: Matt Terry, Dan Stroh, Michael Paine, Department of Planning and Community Development; Kevin O’Neill, Kevin McDonald, Goran Sparrman, Kris Liljeblad, Department of Transportation

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. Welcome and Review of the Agenda

Co-Chair Mike Creighton called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

2. Public Comment

Mr. Peter Maxim, 12405 NE 2nd Street, urged the steering committee to preserve as much area for parks and open space as possible. He said people living in the Wilburton Hill residential area to the south of NE 8th Street fear that with NE 6th Street extended, there is the possibility that traffic will head south of NE 8th Street to NE 5th Street in order to cross over to NE 6th Street, creating a great deal of traffic in the neighborhood. The NE 8th Street/124th Avenue NE intersection should be targeted for neighborhood traffic mitigation.

Mr. Andy Lane with Cairncross and Hempleman spoke on behalf of Bill Sherman and Sherman Development, whose offices are at the corner of 124th Avenue NE and Northup Way. He emphasized the desire of Mr. Sherman to be allowed to continue the current office uses and be permitted to construct new office uses in the area over time as the market deems appropriate. He proposed designating the area for office as opposed to housing, or allowing the existing uses to continue as legal conforming uses and to allow new office development.

Mr. Todd Woosley with Hal Woosley Properties said he is encouraged by the progress made by the steering committee. While the future looks bright, there should be assurances that no harm will be done to existing uses in moving forward with planning and zoning for future uses. Additionally, the fact that on the Redmond side of the line in Overlake there are plans for up to 5800 new residential units should be taken into account, especially so since the impacts of residential units were not considered in the BROTS agreement; the agreement may need to be updated yet again.

Ms. Cindy Ludwig, a resident of the Bridle Trails area, said her home is on the north side of SR-
520 overlooking the Safeway property. She observed that there are currently silo-type structures on the Safeway property. If development were permitted on the site with heights greater than those silos, the bank of trees on the south border of the Bel-Red corridor would no longer be visible. If a ten-story building would be the same height as the silos, there will be no problem. In the presentations made to the steering committee, all of the buildings in the drawings have been shown with no more than six stories; the visuals do not depict the proposed ten-story building height. Some have said that allowing taller buildings will preserve areas for green space, but the fact is that will only keep open the door to future construction of additional tall towers, unless there is a moratorium placed on construction in green space areas. The public wants to see the promised green areas constructed and preserved.

Mr. Howard Katz, 7 Lake Bellevue Drive, spoke representing the Bellevue Network on Aging. He commented that housing for older Bellevue residents is becoming unaffordable. If the city is going to lift any zoning restrictions to allow for more housing units, some of the units should be affordable.

Mr. John Torrence, 807 Lake Street South, Kirkland, urged the steering committee to consider allowing for greater building height in the corridor. Many equate the height issue with big, bulky buildings. In the Brentwood Mall area of suburban Vancouver, B.C. is served by rail transit of the sort contemplated for the Bel-Red area. Building height around the station locations is permitted up to 300 feet, and the towers must be separated by at least 80 feet.

3. Approval of Minutes of April 25 Steering Committee Meeting

Mr. Creighton called attention to the first paragraph on the second page of the minutes and said the sentence “…commented that no action taken by the committee would eliminate office uses on the site in question…” should read “…commented that action taken by the committee would not eliminate office uses on the site in question….”

Motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Mr. Ptacek; second was by Ms. Roland and the motion carried unanimously.

4. Continued Discussion and Direction on Preliminary Preferred Alternative Map

Strategic Planning Manager Emil King raised with the committee the issue of housing in the northwest portion of the study area which has received a number of comments from the public. He noted that there was general consensus on the part of the steering committee that housing in the area is a good idea based on view potential and other reasons, though non-housing uses were also discussed. The area is currently home to a variety of uses, including light industrial to retail, service and office uses. In discussing LI uses for the entire subarea, the committee reached the conclusion that existing uses should be allowed to remain, expand and be reconstructed, but no new LI uses should be allowed in any part of the subarea.

Mr. King noted that the committee had previously agreed that the broad category of service uses should be permitted virtually anywhere in the corridor, including the northwest corner. The committee has not, however, had a discussion regarding what to do about existing offices and the possibility of allowing new offices. On April 25, a committee member made the suggestion that office uses should be framed similarly to LI uses, allowing them to continue, expand and rebuild, but disallowing new office uses in the areas marked for housing as the primary use. Mr. King said the opinion of staff is that live/work office spaces should be included as an allowed use.

Mr. Glass asked if Mr. Sherman would be allowed to tear down an existing office building and
rebuild it in a new office configuration. Mr. King said in the opinion of staff the expansion of office uses would have to occur on the existing property. Reconstruction should be allowed in the case of catastrophic loss through fire or another disaster.

Ms. Tish observed that in the Pearl District there are models in which there is office and retail uses below lofts above in a live/work format. Mr. King said that might be an acceptable approach to take provided the office component did not overtake the character of the project.

Ms. Roland asked if “expand” could mean taller, and Mr. King allowed that it could.

Mr. Hansen said he would prefer to see housing as the predominant use in the northwest part of the study area.

Ms. Sheffels said the proposal to treat office uses in the same way LI uses are to be treated is a good compromise and the right approach to take.

Answering a question asked by Ms. Tish, Long Range Planning Manager Kevin O’Neill said most of the new housing uses in the corridor will occur in the development nodes. The intensity of development in the areas designated for housing would be far less. Staff and the consultants have not redistributed land uses based on the alternative identified by the committee on April 25, but it will be possible to accommodate the housing program.

Senior Transportation Planner Kevin McDonald said to the extent that developers want to bring new housing units online in the northwest area, the potential for improving the stream corridors is greater because the intensity would be less than mixed use with office and retail uses would create.

Mr. Mathews said the proposal to treat office uses like LI uses will allow flexibility for existing non-housing uses while emphasizing the desire to see the area convert to housing uses over time.

Mr. Creighton suggested the area will likely remain mixed use for some time, especially considering that King County Metro intends to continue operating its site there. He agreed that the vision for the future of the area should be on housing.

Mr. Schiring agreed with the suggested approach relative to office uses. He noted, however, that there are several existing uses in the area that will be around for some time to come. In addition to Metro, the Safeway bakery intends to stay where it is. Mixed use housing residential would be appropriate for the area.

Ms. Tish said she favors housing in most of the area. There is a good stream and it is easily accessible by foot. There are, however, some pockets within the area that are just not suitable for housing, thus mixed use housing and commercial might be the best approach.

Ms. Sheffels said the suggestion of staff includes LI, service uses, retail and office uses along with housing, and is more definitive than the broader mixed use category. Mr. Hanson concurred.

Ms. Roland proposed shrinking the size of the area designated for housing. She agreed that housing makes sense near the development node but less sense to the north and west.

Motion to designate the area for housing, treating office the same as LI as proposed, was made by Mr. Hansen. Second was by Ms. Sheffels. The vote was six for and six against, and the
motion failed.

Mr. O’Neill said the committee could call the area out for housing while allowing other new uses through density controls and the like, an approach that would favor housing over other uses.

Mr. Ptacek said it makes the most sense to lean toward housing uses in the northwest part of the study area, given the stream corridor and other factors.

Mr. Creighton proposed temporarily tabling the issue until after the discussion on the vision.

Mr. King called attention to the southwest portion of the study area to the south of NE 12th Street. He reminded the committee that on April 25 the decision was made to change the area to the east of 120th Avenue NE from retail/commercial to mixed use housing/commercial. The area would have less intense development. The committee confirmed the direction given.

Mr. King said on April 25 there was also general agreement by the steering committee to keep the colors shown on the map relative to the arts district. The discussed focused on the range of uses and public spaces that could help form a district that functions with more of a community orientation rather than a specific arts orientation. The committee agreed to move forward into the Final Environmental Impact Statement with the area as outlined and labeled “Cultural Arts District.”

Mr. Ptacek said Mr. O’Neill came to the Arts Commission meeting on May 1 to provide and update on the Bel-Red corridor study and specifically the concept of the arts district. There was strong support for the outlined approach.

Mr. King said following April 25 meeting staff did not feel there was a consensus to make a change on the map extending the park blocks concept shown along NE 16th Street as stretching from 120th Avenue NE to the node at 130th Avenue NE. The idea of extending the concept further to the east was agreed to by the committee.

5. Discussion of Committee Vision for Bel-Red Area

Mr. O’Neill allowed that land use transition has been going on de facto in the Bel-Red area for decades, but in a very unfocused manner. The last time the area was looked at in a comprehensive manner was in the late 1980s. The area has seen some economic stagnation, though there are also some very healthy parts of the area. Between 1995 and 2005 there has been a net loss of jobs in the corridor while the city as a whole as gained in total jobs. The Comprehensive Plan encourages reviewing older commercial areas with an eye on whether or not they should be given a fresh look. The fact that Sound Transit is in the planning stage for its East Link project makes the time right to study the corridor through which the light rail line will run.

Mr. O’Neill proposed adopting the suggestion of Mr. Overstreet to frame the visioning discussion around three key questions: 1) What are the unique characteristics of the corridor that should be preserved; 2) What should be added to the corridor that is not currently there; and 3) How will people in 2030 describe the area?

With regard to the area assets that should be preserved, the phrases used by staff included the existing business mix, the tree canopy on Bel-Red Road, the convenience of Bel-Red Road as an east-west connector, and the place for community afforded by Highland Community Center and the YMCA. The committee members noted the need to preserve the hospital/medical zone, the
existing strong employers, Evergreen Shopping Center, newer and recently renovated buildings, the diverse business community, the buffering nature of the structures in the area to the south of Bel-Red Road, and buffering between commercial and residential areas.

Turning to the question of what should be added to the corridor, staff kicked off the conversation by listing housing, mixed use development, midrise office uses, parks and open space, light rail and transit, community amenities, and trees and greenery. The committee members added NE 16th Street as a green corridor, transportation infrastructure such as another outlet for NE 16th Street, the nodal development concept, density that will have a positive impact on the overall community, diverse housing options, including affordable housing opportunities, with quality construction, and undergrounded utilities.

The list of things to be improved or enhanced included the network of stream corridors, the street network, bus and transit services, the non-motorized system, protections for the neighborhoods from land use impacts, the sense of place, connectivity to areas outside the corridor, incentives to bring about the new land use vision, and diversity in the broadest sense.

The list of words to be used in describing the Bel-Red corridor in 2030 included livable, green, convenient, economically and socially vibrant, sustainable, connected, diverse, desirable, unique, transitional between downtown and the neighborhoods, transit-centric, quality, walkable, safe, edgy, and a model for balancing living, working, transportation and nature.

Mr. Hansen suggested a good neighbor policy should be developed as part of the process.

Mr. O’Neill said staff will draft a vision statement and have it ready for review at the next steering committee meeting.

Returning to the discussion regarding uses in the northwest corner of the study area, Mr. Springman suggested that gaining housing uses along 124th Avenue NE would be very challenging. The same challenges to housing do not exist in other parts of the northwest corner.

Mr. Hansen reiterated his call for housing only as the predominant vision for the future of the area. Mr. Glass noted that the areas to the north and south of the area in question are all predominantly housing.

Department of Planning and Community Development Director Matt Terry suggested that in the areas of the corridor designated for mixed use development the buildings will be primarily vertical structures housing more traditional condominium and office uses. To gain row houses and live/work and other less conventional forms in a density range of 15 to 40 units per acre will require emphasizing the area as a place for housing. If a full range of mixed uses is allowed there, the market will discourage that kind of housing.

Motion to show the area along 124th Avenue NE as mixed use office/housing and the rest of the northwest corner as housing was made by Mr. Lukens. Second was by Ms. Tish and the motion carried unanimously.

6. Final Environmental Impact Statement: Steering Committee Direction to Proceed

Mr. O’Neill sought from the committee direction to proceed to the Final Environmental Impact Statement stage based on the vision and the land use map as amended.

Mr. McDonald recapped the public participation that has occurred throughout the Bel-Red
corridor study project, all of which has fed into the preferred alternative. He also briefly outlined the land use pattern as identified on the map.

Mr. Terry voiced the opinion of staff with regard to the preferred alternative. He said the alternative is consistent with the thinking done by staff regarding the principles and objectives set for the process. While there are still issues to be resolved, there are no identified fatal flaws associated with the alternative.

Continuing, Mr. Terry said in moving forward it will be vitally important to focus on the implementation strategies; they are what will bring life to the articulated vision. There will be four key elements to the implementation strategies: 1) the zoning overlay to create the possibility of achieving the land use vision; 2) a finance plan; 3) reconciliation work with Redmond to determine the combined impacts of the two plans on the neighborhoods, and the need to make sure growth is linked to infrastructure improvements; and 4) capitalizing on the anticipated investments of Sound Transit aimed at getting light rail through the corridor from downtown Bellevue to Redmond.

The Bel-Red corridor study began with a market study that set the framework. The study found a limited market for office and a strong market for housing. The forecast is that the King/Pierce/Snohomish region will see an increase of some 1.5 million people over the next 30 to 40 years. That will not occur comfortably; pressures are already being felt by the neighborhoods as the market attempts to increase the number of housing units. The notion of providing new neighborhoods, which is contemplated by the preferred alternative, is one of the most important things cities in the urban areas within the region can do to reasonably accommodate growth.

Mr. Terry stressed the fact that there will still be time to tweak and adjust the vision once the Final Environmental Impact Statement work is completed. With regard to height, he commented that height and density work together to answer the question of whether or not the result will be an economic niche not being filled in other areas of the city. He reminded the committee that no final decision has been made with regard to the height question, but there was consensus to at least study the issue as part of the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Mr. Rebhuhn asked staff to bring to the next meeting ideas to facilitate the discussion of affordable housing options for the corridor.

Motion to proceed to developing the Final Environmental Impact Statement was made by Mr. Lukens. Second was by Mr. Springman and the motion carried unanimously.

7. Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for June 7. It was agreed that the meeting may need to start an hour earlier.

8. Adjourn

Mr. Creighton adjourned the meeting at 6:05 p.m.