

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

May 9, 2007
7:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Bonincontri, Ferris

STAFF PRESENT: Paul Inghram, Nicholas Matz, Lacey Madche, Department of Planning and Community Development

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m. by Chair Mathews who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

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

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus.

4. STAFF REPORTS

Comprehensive Planning Manager Paul Inghram introduced Legal Planner Lacey Madche to the Commissioners.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

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

7. STUDY SESSION

A. Electrical Facilities

Mr. Inghram said the Council direction to craft Comprehensive Plan policy amendments regarding the siting and/or expanding of electrical substations and transmission facilities is predicated on balancing two equally important objectives: 1) protecting residential neighborhoods from incompatible electrical facilities, and 2) the needs of Puget Sound Energy to provide sufficient electrical energy to service the growing demand of Downtown Bellevue and other commercial areas.

Senior Planner Nicholas Matz briefly recapped the tour of electrical facilities given the Commissioners prior to the meeting. He commented that the Factoria substation is split by both residential and office zoning, but pointed out that it is fairly well screened and isolated from adjacent residences. He said Puget Sound Energy has started its public outreach process much earlier than in the past, having been encouraged informally by the city to do so. They are also being encouraged to carefully consider how the expansion will affect the adjacent residential neighborhood.

Mr. Inghram said the Phantom Lake substation is located close to the street. It is protected by an open chain link fence and is screened by vegetation. He shared with the Commissioners a map showing the plan of Puget Sound Energy to add transmission lines between the Phantom Lake and Lake Hills substations to create a continuous loop system to increase reliability.

The Lake Hills substation has a very tall wood wall providing protection and screening. Commissioner Orrico said she spoke with the Puget Sound Energy tour guide about the tall fence and was told that the company prefers open chain link fencing because it is easier to see if someone is inside. Barbed wire is used on top to keep people out. In the case of the Lake Hills substation, the fence was constructed tall enough to make it impossible to get over without a ladder. She said from the outside the tall wood fence is very attractive.

Mr. Matz said neither the Phantom Lake or the Lake Hills substation will be expanded outside their current boundaries. However, the fact that they will be terminus points for the new transmission lines does mean there will be visual impacts.

Mr. Inghram shared with the Commissioners photos of the Clyde Hill substation which was not visited on the tour due to time constraints. With regard to the Lochleven substation, he said it serves as a model for new screening mitigation in that it has an attractive perimeter wall made of pre-cast fiberboard that also offers some sound deadening. Second, the Lochleven substation utilizes a gas insulated system in which the voltage lines all run through a tube filled with gas. The system allows for placing all of the equipment physically closer together.

Chair Mathews noted his support for Puget Sound Energy getting the neighborhoods involved early on in the process. He said it is far easier for people to buy into changes when information is shared and alternatives are demonstrated in a timely manner, allowing them the opportunity to digest the information and make decisions. The approach worked very well for the Lochleven substation in which there was 100 percent buy-in on the part of the local community.

Commissioner Robertson said it was very helpful to tour the various substations and to see how each could be visually screened from the street.

Mr. Matz said the city intends to continue to identify, review and regulate electrical facilities expansion based on responsibilities defined in the Utilities Element, which primarily involve assuring sufficient facilities to meet the demands of growth in the community based on the adopted Land Use Plan. The need to expand substations and add transmission facilities is needed to improved reliability.

Commissioner Sheffels asked why the language of Resolution No. 7107 specifically calls out the need to meet the growing demand of the Downtown and not the residential areas. Mr. Matz said the uses in the Downtown typically demand more power, which demands more facilities and sooner rather than later. The Council direction also focuses attention on the other commercial areas, which staff has interpreted to mean the five primary commercial areas. Staff does not believe the resolution specifically ignores the needs of the residential areas. Mr. Inghram added that because the Downtown area is slated to be the location of large number of residential units, by assuring adequate electrical

systems to serve the Downtown the needs of residents living there will also be assured. Because the outlying residential areas are mostly built out, the growth in residential usage will be tied more to habits and changes in lifestyle and will be on a much smaller scale than the growth demands of the Downtown.

Chair Mathews agreed that the wording of the resolution makes it sound as if the entire focus is on the Downtown and the commercial areas of the city. He suggested the wording should be rephrased to make it clear that the focus is on the needs of the city as a whole. Commissioner Bach concurred.

Mr. Matz commented on the fixed the language of the resolution, having been adopted by the Council.

Mr. Inghram suggested there is no intended limitation placed on the Commission that will keep from viewing the entire city as a whole in terms of electrical facilities needs or to address residential growth. The Council is focused, in part, on the potential impacts on residential areas caused by growth in the commercial areas.

Commissioner Sheffels proposed asking the Council to add to the resolution a residential focus as a whereas statement.

Commissioner Orrico asked if there are safety issues beyond screening and electromagnetic fields (EMF) that should be addressed. Mr. Matz responded by saying it is appropriate for the Commission to address all issues related to safety. It would be more difficult for the land use process to directly address enhanced safety considerations such as terrorism, storm damage, or electrical fires due to accidents.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Orrico regarding the issues of reliability, capacity and redundancy, Mr. Matz explained that current city policy defers to the serving utility when to implement their plans. Accordingly, Puget Sound Energy responds to the need for new facilities based on systemic reliability concerns. The city is involved in monitoring performance and reviewing the response times of the utilities when outages occur, under a memorandum of understanding attached to the current franchise agreement.

Commissioner Orrico asked what the WUTC has authority over when it comes to utility companies. Ms. Madche said they regulate rates and the siting of electrical facilities, excluding substations. Their siting focus is on the larger scale. Mr. Matz added that the WUTC exists to regulate utilities, their financial performance, efficiency and reliability of service, the methods by which they interact with government and with the public, and to serve as the regulated voice between ratepayers and a regulated monopoly. The franchise agreement between Puget Sound Energy and the city stipulates how the utility gets to use city rights-of-way.

Mr. Matz said the intent of the CPA work program remains to propose new policies, a new map and new land use regulations to address the direction given by the Council. The purpose of these tools going forward will be to ensure utility capacity to adequately serve the Land Use Plan; to schematically map the existing and planned system buildout of the utility; and to continue to rely on the map as a physical understanding of how policies influence Puget Sound Energy decisions with regard to their systemwide and project siting and expansion decisions. The Puget Sound Energy system plan is predicated on full build-out of the land use zoning, which extends beyond the comprehensive planning period. As opportunities are unveiled, Puget Sound Energy builds systems specifically to meet projected future demand or to improve reliability through backup components.

Mr. Matz said the work program will include identification of an environmental review framework

built around the visual impacts neighborhoods face when system facilities are expanded. That aspect was not emphasized as strongly in the 1993 work that resulted in the current electrical facilities policies. The environmental review will form the basis for future policies and land use regulations that directly address visual impacts. The study has already identified facilities that have a greater potential for visual impacts; the policies to be crafted will ideally emphasize transparency and predictability in siting decisions and mitigation.

Commissioner Robertson asked if any attempt will be made to develop specific design guidelines for electrical facilities. Mr. Matz said yes, the focus will be on land use regulations that will be more directive with regard to specific mitigation.

Mr. Inghram said the city does not currently have many policies about visual impacts beyond some general policies that apply to all utilities. The city requires a conditional use permit for all substations and electrical facilities, and that process requires consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. The proposal is to develop policies with a higher level of detail relative to visual impacts and how they can be offset through site mitigation techniques.

Mr. Matz said the initial facilities screening to establish an environmental review framework looked at facilities that have potential visual impacts based on how much facility is built that wasn't there before. New or planned substations and new transmission lines will have the greatest visual impacts, followed by expansions beyond fenced boundaries, then existing substation expansions within their fenced boundaries.

Mr. Matz reiterated that the policies being developed during the process will encourage more transparency in the systemwide process of siting and expanding electrical facilities serving the city. One of those will be focused on encouraging continued early community engagement in the siting process. Policies stating city visual impact preferences with regard to siting will be developed as well. The policies intend increased predictability for both the utility and the city, which will be good for all involved.

The scope of work relative to the EMF issue will be expanded. A consultant will review the conclusions reached in 1993 and the current state of the science, including the effects on human health. The community has not been raising the EMF issue like it did in 1993. The EMF background work will be part of the environmental framework.

A community open house was held on April 18. It included an engaging two hours of discussion with the twelve people who attended, most of whom were representing the Bridle Trails and West Bellevue communities. Presentations are scheduled for neighborhood associations as well.

Mr. Matz said the Department of Planning and Community Development is participating in a separate review effort relative to undergrounding utilities in response to various concerns voiced by the community. He said the issue offers its own set of opportunities and constraints.

Mr. Inghram said undergrounding is expensive and questions abound regarding who should pay for it and how. A tariff structure dictates Puget Sound Energy's ability to spread underground costs throughout its western Washington system.

Mr. Inghram reviewed an email received from Ellen Kerr representing the Bridle Trails Community Club, in which the request was made to have the Planning Commission expand the scope of the electrical facilities CPA work program to include issues of reliability and storm response. Ms. Kerr raised the issue of undergrounding as well in her email.

In a letter from Robert Sheehan the recommendation is made that the work program be put on hold in favor of hiring an independent engineering consulting team. A letter from Rich Wagner voiced similar comments. Both call for a broader review of how Puget Sound Energy provides power and whether or not they have the correct system plan in place.

Commissioner Sheffels asked if staff will be responding to the letters. Mr. Inghram said that will not be done directly. Each person attended the open house and engaged staff in one-on-one discussions. He said that in addition he and Mr. Matz have met directly with Mr. Wagner and Mr. Sheehan to discuss their concerns. The promise was made to communicate with the City Attorney to determine if the city even has the authority to take their proposed direction.

There was consensus on the part of the Commissioners that the process should proceed as outlined.

8. NEW BUSINESS – None

9. OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Inghram asked the Commissioners to put July 11 on their calendars as the date for the annual Commission retreat.

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. February 7, 2007

It was noted that Commissioner Bach should be listed as absent rather than present.

Motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Commissioner Orrico. Second was by Commissioner Sheffels and the motion carried without dissent; Commissioner Robertson abstained from voting.

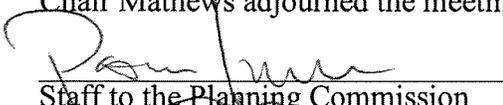
B. February 28, 2007

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Robertson. Second was by Commissioner Orrico and the motion carried without dissent; Commissioner Bach abstained from voting.

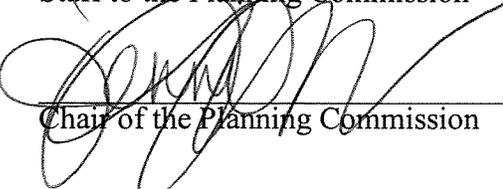
11. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

12. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Mathews adjourned the meeting at 8:14 p.m.


Staff to the Planning Commission

9/12/07
Date


Chair of the Planning Commission

9/12/07
Date