

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BEL-RED CORRIDOR PROJECT  
STEERING COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES

December 1, 2005  
4:00 p.m.

Highland Community Center  
General Purpose Room

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Mike Creighton, Co-Chair; Terry Lukens, Co-Chair; Joel Glass; Doug Matthews; Kurt White; Sue Baugh; Steve Dennis; Norm Hanson; Bill Ptacek; Dean Rebhuhn; Ken Schiring; Pat Sheffels; Kurt Springman; Laurie Tish

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Earl Overstreet; Eddie Pasatiempo

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Kevin O'Neill, Matt Terry, Michael Paine, Department of Planning and Community Development; Kevin McDonald, Goran Sparrman, Kris Liljeblad, Bernard van de Kamp, Tresa Berg, 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. The steering committee members took a moment to introduce themselves.

The agenda was approved by consensus.

**2. Approve Minutes from October 27 Steering Committee Meeting**

Motion to approve the minutes of the October 27 Steering Committee meeting was made by Mr. Dennis; second was by Mr. Ptacek and the motion carried unanimously.

**3. Discussion of Economic/Market Study Results to Date as Presented on October 27**

Strategic Planning Manager Kevin O'Neill offered a short presentation outlining the information contained in the economic/market report that was prepared by Leland Consulting Group and presented to the Steering Committee on October 27 by Rod Stevens. Slides were shown that outlined the existing land uses in the area, ownership patterns, and a map depicting the ratios of improvements to land value. It was noted that most of the parcels in the corridor have relatively low improvement values, most below 60 percent based on a conservative land value of \$15 per square foot. In reality, land values are much higher in much of the area, meaning the ratios are even lower.

Mr. O'Neill reminded the committee of some of the main findings from the work done to date by Leland Consulting Group, including a strong anticipated future market for office, housing and

retail through 2030. He noted that the office market alone is expected to require an additional 2.5 million to 3.9 million square feet of space. The committee was reminded of some of the conclusions reached thus far, namely that the area is centrally located; much of the land is underdeveloped based on current values; Overlake Hospital and Microsoft are key anchors on either side of the corridor; there has been limited reinvestment occurring in the area, evident by the fact that most of the buildings were constructed before 1990; and an anticipated strong future demand for housing and office uses.

Mr. Creighton opened the floor to discussion by the committee members.

Mr. Dennis asked if the office forecast means other areas with an office focus, such as the Downtown, will be running out of room in the future. Mr. O'Neill responded by saying the office forecast for the Bel-Red corridor is based on a review of the projected office market for the entire region and the Eastside and historic absorption rates. There is expected to be a great deal of future growth in other office markets, particularly the Downtown and Overlake.

Mr. Ptacek wondered about the potential for siting an educational institution in the Bel-Red corridor. Mr. O'Neill said the work to develop a land use forecast thus far has been focused on broad employment sectors, not specialized niches such as education uses. He allowed that the final report could be more specific.

Ms. Sheffels pointed out that Pacific Northwest Ballet has a school located in the study area.

Mr. Dennis suggested that educational uses should be something to consider when zoning is discussed.

Department of Planning and Community Development Director Matt Terry said the type of office development in the corridor may be determined by the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) allowed by the zoning. He explained that FAR is a measure of land use intensity and a reflection of the amount of building area relative to the size of a site. For the Bel-Red area, a FAR in between that of the Downtown and suburban office parks might be appropriate.

#### **4. Land Use Existing Conditions Report**

George Crandall and Don Arambula of Crandall Arambula introduced themselves and presented the work they have accomplished to date on existing land use conditions within the Bel-Red corridor. He noted that Crandall Arambula is located in Portland and has worked on light rail alignments in the Portland area, the Orenco Station development, and a number of downtown plans, including plans for Knoxville, Tennessee; Lincoln, Nebraska; Oak Park, Illinois; and Racine, Wisconsin. Work on a plan for Sante Fe, New Mexico is just underway.

Mr. Arambula said there are things in the study area worth saving and building on, such as the Highland Community Center. Some things are not thought of as much of an asset currently because they are underutilized; the railroad right-of-way is a good example.

Mr. Arambula said he has reviewed some of the city's regulatory and policy documents, including the Comprehensive Plan. The light industrial area, as spelled out in the Comprehensive Plan, presents a clear opportunity for rethinking the future use for the area. As changes in land use occur, the necessary regulatory revisions need to be considered to make it all work. The BROTS agreement certainly has an impact on the study area, as does development in adjacent jurisdictions, especially the decision by Microsoft to construct a couple million more square feet of office space.

One of the key indicators when considering transportation access and livability is the number of trips generated on a daily basis. Higher trip numbers and pedestrian orientation do not go hand in hand. Generally speaking, the cutoff beyond which people do not feel comfortable walking along a particular street is 20,000 trips per day. Accordingly, many of the streets in the Bel-Red corridor can be considered to be pedestrian unfriendly simply because of the traffic volumes; Bel-Red Road, NE 20<sup>th</sup> and 148<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE all fall into that category. The primary issue for the study area is the incomplete street grid which if in place would allow for multiple travel venues within the district. Because the grid is incomplete, the bulk of the trips are funneled onto a series of major and minor arterials, the result of which is high traffic volumes moving primarily north-south.

Mr. Arambula shared with the group a map indicating the location of current pedestrian and bicycle facilities in the study area. He allowed that the pattern is a reflection of the current land uses, most of which were developed with automobiles and trucks in mind. There never has been a desire to provide a lot of pedestrian access, especially connecting manufacturing areas, and as a result there are few sidewalks. Given the high traffic volumes in the area, any attempt to make the area more pedestrian and bicycle friendly will require an investment in sidewalks and bike facilities throughout the corridor.

With regard to the topography of the study area, Mr. Arambula allowed that there are both benefits and constraints. There are higher elevation areas that offer wonderful views toward the Downtown. Redevelopment of the area should take advantage of the view corridors in higher elevation areas to maximize the economic value of the land. These areas offer no particular advantages when seeking to develop auto services.

Land use decisions need to be informed by transportation. It will therefore be important to understand what is happening with Sound Transit with regard to routing and high-capacity transit technologies.

Mr. Arambula stated that knowing what the Comprehensive Plan says, what the zoning is, what the existing uses are, and about the local market will be of no particular use in developing a land use plan unless it can all be applied. He highlighted a number of parcels that can be labeled stable because they have recently constructed buildings on them, house uses that are unlikely to move for strategic reasons, have high land-to-improvement ratios, and have uses appropriate in buffer zones. There are within the study area soft parcels as well; soft parcels are vacant, have large surface parking lots, or have land-to-improvement ratios of 60 percent or less. There are also natural resource areas within the corridor that impact development; they include properties with areas constrained by streams, wetlands and steep slopes.

When the stable parcels and constrained properties are subtracted from the total, it can be seen that of the 900-acre study area about 400 to 450 acres may be suitable for redevelopment.

Mr. Crandall explained that the next steps will involve further review of the market and environmental information along with the inventory analysis to generate a sense of what the

demand might be and what land is available to look at in realistic terms. He said there will also be consideration given to the potential high-capacity transit alignments through the area; there is always more than one way to go, and a couple of routes have already been identified. The kinds of transit-supportive development that might be possible and where it could locate will be evaluated. With the number of soft parcels identified in the area, change is inevitable. The trick will be to get out in front of the market in order to shape the area rather than just letting change happen.

Mr. Dennis asked if the parcels not likely to change should be overlaid in the Comprehensive Plan with a wish list of desired future land uses. Mr. Arambula said the typical approach is to make suggestions for every part of the study area. Parcels that may be stable currently may not be stable 10 or 20 years into the future.

Mr. Ptacek asked what the process will be for determining high-capacity transit alignments and options. Mr. Arambula said there will be a series of recommendations developed for how transit might occur within the corridor; no definitive routes have been selected to date. Mr. O'Neill said Sound Transit is currently in the process of looking at alignments across I-90 connecting with Downtown, Overlake and beyond. They have and will continue to have the lead on a lot of that work. The hope is that the corridor planning effort will influence the thinking of Sound Transit vis-à-vis the Bel-Red corridor. The study will take into account land use, transportation and high-capacity transit, and environmental constraints in a cohesive manner. Mr. Arambula said Sound Transit will benefit from the study, especially if in the long run the area redevelops with densities and in a manner conducive to transit services.

Ms. Sheffels asked if the group can consider the private railroad right-of-way running through the study area as something the city can use in the future or as something that cannot be touched. Department of Transportation Director Goran Sparrman said King County has an exclusive agreement with Burlington-Northern/Santa Fe to acquire the right-of-way, which would bring it into the public domain. Just how the right-of-way will be used over time cannot be said with any degree of certainty; there are no specific plans in place for it yet.

Mr. Lukens asked if the potential locations for transit stations within the study area vary based on the type of high-capacity transit technology used. Mr. Arambula said the study will remain technology neutral, noting that the principles for transit-supportive development are similar regardless of the technologies used.

Mr. Rebhuhn asked if the Bel-Red corridor could be suitable to the development of several villages, such as an educational/library village in some place or a medical village near the hospital. Landowners want more density, and he suggested that there should be some incentives for constructing vertical housing in exchange for daylighting streams and preserving and enhancing natural areas. With light rail and buses traversing the corridor each village development could be interconnected. Mr. Crandall allowed that anything is possible and urged the committee members to voice ideas that could work for the area as the recommendations are being formed.

Answering a question asked by Ms. Baugh, Mr. Crandall explained that development must make sense without high capacity transit; whatever occurs in the area must be able to stand on its own without high capacity transit. The study is aimed at identifying appropriate land uses that can be supported by the market and that will create the kind of community the city wants; that will fit with transit as the process moves forward. In too many cases the development of transit infrastructure, including stations, has preceded land use development, and the result has been underused transit facilities. Transit alone is not enough to create communities, but communities

must be designed in ways that will accommodate transit.

Mr. Arambula said it is necessary to have a land use plan in hand that can be used to craft zoning to fit the vision. Transit is definitely linked to land use, but it is not a precursor. Mr. O'Neill agreed and voiced the notion that while transit serves land use, high-capacity transit is also an enabler for land use. Successful transit planning can and does drive certain types of land use development to happen. An entire land use plan should not, however, be based around transit facilities.

Mr. Sparrman said Sound Transit has for quite some time been planning for high-capacity transit facilities on the Eastside. Their intent is to have light rail or bus rapid transit serving Downtown Bellevue. Sound Transit envisions serving Overlake and Redmond either by running a line along SR-520 or Bel-Red Road. The study is intended to, among other things, inform the Sound Transit planning process while at the same time helping to solve the capacity problem currently experienced within the corridor. A recommendation from the committee should be in hand before Sound Transit seeks voter approval for Phase II. That is one reason why it appears planning for high-capacity transit is driving the corridor study, but the fact is the transit options will be developed with or without a land use plan for the Bel-Red corridor.

## **5. Summary of Findings from November 9 Workshop**

Senior Transportation Planner Kevin McDonald said some 63 persons attended the November 9 workshop. They viewed the display boards and talked with staff and each other about what they think about the corridor and its potential. A presentation was given by staff which was followed by small group discussions. Each small group was asked to respond to four specific questions: 1) Why are you interested in the Bel-Red corridor? 2) What do you like about the Bel-Red corridor? 3) What do you not like about the Bel-Red corridor? and 4) What opportunities for change do you see within the Bel-Red corridor?

Some said their interest in the Bel-Red corridor is in making sure the potential adverse impacts of redevelopment are considered. Several mentioned higher density as a negative in that it is equated with traffic impacts, especially on adjacent residential areas. Others pointed out the necessity of not losing sight of the myriad of transportation system needs in the area by focusing too much on high-capacity transit; they mentioned the need for local transit services, connectivity with other commercial areas, and the lack of ped/bike facilities. The need to enhance the environmental aspects of the area was often mentioned; there are some green areas within the corridor currently, and others could be created along the streams and the wetlands.

With regard to what they like about the current land uses in the Bel-Red corridor, most mentioned the diverse range of small businesses and the services not found elsewhere in the city; the uses listed include auto repair shops, print shops, furniture repair and dog grooming. The blue collar attitude of the area is appealing to many; it is not a Downtown highrise area nor is it a suburban office park, it is not very pretty but it works and it is close by. In highlighting what they do not like about the area, many said a facelift is needed; some of the uses are tired, some of the buildings are run down, and some of the infrastructure is wearing out. Many suggested that the industrial/commercial nature of the area is out of context with the rest of Bellevue.

The people suggested that the Bel-Red corridor offers an ideal location for promoting mixed use environments that include residential components. They held the view that it would be better to direct density toward the western side of the corridor rather than the eastern side where the bulk of the service uses are located. Bonus incentives should be offered to developers in order to get more housing constructed; the bonus incentives should be tied to obtaining open space and

enhancing the quality of the streams and wetlands in the area.

With regard to transportation, some highlighted the fact that the area is easily accessible from the freeway system, while others said the area is difficult to access from the freeway system. Many said they dislike the fact that it is difficult to walk or ride bicycles in the area, the fact that there are very few east-west roadway connections, and the fact that there is a lot of traffic spillover from the adjacent freeways onto the arterials. The need for enhancing the ped/bike system was mentioned by many; most especially pointed out the need for improved connections within the area and to regional parks and trails. Several outlined the possibility of providing transit hubs and clustering new development and redevelopment around mixed use structures, especially on the west side. Improving the overall roadway grid as a means of relieving congestion in the area was highly touted.

Mr. McDonald said the workshop attendees liked the fact that there are places within the corridor that have healthy and abundant vegetation, such as the mature trees along Bel-Red Road, and the vegetation that obscures the vast areas of parking that exist in the area. On the negative side, it was mentioned that there is an excessive amount of impervious surface area in the corridor that is causing flooding and water quality problems in addition to a lack of wildlife habitat. The list of opportunities for change relative to the environment included enhancing the natural functions of the streams and wetlands; some pointed out that Lake Bellevue is surrounded by hardtop parking areas.

Mr. O'Neill shared with the committee some of the comments that have been received as a part of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement scoping process. He indicated that the November 9 public meeting was held both to gather feedback from the broader community and to help scope the Environmental Impact Statement by outlining the issues people care about the most. Comment forms were made available at the meeting which can be filled out and returned; comments can also be submitted online.

Mr. O'Neill said one thing that came out very strongly with regard to land use is a general support for preserving the network of small businesses in the corridor that are valuable to Bellevue residents. The concern expressed most often was that redevelopment could increase land values and therefore price the small uses out of the area. Some suggested that the land use patterns within the corridor are generally okay, while others proposed the city should think big and take the opportunity to reinvent the whole area. There was some support voiced for the concept of mixed uses. Generally speaking, there has been support for broad change, especially in the western portion of the study area.

Regarding transportation issues, several have mentioned that Bel-Red Road is a good connector. Free parking in the area has been mentioned by many as a good thing. There has also been a lot of recognition of the access constraints and the limited ped/bike facilities extant in the area. Comments support for and concerns about high-capacity transit have been turned in.

There is far more unanimity regarding the environment and the fact that it is largely degraded.

Mr. O'Neill said the comment period for the Environmental Impact Statement will end on December 23. After that date a more detailed scoping report will be issued.

## **6. Discussion of Issues Discussed at November 9 Public Workshop**

Ms. Sheffels pointed out that finding an address in the area is both difficult and confusing, in part because signage is limited.

Mr. Ptacek asked if there is any way a land use plan can ensure the preservation of affordable space for small service businesses, noting that because change is inevitable within the corridor, the nature of the area could change to a large degree regardless of what a land use plan says. Mr. Crandall said the trick will be to shape the change in a manner that is consistent with the land use vision for the area.

With regard to creating people places within the area, Mr. Hanson suggested incorporating parks into the transportation facilities. He said putting a lid on SR-520 could create a place for a park with an excellent view while protecting the nearby neighborhoods.

Mr. White said the city has worked diligently over the years to connect all of its parks with trails. There are ample opportunities to connect park and open space land within the Bel-Red corridor to other areas.

Mr. Springman pointed out that if the service uses that currently exist in the corridor were to be priced out of the area by changing land use patterns they would tend to gravitate to more distant affordable areas such as Totem Lake and Kent. Bellevue residents would then have to drive further to get the services they need and that would change traffic patterns generally. There would be no net gain for the city if that scenario were to play out.

Mr. Ptacek commented that there is no other part of Bellevue in which such large amounts of land could be assembled for development and redevelopment. Accordingly, the area could be right for a use that needs a lot of land, such as an institution of higher education or a Microsoft-like campus. Uses of that sort could be very beneficial for the community as a whole.

Ms. Sheffels voiced support for retaining the small businesses that exist in the area. If taken as a whole and promoted in the way the Downtown and other commercial areas are, the area could greatly benefit economically.

Ms. Baugh concurred. She suggested the issue might be finding a way to give the area an identity and making sure the small service businesses are integral to the character of the area. If that were done, the other areas could be filled in with mid-rise office or residential uses.

Mr. Creighton thought the committee could benefit from having a map produced that shows the location of the various uses and businesses. Mr. O'Neill said staff has information in hand that could be used to develop a finer grain map. He agreed that there are services essential to Bellevue citizens that are located in the Bel-Red corridor and nowhere else in the community; they should be preserved at the very least and enhanced to the degree possible without negatively impacting the surrounding neighborhoods.

Mr. Springman pointed out that there are a lot of businesses in the area that cater to home design and decorating. The various uses are surprisingly connected by proximity.

Mr. Ptacek commented that a number of social service agencies are located in the Bel-Red corridor because the rents there are affordable. Those are also uses that are important to the community. Mr. White added that there are also schools that provide performing arts instruction in the area.

Mr. Springman observed that some large warehouse spaces are used for sports activities, many of which offer a huge draw for the community; they need big boxes to accommodate their products.

Ms. Tish said when she takes her daughter to the ballet school she is not able to go to Starbucks without driving there even though it is only a few blocks away. It seems ridiculous to have to drive, but the lack of sidewalks makes it necessary.

Mr. Dennis said there are some light industrial uses in the area that are not all that important to the residents of Bellevue; they may be willing to move, especially if redevelopment of the area will result in higher rents. Those types of uses would probably not even be missed, whereas the loss of the service businesses and social service agencies would have a negative impact.

Mr. Schiring pointed out the importance of avoiding actions that will tend to drive out uses. He said light industrial uses are important to the city. The owners of some of the industrial properties in the Bel-Red corridor are waiting to see what their opportunities will be if the zoning of the area changes. The residents of Bellevue may not know or even care that there is a warehouse in the Bel-Red corridor that supplies hydraulic fittings, but the people who work their care very much and are not anxious to see their jobs move out of town.

Mr. Lukens expressed a desire to be more open to opportunity. He said things change over time, pointing out that many of the uses that are currently housed in the Bel-Red corridor were at one time located in what is now the Downtown. The city should not pass over a golden opportunity to bring about positive change that will benefit the broader city by focusing too much on preserving the status quo.

Ms. Baugh agreed and suggested that one way to accomplish both goals would be to reconfigure the layout so that the small service businesses are accommodated but without taking up vast amounts of land. The study presents an excellent opportunity to look at the notion of mid-rise office and residential uses in the corridor. The growth the Downtown has seen is wonderful, but there are some companies that will never choose to locate in highrise structures. If the city fails to provide for a different product mix, it will lose the potential to have those companies in town.

Mr. Springman observed that in some areas, such as New York City, there are multistory industrial and warehouse uses. Ms. Baugh agreed and pointed out that as the land becomes denser it will become more valuable, and when that happen the city will have to focus on finding ways to provide small service businesses with affordable rents so they will be able to stay in town.

Mr. Ptacek pointed out that the Bel-Red corridor is regionally located about midway between the Microsoft campus and the University of Washington. It will become even more important as transit services are developed over time.

Mr. Matthews agreed and observed that the corridor is bordered on one end by a major medical institution and on the other end by Microsoft. Over time as the area develops it will be necessary to house a variety of support functions.

Mr. Dennis stressed the importance of remembering how the Bel-Red corridor fits into the regional picture.

Mr. Creighton agreed and reiterated the need to find a way to preserve the host of service businesses operating in the area. Mr. Rebhuhn suggested that under the village concept one of the villages could be focused on service businesses.

Mr. Creighton commented that regardless of the vision for the area developed by the city, it will

be the private sector that will build it. If Safeway sells to a party with a grand vision for a new land use for the site, it will probably happen. The area is a good location for a biotech focus, but in the end all the city can do is provide for the opportunities for development and redevelopment.

## **7. Next Meeting(s)**

### **A. January Meetings**

Mr. O'Neill said the focus for January will be on some of the more substantive topics, including land use, transportation, the environment, and high-capacity transit. The list is too long to be adequately addressed in a single meeting thus it might be necessary to conduct two meetings in the month.

There was agreement to schedule meetings for January 5 and January 19.

### **B. Tour of Study Area in December**

It was agreed to offer two tours of the study area for the committee members, the first on December 14 beginning at noon, and the second on December 19 beginning at 7:30 a.m.

## **8. Public Comment**

Mr. Todd Woosley spoke as owner of a property in the western section of the study area called Brierwood Center. He echoed the need for change in the corridor. Much of the area has been underperforming for many years. The private sector will make the vision for the area come about, but it will be necessary to have an FAR that will make redevelopment feasible, and it will be necessary to allow for a host of uses in line with the demands of the market. Transportation infrastructure will be critical to the redevelopment of the area. The city's concurrency standards are presently keeping some redevelopment from occurring. Recent zoning changes have allowed for a number of new uses, but some long-standing uses in the area are becoming functionally obsolete as the market changes.

## **9. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:51 p.m.