CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

February 26, 2014
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Tebelius, Commissioners Carlson, Hamlin, Hilhorst, Laing, deVadoss

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Ferris

STAFF PRESENT: Paul Inghram, Erika Conkling, Department of Planning and Community Development

GUEST SPEAKERS: Lisa Grueter, BERK

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:38 p.m. by Chair Tebelius who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Hamlin, who arrived at 6:47 p.m., Commissioner Carlson, who arrived at 6:54 p.m., and Commissioner Ferris, who was excused.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Laing. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hilhorst and it carried unanimously.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

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

6. STAFF REPORTS – None

7. STUDY SESSION

A. Comprehensive Plan Update

Comprehensive Planning Manager Paul Inghram noted that in past meetings the Commission has discussed the issue of light industrial land (LI) in the city. There are also a couple of policies in the current Comprehensive Plan about LI, including one that talks about the need for a general review of the uses and the locations. The Comprehensive Plan update provides the opportunity to take a citywide look at the issues.

Lisa Grueter, a land use planner with BERK, a public policy firm, said her company was retained by the city to help Bellevue with its economic development strategies, part of which has involved taking a closer look at the city's LI lands.

Mr. Inghram said Bellevue's vision to have light industrial and manufacturing uses dates back to the 1920s, but most of it never came about. Factoria's name stems from the notion of locating factories there, though only one factory was ever built there. LI zones were developed over time, however, primarily along the Burlington Northern/Sante Fe corridor. The LI-zoned land adjacent to the airport in Eastgate was rezoned to Office/Limited Business-Open Space as a way of transferring open space density credits to the development site. The western portion of the Bel-Red corridor was originally zoned LI but recently was rezoned to a variety of different Bel-Red zones. The Eastgate/Richards Valley area still has some land zoned LI.

Ms. Grueter said one issue BERK has focused on is where light industrial lands fit in the regional context. In 2012 manufacturing had more jobs than in the pre-recession years, and while most were in aerospace other manufacturing sectors were strong as well. Regionally, the land zoned for manufacturing, warehousing and distribution are recognized in the Vision 2040 plan. As the uses trend more toward distribution, larger parcels of land are needed, most of which are in the Kent valley and in Pierce County. Put into the regional context, Bellevue's light industrial lands do not figure significantly. The largest concentration of light industrial land currently in Bellevue is in the Richards Valley, but as land values rise market pressure is pushing toward changes to other uses.

Chair Tebelius asked if land in areas zoned for LI has lower market value. Ms. Grueter said in talking with brokers she was led to believe that the land in the Richards Valley is encumbered with a network of critical areas and small parcels which make it difficult to access and difficult to assemble the land into sufficiently large parcels. Accordingly, the highest and best use is still LI. For other LI areas in the city that have good visibility and good access, most of which are surrounded by residential, office or other uses, the LI zoning becomes questionable. Bellevue's strength's clearly, are in arenas other than industrial, particularly information and technology, business services, retail, and tourism.

Commissioner deVadoss asked why healthcare was not included as one of Bellevue's strengths. Ms. Grueter allowed that the services category, which includes healthcare, continues to be a strong sector for Bellevue.

Commissioner Laing pointed out that notwithstanding the Bel-Red plan and zoning, the corridor is still predominantly a light industrial area. The only thing keeping new businesses in very affordable existing buildings is the zoning requirements. A five-year look back at the zoning will be undertaken in 2014. He asked why the BERK report did not include Bel-Red as a light industrial area, and how the analysis would change if the look back recommendation relative to the zoning in the corridor were to remove the nonconformity provisions to allow for market-driven redevelopment. Mr. Inghram said the scope under which BERK is working involves only those areas that are zoned LI. He clarified that the uses in Bel-Red are explicitly not nonconforming and as such are free to continue in perpetuity. Many of the buildings that stand empty and which are having a difficult time finding new tenants are in fact in General Commercial (GC) zones. In the Bel-Red corridor, the uses in the LI zones are essentially Coca Cola, Safeway, the International Paper site, Cadman, and the two King County Metro properties.

Commissioner Laing called attention to a statement made on page 22 of the BERK report about light industrial uses not being a focus of the draft economic development strategy and asked if that is as a result of Council direction. Mr. Inghram said it really is tied to the fact that the predominance of economic activity in Bellevue is not in the industrial category. The Council's work is continuing so their direction could evolve. Commissioner Laing allowed that the existing LI uses in the Bel-Red corridor, whether located in LI zoning or GC zoning, are allowed to continue. However, if the city has an interest in having light industrial uses, and if the bulk of the land and facilities suitable to light industrial uses is in the Bel-Red corridor, the fact that the existing zoning in most cases precludes a new light industrial use from opening. Mr. Inghram clarified that the zoning in Bel-Red allows new light industrial uses to locate in buildings vacated by light industrial uses.

Commissioner Hilhorst asked if storage businesses are categorized as LI or commercial. Mr. Inghram said they actually can be allowed in either LI or GC zones and that allowed uses for LI are not much different from the GC zone.

Commissioner Hilhorst commented that the city's plans for the future focus on more urban housing. It is unlikely, however, that people are going to want to give up their RVs, boats and other toys even if they live where they can store those things. As a result, people are going to need storage uses nearby, and those uses could need a light industrial zoning in which to locate. Ms. Grueter agreed there will be a local need to preserve opportunities for storage uses and areas in which businesses can form and grow. LI and GC areas will certainly be needed. While their value may not be high from a regional perspective, they certainly have local value.

Ms. Grueter called attention to Exhibit 12 in the BERK report and reviewed with the Commissioners the percentage of building space that houses industrial uses in each of the city's five LI areas. She noted that other uses include office, retail, school and other. She suggested the range of zoning options includes retaining the existing LI zoning; expanding the zone to create more opportunity for industrial uses; retaining the existing areas where there is currently a critical mass; reviewing the uses allowed in the zone and allowing for some additional flexibility; and consolidating the GC and LI areas into a single zone given the similar mix of uses allowed in each zone.

Mr. Inghram commented that even in the Bel-Red corridor there is insufficient light industrial land available to house large warehouse operations, so being competitive at the regional level is unlikely. However, there could still be interest in or demand for small craft manufacturing or warehouse and storage uses. There is no reliable method for calculating industrial and/or manufacturing jobs in proportion to population. Some future companies may have as their primary focus professional services with thousands of high-tech employees but they may want lab space in a light industrial area, and having that option available close at hand may in fact be key in deciding where to locate their main operation.

Commissioner Hilhorst expressed the view that once the LI areas are gone from Bellevue, there will be no getting them back.

Commissioner Laing said there are uses that are typically associated with light manufacturing that provide value to the community in a number of ways. They certainly are one element of a diverse and healthy local economy. In talking about LI uses, however, there is a tension between flexibility and compatibility. The GC zone is more encompassing in terms of allowed uses, but allowing manufacturing uses in it could create compatibility issues. He said of the zoning

options outlined in the BERK report, options 4 and 5 were the most appealing to him. In the end it will all come down to how things are permitted, outright or by conditional use. The focus should be on what should be done to merge the concepts of options 4 and 5 to allow for both flexibility and compatibility.

Mr. Inghram said the zoning options represent the range of possibilities. If the intent is to increase flexibility for the LI zone, that could allow for more of the uses the community wants, such as auto rebuild and storage units, but it could mean a slow withering of space for actual manufacturing uses.

Commissioner Laing said under the Growth Management Act land for uses such as mining and logging can be preserved and when they are neighboring property owners receive notice that they will not be allowed to complain about those activities. If the issue of allowing for light manufacturing uses is that they are not always compatible with other uses, a similar approach could be implemented by the city. Mr. Inghram stressed that where compatibility is the issue, the specific range of issues will need to be kept in mind. Where something like a rendering plant may not be appropriate, a woodworking operation might be.

Commissioner deVadoss stressed the need for the city to retain its investment in the LI zone as manufacturing practices change in the coming years with 3D printers and other new technologies. If 20 years out the city has not preserved areas appropriate to the new manufacturing approaches, there will be challenges to be faced. Space will particularly needed to house companies that do design work.

Chair Tebelius commented that allowing LI uses gives the city character.

Mr. Inghram briefly reviewed with the Commissioners each of the five LI-zoned areas and the mix of uses currently in them.

Commissioner Hilhorst asked about the proposed Sound Transit maintenance operation in the Bel-Red corridor. Mr. Inghram said it is located in an area zoned for office development and is not directly adjacent to any existing LI property and as such will not negatively impact LI properties or uses.

Chair Tebelius asked if Sound Transit can force the city to allow the maintenance operation in a non-LI zone. Mr. Inghram allowed that they can.

With regard to the LI site along I-405 near SE 8th Street, which it was noted is mostly owned by the state, Commissioner Laing suggested that in looking to the future, the Commission should avoid taking any action that would create or perpetuate a nonconformity. Additionally, any action taken should allow for the maximum amount of flexibility. He said he was generally in favor of simply merging the LI and GC zones into a single designation and dealing with any potentially incompatible uses through the conditional use permit process.

Commissioner Hilhorst said her only fear in taking that approach would be in regard to what potential uses might get lost in translation. If the change is made, there will be no going back. Commissioner Laing said rather than rezoning the LI properties to GC, everything allowed in LI and everything allowed in GC should simply be folded into a single zone; nothing would be lost, and any use that could potentially be incompatible would be addressed through conditional use.

Chair Tebelius said her concern was that the approach could 20 years down the line lead to all LI uses being subsumed by GC uses and the city will have no LI uses at all. Commissioner Laing said that may very well occur, but it would be the market that decides.

With regard to the LI property in Richards Valley on which the King County Humane Society is located, Chair Tebelius said the organization is known nationally for the work they are doing. Additionally, they are currently undertaking a fundraising project that will redevelop their facilities at a cost of millions of dollars. The LI zoning on the site should be retained.

Mr. Inghram reminded the Commissioners that the Eastgate/I-90 CAC recommended that the LI zoning for the Richards Valley area should be retained but some flexibility should be added to allow for flex-tech and research and development uses that might be associated with Bellevue College.

Commissioner Hilhorst commented that nearly every building in the area is being fully used, which might be an argument against making any changes. Certainly nothing needs to be done to help full the spaces.

Mr. Inghram said the economic development policies will be before the Commission again at a future meeting. Time could be taken at the same meeting to talk more about strategies for the LI zone. At the Comprehensive Plan level the Commission could include policy direction aimed at assessing the uses, flexibility and compatibility of the Light Industrial zone.

Commissioner deVadoss asked Ms. Grueter what, if anything, surprised her as a result of her analysis. Ms. Grueter said she was most surprised to see just how close the LI and GC zones are relative to allowed uses. There was nothing surprising in terms of the data itself.

6. Eastgate/I-90 Area Plan

Senior Planner Erika Conkling said the Eastgate/I-90 CAC recommended a mix of office and commercial zoning, and a little more building height, for the LI-zoned King County site. The site is not currently housing industrial uses and it is separated from the Richards Valley by the topography. Its proximity to the freeway makes some types of industrial uses undesirable. For the rest of the Richards Valley LI areas, the CAC recommended preserving industrial uses while allowing flex-tech and research and development uses to locate there. Adding zoning flexibility could help the market to be more responsive in the area.

Councilmember Stokes noted that the CAC also discussed enhancing the natural areas that exist because the topography makes them unusable for development. Chair Tebelius said anything that could be done to make the area "softer" would benefit the area.

Ms. Conklin said the LI area that is part of the Lincoln Executive Center has been recommended by the CAC to be part of the transit-oriented development. While the site is zoned LI, the concomitant zoning agreement in place actually strips away most of the allowed LI uses. The site is currently used primarily for offices. The BERK report agrees with the recommendation of the CAC that the site should become part of the transit-oriented development.

Commissioner Laing commented that it would be incompatible with the recommendation of the CAC to expand the LI uses that were stripped away under the concomitant zoning agreement put in place in the 1980s for the Lincoln Executive Center site. Clearly the site was never intended

to develop as LI and obviously it has not. To fulfill the CAC's vision, the Commission should not suggest the site should be retained or treated as LI zoning.

Commissioner Hamlin agreed. He said for all the reasons cited, it makes no sense to try to hold onto the LI designation for those properties.

Chair Tebelius asked what will need to be done to put the CAC's recommendation into play. Ms. Conkling said it will be necessary to change the map for the four parcels in question.

Ms. Conklin noted that the Commission previously touched on the topic of design and site planning policies when it addressed the recommendations for each of the individual areas in Eastgate. She stressed that site planning and design are very important to the character of an area. One of the major recommendations of the CAC was to create a corridor identity; to carry out that direction it will be necessary to incorporate specific policy language for each of the subareas within the corridor. She noted that her memo to the Commission was specific with regard to which policies need to be amended. The general design direction for the entire corridor included incorporation of the Mountains To Sound Greenway and City in a Park elements and themes. The CAC also gave direction that the buildings that face I-90 should be iconic, and that Eastgate should be enhanced as a gateway into the city. The CAC recommendations included pursuing opportunities to enhance the visual quality of the corridor using vegetation, green spaces and building design.

Answering a question asked by Chair Tebelius about the Mountains To Sound Greenway, Ms. Conkling said the greenway itself involves the entire corridor from the beginning of I-90 to Ellensburg and is a scenic byway. The section of the greenway trail that will run through Bellevue is proposed to be located on the south side of I-90 and is just one component of the byway. The segment of the trail between Factoria and 150th Avenue SE is in the early design stage.

Ms. Conkling said one of the CAC's general recommendations was to go through the concomitant zoning agreements of which there are close to two dozen. The agreements range from the 1970s to the 2000s. Some of the design and site planning conditions have been included in the code, but policy language to address them might be in order.

The Factoria subarea has very good design policies that were done as part of the Factoria Area Transportation Study. Some of the policy language should be amended, however, to make sure the area is designed both for visibility from I-90 and to accommodate a pedestrian scale. In the Richards Valley, policy language is needed to promote sensitive building design and buffering from single family uses. A new policy is needed to assure that whatever happens on the King County site should add to the visual quality of the area and be well designed.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Hamlin, Ms. Conkling said she did not include in the matrix the notion of policy language aimed at daylighting streams. Policies similar to those for Bel-Red would be appropriate, as well as language addressing opportunities for enhancement that could include removing culverts or allowing streams to flow more naturally.

Ms. Conkling said the huge transit-oriented development area in Eastgate is going to be something new and as such will need policy language. It will also be important to highlight the need for suitable internal circulation systems for all modes of travel as the larger parcels redevelop, as well the need to ensure connections with regional systems.

Attention was given next to floor area ratio (FAR). In simple terms, FAR is simply the building area divided by the site area, though the building area excludes the parking and mechanical equipment, and the site area usually excludes rights-of-way, though in most easements and critical areas are not excluded. The Commissioners were shown how a an FAR of 2.0 could result in either a low, flat building or a tall, skinny building.

Eastgate is being viewed as a redevelopment area, but that will not necessarily mean tearing down existing buildings; it could mean new infill development, or a partial tear down and rebuild. In thinking of allowing larger buildings, consideration must be given to impacts on views, light and glare, and visual dominance. Topography must also be taken into account.

Ms. Conkling said the base and maximum FAR varies throughout the city, as does allowed height. Currently in Eastgate the maximum is an FAR of 0.5 and a height of 45 feet. The CAC has proposed different FARs for different parts of the corridor. Bel-Red has a maximum FAR of 4.0 and an allowed height of 150 feet, and in the downtown the FAR can be as high as 8.0 and building heights can reach 450 feet.

Mr. Inghram said the city uses FAR to calculate the intensity of the office use, not to calculate the building envelope. He noted that quick mental calculations of building height and massing for a known FAR can lead to the wrong impression of how FAR translates to a building. The Commissioners were shown photos of a number of buildings, including both commercial and residential, and were asked to guess the actual FAR of each; in most cases the guesses were higher than the actual FAR.

7. COMMUNITY VISION

Mr. Inghram noted that the Commission first discussed the issue of community vision in June 2012. He explained that the vision sets a unified tone for the entire city by mapping out what the city wants to be, where it wants to go, and a roadmap for getting there. The vision as stated in the current Comprehensive Plan has served the city well and should not just be thrown away. The community outreach done as part of the Comprehensive Plan update has pointed out that Bellevue residents like the city and moved to it for a reason.

Ms. Conkling said outreach efforts have been under way for well over a year and began with a series of scoping meetings where the focus was on four specific areas: community, environment, family and business. The joint commissions forum served as one of the scoping meetings and the common themes that came out of that meeting had to do with economic growth, recognizing diversity, and environmental protection. The public forum hosted by the East Bellevue Community Council served as another scoping meeting and the common themes that emerged there included affordable housing, managing storm water, increased mobility and transportation, and green spaces/open spaces/parks. The Bellevue's Best Ideas interactive online site generated a lot of discussion about improved mobility, quality neighborhoods, and economic development. People were allowed to vote on other people's ideas, and the top ideas that came out of that exercise had to do with alternative transportation options, creation of a downtown performing arts center, a children's museum, super fast internet connections, and the creation of third place neighborhood gathering places.

A review of the current vision statement yielded 54 potential vision statements in six different categories. Six different workshops were conducted where people were asked to identify which

of the statements is most important to them, what they like about the statements, and what it will take the most effort to accomplish. In the natural and sustainable category, people generally supported broad ideas involving environmental stewardship, retaining natural settings, retaining the City in a Park idea, and having lots of transportation options. In the design for people category, it was clear that the community should be built on both physical and social connections that link people together. They indicated a desire for diverse housing types and housing affordability, and complete neighborhoods with gathering spaces, parks and shops, all within reach.

In the category of strong economic centers, people were in favor of flourishing active centers in the downtown, Bel-Red, Eastgate and Factoria. They also highlighted the importance of continuing the city's high standard of living and quality education, supporting small businesses, having local neighborhood services and shopping centers, and diversity as an economic asset. With regard to the arts, culture and diversity category, the participants said they see Bellevue as a regional and international leader in arts and culture. They focused on Bellevue as being a great place for those who live here, but not necessarily a tourist destination. They also suggested that diversity as a theme should be woven into all areas of the Comprehensive Plan, not just in arts and culture.

The healthy and secure community category generated comments about housing affordability, maintaining a low crime rate, making sure the community is healthy and prepared for emergencies, and continued support for human services in the community. With regard to the aspirational government category, people expressed a desire to have an open, inclusive and accessible government, continued maintenance of existing facilities and infrastructure, and partnerships and collaboration in the way the city conducts business.

Mr. Inghram said the current vision has several different sections. The intent is not to start over with the update, but there should be a recognition of current conditions, interests and values as well as a future orientation. The vision should be both aspirational and realistic. It should be meaningful, representative and memorable. The difficult part will be in finding the balance between being broad and specific to Bellevue. The current version of the vision is overly long and overly descriptive of Bellevue as it currently exists as opposed to being an aspirational statement of direction for the city. There is also not a clear linkage between the vision and the rest of the Comprehensive Plan. Missing from the current vision statement is an emphasis on people; Bellevue response to regional and global environmental issues; any recognition of the non-downtown commercial centers; the issue of neighborhood connectivity; a focus on diversity beyond an arts and culture viewpoint; and an emphasis on schools. The list of challenges to be addressed included the fact that most of Bellevue's future growth will be focused in the downtown; the population is becoming more diverse and the population of older citizens is increasing; the city is globally connected; light rail is coming to Bellevue; the cost of housing continues to be an issue for many; and the desire for residents to preserve and improve the environment and include park opportunities in the fact of a city that is becoming more urban.

Mr. Inghram asked the Commissioners to review and comment on the draft vision statement included in the packet relative to whether or not it generally represents the character of Bellevue, is aspirational, and is unique to Bellevue. He also asked for comments on issues that may be missing from the draft.

Chair Tebelius stressed that words matter when it comes to outlining a vision for the city. She objected to the use of the phrase "...some neighborhoods retain their unique character..." and to

references that families will be living in highrises in the downtown. The fact that Bellevue's population is aging means there will be more homes in Bellevue's neighborhoods available for families with children. Mr. Inghram said the intent is to show there is a wide range to Bellevue's families; there are families living in highrises, and there are elderly living in single family homes.

Commissioner Hamlin said he had no problem with the language as proposed. He allowed that some tweaks may be in order but they should be made only after careful contemplation and additional discussion.

Commissioner deVadoss said the vision statement needs to be very concise. It should focus simply on themes and principles.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Chair Tebelius said the Commission could benefit from having an education class or even a "cheat sheet" relative to the various zoning districts. Mr. Inghram said an orientation guide is provided to new Commissioners. It outlines the work of the Commission and includes the Commission' by-laws, but it does not focus specifically on land use planning terminology and he agreed that something focused on that would be useful.

9. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS - None

10. COMMITTEE REPORTS - None

11. STAFF REPORTS

Mr. Inghram invited the Commissioners to attend the Transit Master Plan meeting on February 27 and a housing workshop on March 6.

Mr. Inghram reported that he attended a meeting in Lake Hills recently to give an update on the Comprehensive Plan work, with a particular focus on the extent to which the Comprehensive Plan can help address the housing issues that community has been facing. An offer to provide similar updates is being made to other neighborhood groups.

Mr. Inghram noted a number of ongoing developments in the Wilburton area, including a Porsche dealer, the Bellevue School District maintenance facilities building and a new hotel under construction.

12. DRAFT MINUTES REVIEW

A. January 8, 2014
B. January 22, 2014

There was agreement to defer approval of the minutes to the next meeting.

13. NEXT PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING: MARCH 12

14. ADJOURN

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Hamlin and it was seconded by Commissioner Hilhorst.

Chair Tebelius adjourned the meeting at 9:50 p.m.

Paul Inghram
Staff to the Planning Commission

5/28/14
Date

Diane Tebelius
Chair of the Planning Commission

5/28/14
Date

* Approved May 14, 2014