

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

September 24, 2008
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Orrico, Commissioners Hamlin, Lai, Mathews, Sheffels

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Robertson, Ferris

STAFF PRESENT: Paul Inghram, Cheryl Kuhn, Steph Hewitt, Department of Planning and Community Development; Matthews Jackson, Development Services Department, Kevin O'Neill, Franz Loewenherz, Department of Transportation

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. by Chair Orrico who presided. Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Robertson and Ferris, both of whom were excused.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Richard Morris, 13430 SE 24th Street, spoke on behalf of the Sunset Community Association. He indicated general support for the Phase II neighborhood character update. He noted that in his area the biggest concern is with code compliance, primarily with renters who do not know the rules with regard to general property upkeep. If there are penalties or fines, they should be fair and established for a reason; they should not go too far.

Mr. James Binder, 3010 142nd Place NE, said he serves as an advisor to the Bridle Trails Community Club, and as president of the Winchester Estates Homeowners Association. He said he has made numerous appearances before the Transportation Commission to comment on the ped-bike plan update. The Bridle Trails Community Club wants to see the equestrian nature of the neighborhood kept as it is. To that end, 140th Avenue NE should be retained as a sub-arterial without any widening of the roadway for automobiles. The trees in the area should be preserved as well. The proposed plan includes a bicycle path on both sides of 140th Avenue NE north of NE 24th Street. The existing NE 29th Street corridor, along with the SR-520 bicycle path, is sufficient. Photographs of the area and the existing six-foot path were shared with the Commissioners. Widening the roadway would require the loss of trees and would lead to increased vehicular traffic and speeds.

Commissioner Sheffels asked if the equestrian overlay is adequate or needs to be tweaked in any way. Mr. Binder said there is a very active horse community in Bridle Trails. The community has given it very positive feedback.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus.

4. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCILS, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None
5. COMMITTEE REPORTS – None
6. STAFF REPORTS

Comprehensive Planning Manager Paul Inghram noted the inclusion of information about deconstruction practices in the Commission desk packets. He said he had also included in the desk packet a short memo about Bel-Red. Commissioner Orrico presented the recommendation to the City Council on September 20, joined by representatives from the Transportation Commission, Arts Commission, and the Parks and Community Services Board, each of whom also voiced support for the recommendation.

7. STUDY SESSION: Neighborhood Character Phase II

Neighborhood Outreach Manager Cheryl Kuhn noted that the Commission had been satisfied on September 10 with the responses concerning all of the issues with the exception of the FAR threshold that was originally proposed by Commissioner Ferris. Of the options presented by staff, the Commission was willing to consider only one, namely the idea of adding a height factor as a threshold.

Ms. Kuhn noted that the Commission had asked staff to take a specific look at the house belonging to the mother-in-law of a Councilmember because it had been held up as an example in a Councilmember meeting. She shared with the Commissioners photos of the home which is situated in a heavily wooded area. A new large house has been constructed 30 feet to the north. The foliage makes it impossible to see the new house from the mother-in-law's house. The new house is very large; it has 7200 square feet including the garage, though it calculates out to have a 0.3 FAR because it is on a very large lot.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Orrico, Ms. Kuhn said the new home would not have triggered additional design criteria under the proposal because it is on a large lot. The new house does not surpass the proposed FAR threshold, it does it trigger the proposed height threshold, and it is not within ten feet of the property line.

Ms. Kuhn showed the Commissioners a series of photographs of homes with FARs of 0.5 or more, each of which would be subject to the threshold requirements that were part of the original recommendation of the Commission. Community Involvement Coordinator Steph Hewitt informed the Commission that during 2007 and 2008, a total of 239 permits have been issued for new home construction. Of that number, 47 percent had an FAR of 0.5 or greater, which represents a substantial leap from the files reviewed in 2004 and 2005 where only 25 percent exceeded that threshold.

The Commissioners were also shown photos of homes over two stories and over 0.5 FAR. They were informed that only 12 percent of recent new home permits have exceeded two stories and 0.5 FAR. Photos of homes over two stories but under 0.5 FAR, and photos of homes under three stories and under 0.5 FAR, were also shown to the Commission.

Ms. Kuhn asked if the Commission were willing to continue supporting the original

recommendation, which was Option A, or if a recommendation regarding height should be added, which would be Option B.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Orrico, Planning Manager Mathews Jackson suggested that it would be easier to establish a threshold based on height rather than feet. It is easier for everyone to understand and for staff to review. The measurement would be the same as is done for building height, which is from average existing grade.

Commissioner Sheffels agreed that determining what a story is would be problematic; using an actual height measurement would make the most sense, but 20 feet would not be enough since it would essentially work out to only two stories. It would be easier to do the FAR as originally envisioned. She said her preference would be to stay with the original recommendation of Option A.

Commissioner Hamlin agreed. He said the Commission was originally looking for something that would be simple and easy to enforce. Adding stories or height to the equation adds complications. He indicated his preference for Option A.

Commissioner Lai concurred that stories as a unit of measure is not very instructive. In the case of steeply sloped lakeside lots, anything measured from average grade would not prevent impacts on a neighboring cottage. He also voiced support for Option A.

Commissioner Mathews said height is a wild card given how many different variations there are. Using that measurement would still not address all the issues that need to be addressed. He said his preference would be to stay with the FAR approach.

Commissioner Orrico said she was struck by the realization of how much development activity will be impacted by the proposed approach, which with the FAR approach will be half the permits issued. She said she would prefer not to over regulate and to go with the FAR only.

Ms. Hewitt pointed out that if the trigger were bumped up to 0.6 from 0.5, only 43 of the 239 permits would be affected.

Commissioner Mathews observed that a number of the homes captured under the 0.5 threshold are already doing some of the things the Commission wants to see done, such as stepbacks or daylight plane. Ms. Kuhn noted that in addition the Commission has already approved the off-ramp under which if a developer can show that a proposal will not impact a neighbor's daylight plane, they can proceed under a variance.

Commissioner Sheffels proposed raising the 0.5 FAR threshold to 0.6. Commissioner Orrico noted that the Council expressed concern that even at 0.5 some homes would be missed.

Commissioner Mathews said his preference would be to stick with the 0.5 threshold. Commissioner Hamlin concurred, as did Commissioner Lai.

Ms. Kuhn said the intention of staff is to present all the options to the City Council, but the strongest possible case will be made for the recommendation of the Commission.

8. STUDY SESSION: Ped-Bike Plan Update CPA Briefing

Senior transportation planner Franz Loewenherz presented the Commission with the revisions to the 1999 ped-bike plan as recommended by the Transportation Commission. Since March 2007

when the update process began, there have been extensive meetings with the Transportation Commission, which was appointed by the City Council to have oversight responsibility for the project. In addition, there have been hours of public testimony received. The Planning Commission is involved because the revisions include changes to the Comprehensive Plan. The package will be presented to the Council on October 6; the anticipation is that they will give the green light to proceed with the Comprehensive Plan amendment process.

Mr. Loewenherz said there are ongoing discussions with the Transportation Commission regarding the CIP/TFP non-motorized project list, which is how the various ped-bike projects will ultimately get funded.

The ped-bike plan was originally adopted in 1993 and was updated in 1999. The Comprehensive Plan portion of the 1999 update was adopted by ordinance, but the functional aspect was adopted by resolution. The proposed update includes revisions to the Transportation Element; the Urban Design Element; the Parks and Open Space Element; and the Transportation Facilities Plan.

Mr. Loewenherz briefly described for the Commission the outreach efforts undertaken during the update process.

Assistant Director Kevin O'Neill explained that after the initial phase of public involvement and the preliminary draft network plan was released, a report was given to the Council. The direction received at that time was that a step back should be taken to look at the policy framework; their desire was to let the policy framework serve as the guide. Their sense at that time was that there were some gaps in the policy framework that needed to be filled in. In October 2007 staff prepared for the Transportation Commission a policy evaluation matrix. Every policy relating to the non-motorized network that could be found in the Transportation Element, the Land Use Element, the Urban Design Element, the Parks and Open Space Element, and in the ped-bike functional plan was pulled out for review. Several of the policies were identified as not having been captured since the last major Comprehensive Plan update.

The Transportation Commission engaged in a series of meetings in late 2007 and early 2008. They concluded that the organization of policies should be improved, that redundancy should be avoided where possible, and that there should be a clear goal or vision statement about the purpose of the ped-bike plan and network. They felt the policies in the plan should better articulate the need for a comprehensive connected system, a point with which the Council was in full agreement. The Transportation Commission drafted policies that read like strategic plans with specific accomplishment goals set for the next five years and the next ten years to help prioritize projects.

Mr. O'Neill said the goal statement developed by the Transportation Commission is focused on trying to achieve an integrated and connected ped-bike network to accomplish a number of objectives, including providing for transportation choices, encouraging health and fitness, making sure everyone can travel, ensuring safety, enhancing neighborhood livability, addressing climate change issues, and supporting economic development. The Transportation Commission put into policy language having two completed and connected north/south bike paths, and two completed and connected east/west bike paths. Similarly, they outlined in policy language having bike paths connecting through the downtown. They identified a desire for 25 more miles of sidewalks on arterial streets within the next ten years.

The proposed policy changes were unveiled for the City Council in March 2008. The Council embraced having the broad goal and vision statement, and the specific goal-oriented policies aimed at moving the city in the direction outlined.

Several of the polices support the complete street concept, which means as streets are designed pedestrian and/or bicycle facilities should always at least be considered. Existing policy TR-94 in the Transportation Element is proposed to be revised to enhance support for innovative tools and best practices for implementing the plan. There are policies that support ongoing public involvement and being context sensitive in designing projects. The prioritization criteria policy in the Transportation Element is proposed to be amended, and a new policy has been added that relates to an ongoing program to make sure the policies become projects on the ground.

Mr. O'Neill reviewed with the Commission the proposal for how to organization the policies in the new ped-bike plan.

Commissioner Sheffels referred to policy TR-79 and suggested the inclusion of minority status as a challenge to transportation options does not make sense on its face. Mr. O'Neill said the intent was to have a criteria around social and environmental justice. Often in social and environmental justice legislation, minority status is included as a criteria.

Mr. Loewenherz pointed out that Title VI, the federal civil rights legislation, serves as a central theme for the city in terms of being inclusionary. One of the component parts of the ped-bike plan was to conduct targeted outreach to those constituencies. The city follows the direction because it is the law and because it is the right thing to do. The issue is not that someone in a particular minority population has difficulty using a sidewalk, rather that when information is provided it is in multiple languages. Commissioner Sheffels suggested that one does not routinely think of language barriers when the word "minority" is used. Mr. Loewenherz agreed the language could be tweaked to make the intent clear.

Mr. Loewenherz said the city has received a fair amount of national attention for its use of interactive mapping as part of the ped-bike plan update. The public was able to look at each of the recommendations on a project-by-project basis; it proved to be a very useful way to get detailed information from the public. By clicking on a project link on the interactive map, one could bring up an image of what is recommended along with a project description. More than 600 comments were received by using the technology. More than 800 people signed up on the ped-bike plan list serve.

Commissioner Lai asked if there has been any interaction with employers such as Microsoft on the east side of Bellevue. Mr. Loewenherz said there were some downtown businesses that took it upon themselves to spearhead a photographic endeavor in which they took pictures of existing issues in the downtown. There was no targeted meeting with Microsoft or Microsoft employees, though at a number of the community events those interests were represented.

Mr. Loewenherz said there has been a constant iterative process throughout the project of going back to the drawing board. He said he got out into the field in a variety of ways, including walking, biking and horseback riding. Photovisualizations were used to help inform the public. The Transportation Commission went over in great detail all of the projects in the various districts.

Mr. Loewenherz said there were differences of opinion as to what the 140th Avenue NE corridor should look like. The 1999 plan included bike lane facility recommendations for the corridor. To the north in Redmond there are bike lanes on both sides of the street. The corridor is identified as one of the north/south priority corridors. The Transportation Commission carefully reviewed the proposal for the corridor; several Commissioners visited the site, walked and biked the area, and met with members of the community. Differences of opinion remain. Ultimately,

the Transportation Commission voted to include the recommendation for bike lanes even though staff was advocating for a multipurpose off-street path on the east side of the roadway. Consideration was given to including bike lanes on 132nd Avenue NE, but that idea was ultimately rejected because it would have too much of an impact on the equestrian community.

Commissioner Orrico said she would prefer to see priority given to adding ped-bike facilities to streets that currently do not have any over streets that already have facilities on at least one side. Mr. Loewenherz suggested that in all likelihood there will only be enough money to implement projects in that way. He noted that projects on each side of streets are labeled as distinct projects for that very reason.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Lai, Mr. Loewenherz explained that after the Transportation Commission had agreed on the project lists, they spent a great deal of time determining how the projects should be prioritized. They assigned specific weights to each of the indicators listed in policy TR-79 and used the resulting data along with the GIS data in their work to prioritize the project lists.

Mr. O'Neill commented that the pedestrian network that is in the plan is essentially the corridor network. There are many local neighborhood sidewalks that are not part of the ped-bike plan network that are still very important and which get constructed through the Neighborhood Enhancement Program or by other means. Often NEP projects that get voted on include sidewalks that are not even listed in the ped-bike plan.

Commissioner Sheffels asked if the city requires residential developers to put in sidewalks. Mr. O'Neill said the requirement for new developments typically includes a requirement for sidewalks on at least one side of streets. Commissioner Sheffels asked if the developer of a tear-down where there has not previously been a sidewalk is required to include a sidewalk. Mr. Loewenherz said to a large degree that would depend on the neighborhood; some neighborhoods simply do not want sidewalks. If the street is shown in the plan as being part of the pedestrian network, the city would require the sidewalk.

Commissioner Mathews said the network map made it easier to understand the selection of the east/west corridor that includes NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street. Mr. O'Neill allowed that the Bel-Red process that highlighted NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street helped define what the east/west corridor should be. The existing ped-bike plan project proposal for NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street is consistent with the recommendation of the Commission for the subarea plan.

Commissioner Sheffels asked if consideration was given to promoting quiet surfaces in ped-bike projects. Mr. Loewenherz said that topic falls under the category of keeping up with best practices and innovative approaches without being too prescriptive. Mr. O'Neill added that the concept of being context sensitive is sprinkled liberally throughout the document.

9. BRIEFING: 2008 Comprehensive Plan Amendments

Mr. Inghram reported that the package of amendments along with the recommendations of the Commission have been submitted to the Council for review and action. The Oh and the Lee applications were both withdrawn by the proponent.

The Council directed initiation of the Sambica application. Staff has met with representatives from Sambica and outlined what might work for the rezoning of the site, which will likely also require a supplemental Land Use Code amendment to address the type of use they have there. The fact that part of the area is within a shoreline is creating complications.

The Council also directed initiation of the Coal Creek UGB boundary modification. The action will result in the city being able to annex the part of the park that it already owns.

The Council elected not to initiate the South Kirkland TOD proposal. After significant discussion, the Council identified a number of different issues. The Council has, however, directed staff to return with a proposed work program for addressing the site specifically.

After a great deal of discussion, the Council declined to initiate the Vander Hoek Multifamily proposal as well. The Council expressed many of the same concerns voiced by the Commission, but ultimately took the opposite direction based on the broader policy question of the downtown boundary.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

A. CTED Short Course Scheduling

Mr. Inghram said three Wednesday dates on which a Planning Commission meeting is not already scheduled have been suggested.

11. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. May 14, 2008

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Mathews. Second was by Commissioner Sheffels and the motion carried without dissent; Commissioner Hamlin abstained from voting.

B. June 25, 2008

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Lai. Second was by Commissioner Mathews and the motion carried without dissent; Commissioner Hamlin abstained from voting.

C. July 23, 2008

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Mathews. Second was by Commissioner Sheffels and the motion carried without dissent; Commissioner Hamlin abstained from voting.

12. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

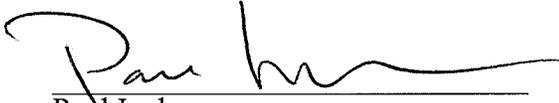
13. NEXT PLANNING COMMISSION

A. October 8, 2008

Mr. Inghram asked the Commissioners to bring to the meeting the information on deconstruction.

14. ADJOURN

Commissioner Orrico adjourned the meeting at 8:36 p.m.



Paul Inghram
Staff to the Planning Commission

1/7/09

Date



Vicki Orrico
Chair of the Planning Commission

1/7/09

Date