November 3, 2011
5:30 p.m. Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-108

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carrie Courter Blanton, Tom Bohman, Lindy Bruce, Dave Elliott, Jay Hamlin, Francois Larrivee, Rob Pucher, Rachel Solemsaas, Jim Stanton, John Stokes, Cynthia Welti

MEMBERS ABSENT: Mark Ludtka, Tom Perea

OTHERS PRESENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Franz Loewenherz, Transportation; Mike Bergstrom, Planning & Community Development

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. Call to Order

Co-Chair Larrivee called the meeting to order at 5:37 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes

A. September 29, 2011

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Ms. Welti. Second was by Ms. Bruce and the motion carried unanimously.

3. Public Comment – None

4. Refinement of Preliminary Preferred Alternative

A. Staff Report on October 18, 2011, Open House

Senior Planner Mike Bergstrom said the open house was held at the Robinswood Cabana on October 18, 2011. He noted that more attended the October open house than attended the May event, and most stayed for the entire time. In terms of community feedback, no surprises arose, and no strong themes were brought out. There were no adverse reactions to any particular part of the alternative, though there were concerns expressed by individuals about particular issues they face based on their own experiences with the corridor. Quite a few comments were made about the need to establish a sense of place and to improve the character of the corridor in general.

Co-Chair Larrivee agreed with the public comment that in the final report some focus should be given to making sure there is clarity as to why the study was done, especially in light of the fact that there is no real development occurring in the corridor. He also noted the comment offered about the relationship and connectivity between residential
development in the corridor and the school districts.

B. Modifications to Preliminary Preferred Alternative

*Land Use and Transportation Components*

Mr. Bergstrom drew attention to the Richards Valley district and noted that the vision is for little fundamental change. The emphasis would continue to be on light industrial uses but would also allow flex-tech uses to evolve there, which might affect building forms in some areas. Apart from that, the focus will include enhancing the natural systems in the area, and creating attractive and more pedestrian-friendly street frontages along the borders, primarily along Eastgate Way and Richards Road as new development occurs.

Co-Chair Larrivee asked if the green areas shown on the updated map are currently existing or planned to exist. Mr. Bergstrom said they depict the existing streams and wetlands.

Ms. Bruce commented that along Kamber Road where the flex-tech is shown and where there is already a certain amount of light industrial, there are old single family homes being used for commercial uses. Because there is single family housing across the street, a step-down approach to building form would be in order, with streetscaping and other adjustments along Kamber Road. She pointed out that it was traumatic for the neighborhood when the Chestnut Hill school went in on the south side of Kamber.

Mr. Stanton said that if the idea is to allow more density vis-à-vis flex-tech, the existing streams and wetlands could make it difficult if not impossible to achieve due to the associated regulations and requirements. He said he liked the proposal as outlined but was somewhat concerned about the realities of development in the area, and suggested that the final report be clear about what environmental constraints redevelopment in the area could face.

With regard to the King County site, Mr. Bergstrom said the focus is primarily on office development. He noted that in all areas where there is office there should be more flexibility in allowing support services, including retail. He said when the final report is written up, that notion will be captured. The intent is to allow height sufficient to gain visibility from the freeway, which would be in the eight- to twelve-story range, and an FAR that makes sense from a development standpoint, above 0.5 and possibly as high as 1.2, through an amenity bonus system. As in the other areas, development should be encouraged to protect and enhance the health of the streams, and the street frontage and landscaping should help create a setting that is friendly to pedestrians and bicyclists.

Mr. Bergstrom said the transit-oriented development center will serve as the focal point for the corridor. It would be the most intensely developed part of the corridor with a mix of uses, including office, commercial and residential with ground floor retail. A physical relationship would be created with Bellevue College. Redevelopment of the Lincoln Executive Center and surrounding properties that truly leverages and integrates the park and ride lot would be encouraged. Beginning with an allowed FAR of 0.5, an FAR of as much as 1.5 to 2.0 could be achieved through incentives, with building heights in the ten- to twelve-story range, streetscape improvements and pedestrian amenities. For the Bellevue College portion, a stronger entry should be created off of 148th Avenue SE as well as from the southwest corner. College-related uses anchoring the 148th Avenue SE entrance could also benefit the surrounding neighborhoods. In the transit-oriented development area, the recommendation should support reducing the parking requirements. The 142nd Place SE bridge will become a gateway element, though it would need to be improved for pedestrians and bus loading. The proposal includes an
interior pedestrian-oriented but drivable main street connecting to the park and ride.

Mr. Stanton asked if the proposed building heights and FAR are similar to the Bel-Red corridor. Mr. Bergstrom said the heights and FAR in Bel-Red are higher.

Mr. Elliott noted that the city of Auburn learned a great deal from its transit-oriented development. One thing they did was overestimate the amount of business the park and ride would generate for the surrounding businesses.

Ms. Solemsaas pointed out that with a viable connection between the business area and Bellevue College, the number of potential retail users would climb substantially beyond just what the park and ride traffic will bring in. Mr. Pucher commented that workers in the nearby office developments would also want to frequent the retail establishments. Ms. Bruce agreed as well and pointed out that the area would be much easier to access than Factoria from the neighborhoods to the north.

Mr. Stanton noted that there are arguments on both sides of the parking ratio issue. He said four to five stalls per thousand square feet is a market-accepted ratio. If the area is truly to be focused on high-capacity transit, traffic will be drawn off of I-90 to park in or around the garage and access transit heading for their destination. An argument could be made for a model that includes paying for commercial parking as the area becomes dense; that would bring about more sufficient parking for the transit piece and for the entertainment/restaurants piece. The city should avoid being too draconian in trying to change behaviors by reducing the required parking ratios. Mr. Bergstrom said the approach he envisioned would not force down the parking ratios but would allow them to be lowered should a developer elect to do so.

Mr. Bohman agreed that trying to force a lower parking ratio does not match with where the market is currently and for the foreseeable future. It could be quite a few years before light rail reaches the spot, and in the meantime transit will be provided by buses and office workers and the like will continue to drive to their jobs and need a place to park. There is already precedent for paying for parking along the I-90 corridor; the higher end office buildings have pay parking as the norm.

Ms. Solemsaas pointed out that Bellevue College implemented its parking fee system, beginning with the fall quarter. The cost is $65 per quarter for students, and $15 per quarter for faculty and staff.

Turning to the Sunset Village area, Mr. Bergstrom noted that the CAC has acknowledged that the car dealers there have value to the city. However, should the dealers for whatever reason choose to move out of the area, the backup plan includes a greater mix of office and retail uses, with restaurants, food stores and other community based businesses, including specialty shops, all on a lower height scale. Redevelopment should include substantial pedestrian and bicycle access and landscaping improvements, and it may require a somewhat higher FAR. Should the auto dealerships leave the area and the properties become available for redevelopment, some internal circulation should be included. The intersections of 148th Avenue SE and 150th Avenue SE at Eastgate Way would be improved, and improvements in the form of a boulevard treatment are envisioned for 148th Avenue SE. The Eastgate interchange would be enhanced with naturalistic landscaping.

Mr. Stanton asked if the State of Washington is on board with enhancing the interchange landscaping. Mr. Loewenherz said it is consistent with their desire but they do not have the money for installation or maintenance. Mr. Stanton suggested the project should be
added to the list of incentives in addition to the traditional package of incentives. Mr. Loewenherz said the CAC’s discussion in December will include implementation strategies. One of the concepts that will be highlighted is partnership opportunities that have worked in other parts of the country.

Mr. Bergstrom said the I-90 Office Park district involves the cluster of office uses that includes Boeing, Advanta, Verizon, and the Eastgate Office Park. The vision calls for creating some additional development capacity in the area. While largely developed currently, the developments all have a fairly low FAR. There are some surface parking areas that could possibly support infill. It is unlikely much redevelopment will occur in the near- to mid-term.

Mr. Bohman noted from the text that consideration would be given to increasing the FAR for the area as market demand opportunities arise and asked what the trigger would be. Mr. Bergstrom said the triggers could be other areas filling up, or additional market studies. Mr. Bohman said the area would support more intense office uses; there are large surface parking lots, and some of the existing buildings could be torn down and replaced with larger buildings over time. He said he would prefer to be specific about preparing the area for redevelopment rather than to include language saying that maybe it will happen and maybe it will not.

Mr. Bergstrom said FAR has an effect on building height. As currently envisioned with an FAR kept at 0.5, building heights would be in the four- to five-story range.

Mr. Elliott pointed out that the buildings in the area are not yet nearing the end of their life cycles. They are good buildings that are still very functional and they have good tenants. He added that when newer buildings start coming online, older buildings become more difficult to lease, especially as they begin to look outdated and their maintenance costs rise.

Mr. Stanton said he would be more comfortable with setting an upper limit but including some threshold beyond which performance steps must be taken.

Mr. Bergstrom said the document acknowledges that the park at the old Bellevue Airfield will happen at some point in the future, though the master plan is not yet fully approved. The park will help to strengthen other pedestrian connections. Along 156th Avenue SE the pedestrian connections to business areas need to be improved.

Ms. Bruce commented that local circulation serving the retail uses is not the best. She asked if some alternative way of getting to the retail could be established. Mr. Bergstrom speculated that if the retail uses currently at Sunset Village get displaced in the future, some might choose to relocate along 156th Avenue SE.

With regard to the Eastgate Plaza area, Mr. Bergstrom noted that the CAC had expressed an interest in a variety of uses, particularly uses sensitive to and which serve the surrounding neighborhoods. Toward the east it makes sense to shift the emphasis from retail to office, hotel, or a civic use.

Mr. Stanton noted that the CAC had had discussions about the need for connectivity and vehicular access internally through the immediate area. He said the area is clunky at best and a better solution is needed, be it a grid or something else.

Mr. Bergstrom said building heights for the area are assumed to be in the range of four to six stories.
Co-Chair Hamlin said he thought in the southern portion the height should be limited to two or three stories given the adjacent residential uses.

Mr. Stanton asked if the idea is to allow the neighborhoods to look over the top of the buildings. He asked what the expectation of the neighborhood is relative to what is on the ground in the area already and what they would like to see in the future. Mr. Elliott suggested that the residents do not want to look at the back side of office buildings. At the same time, the neighborhood likely will be happy if the services they want are retained, even if there is a little more height allowed.

Co-Chair Hamlin said because access in the area is limited, it is unlikely the area could support more density.

Mr. Owen with Makers said consideration was given to building configurations on the Eastgate Plaza lot. He said there is the possibility of putting residential on top of the commercial uses given the way the topography works. Co-Chair Hamlin said that approach would be far more appealing. Mr. Stokes said the approach would prevent the creation of a canyon effect as the other side goes higher.

Mr. Bergstrom said the vision articulated by the CAC for the Factoria area is of a more intense mix of commercial and residential uses, with multistory commercial buildings including residential and mixed use on the south side of the area facing away from the freeways. The CAC discussed in particular the area to the east of the Newport Corporate Center and whether or not there is room for additional infill of office buildings. The conclusion reached was that there is a character break west of the Newport Corporate Center where there is a fair amount of retail and where it might make sense to introduce some residential. The area to the east will likely want to keep its office focus, though it should also allow for retail, services, and residential. An improved transit hub should be developed along Factoria Boulevard, and the urban village concept that grew out of the Factoria study a few years ago should be built on.

Mr. Loewenherz said the CAC has been clear about its desire to see both of the interchange gateways, Eastgate and Lakemont, enhanced, partly through incentivizing partnership activities.

Mr. Loewenherz noted that at the December meeting the CAC will move into focusing on implementation strategies. He said that throughout the project the CAC has been made aware that the financial picture is constrained. The array of transportation projects identified is fairly conservative, fiscally-speaking. Many of the projects considered early in the study have fallen off; most were big-ticket items fraught with environmental issues. There is an interest on the part of the Council and some of the CAC members about the need for specificity regarding the timing and cost of some of the projects prior to the December meeting. Planning level cost ranges for all of the transportation projects will be developed. The projects likely to be competitive in the next cycle of the Transportation Facilities Plan update will be costed out with a greater degree of specificity, including intersection improvements I-2, I-3 and I-4. The improvements could take the form of a roundabout or a widened arterial. The proposal is to capture TFP-195, a project in the current Transportation Facilities Plan, as part of the I-4 project. The proposal also includes updating the numbers for TFP-154, the southbound lanes on 148th Avenue SE, and grouping projects P-2 and P-3.

With regard to I-1, Mr. Loewenherz said the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway trail is seen as a different item. The design work for Greenway trail project (G-1) is about to get
underway, and some cost numbers will flow from that work. Realistically, by itself I-1 is a limited ticket item and logically should be integrated with project G-1.

Mr. Stanton asked if the selected projects meet the intent of balancing improvements to helping traffic get through Eastgate and helping traffic get through the neighborhood.

Ms. Bruce said the question is a good one, pointing out that the neighborhood highlighted transportation and the need to be able to get around as their top priority. She agreed that I-1 would fit better with the trail, but B-2 and the roundabouts on 150th Avenue SE would be most beneficial to the neighborhood. Mr. Loewenherz said the reason behind not including the B projects was that they realistically are feasible to implement as part of the overlay program.

Mr. Loewenherz stressed the partnership projects will be identified as such in the implementation strategy.

Co-Chair Larrivee commented that the 142nd Place SE bridge is intended to make a statement about entry into the area. He asked why that project should not be included on the list as a potential TFP project. Mr. Loewenherz agreed that both the 142nd Place SE and the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway trail projects were among the most important projects in terms of offering the public mobility options. The projects, however, involve too many other players to be included in the TFP, which is primarily the city’s work program.

C. Corridor Character

Parks and Open Space, Gateway Expression, Pedestrian Character/Amenities, Boulevard Expression, Corridor Greening, Neighborhood Identity, Building Form

John Owen with Makers commented that to date character has not been a central theme of the study. However, with the larger pieces gelling it is a good time to talk about character. He said the landscape firm HBB, which has expertise in freeway and street landscaping, is on the team. The team is focused on the “City In A Park” motto, which brings to mind green features, integration with the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway, the gateways, and overall identity for the corridor and specific areas within it. Although the portion of the consultant contract targeted toward landscape design is limited, renderings or plans for certain concepts could be developed to show what the various concepts might look like.

Mr. Owen offered a range of six concepts from which two or three could be selected for additional graphic portrayal, including:

1. Green selected streets with boulevard and landscape improvements.
2. Protect and enhance aquatic systems and wooded areas to improve ecological functions and create a green backdrop.
3. Create higher intensity and higher visibility urban focus around transit center.
5. Incorporate Mountains to Sound Greenway Trail as a visual and physical connector.

Mr. Owen agreed that visibility is very important to local property and business owners, and planting a temperate rain forest will not further that goal, so that will need to be kept in mind in determining what makes sense visually and environmentally in terms of freeway landscaping.
Mr. Loewenherz said one of the thoughts that came out of an earlier discussion was the notion of having the I-90 Office Park complex be allowed greater density while keeping in mind the need for visibility. He suggested one rendering could be the view from I-90 toward the office park complex, showing how added density along with green elements might play out. Mr. Owen reiterated that with limited resources it will not be possible to create too many renderings, which makes it necessary for the CAC to identify the most important elements.

Ms. Bruce said she would put 142nd Place SE on the list given that it is a major gateway area.

Ms. Courter Blanton said she would like to see how the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway trail could be incorporated along with additional trees and still allow for sufficient visibility to local businesses.

Mr. Bohman stated that he felt a “sense of arrival” needs to be created.

Co-Chair Larrivee pointed out that the CAC had not yet had a discussion about how green the corridor should be. He said on the one hand, having lots of trees, even if they hide certain uses, has a certain appeal, while on the other hand giving the built environment a more striking presence could be better for the corridor. Mr. Owen commented that the transit-oriented development area will certainly be highly visible, as will the highrise office complexes in Factoria.

Ms. Welti said she had no illusions of creating a forest within the corridor. Cities are built environments and as such are exciting, but they do need to be attractive, and they can be made that way by adding greenery.

Mr. Stanton said he is comfortable with the fact that the city already does a good job with boulevard and landscape improvements to green roadways, and with protecting and enhancing aquatic systems and wooded areas (concepts #1 and 2, above). He said for him the most important areas to focus on are the transit-oriented development hub (concept #3), landscape/pedestrian/bicycle improvements and the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway (concepts #4 & 5), and freeway interchange landscaping (concept #6).

Co-Chair Hamlin said his top choices are concepts #3 & 6, but also feels a combination of concepts #4 & 5 is good. Concept #2 is good, but a lower priority, and concept #1 would be his lowest priority.

Mr. Owen pointed out that following a treed approach will have some implications for visibility vis-à-vis the view from I-90 to surrounding businesses. He agreed that the various uses will want to be seen, but areas can certainly be framed by trees.

Mr. Stanton said he was less concerned with view issues in the west end where the uses are largely offices. In those areas where there will be retail uses, visibility will be critical.

Mr. Bohman suggested that a “sense of arrival” image could show taller buildings behind the trees, in the area of the I-90 office park.

Ms. Solemsaas felt that careful selection of landscape materials along the Mountains to Sound Greenway trail is important, in order to avoid root damage to the pathway or obstructions to users.
Ms. Welti noted that the easiest opportunity for creation of a gateway is the 142<sup>nd</sup> Avenue bridge. She would like something expressive to convey a sense of arrival.

Mr. Owen said the whole green notion and the concept of visibility is difficult to portray verbally. He said the team would do what they can graphically to make things clearer.

Ms. Courter Blanton said she agrees with Ms. Welti’s comments regarding the 142<sup>nd</sup> bridge.

5. Adjourn

Co-Chair Larrivee adjourned the meeting at 7:37 p.m.