

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES

March 22, 2006  
7:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
City Council Conference Room 2E-127

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Lynde

STAFF PRESENT: Kathleen Burgess, Paul Inghram, Department of Planning and Community Development; Kris Liljeblad, Department of Transportation

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:13 p.m. by Chair Bonincontri who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Lynde who was excused.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus.

4. STAFF REPORTS

Comprehensive Planning Manager Kathleen Burgess reported that the City Council approved the Bridle Trails ordinances on March 20 without change. The Council commended everyone involved with the process, and the Bridle Trails people are very happy.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

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

7. STUDY SESSION

A. Comprehensive Plan Amendment  
– Wilburton/NE 8<sup>th</sup> Study

Ms. Burgess introduced Senior Planner Paul Inghram who has taken on some of the tasks previously assigned to Ellen Miller Wolfe and Steve Cohn.

Mr. Inghram outlined the study area on the map and explained that the boundaries are NE 8<sup>th</sup>

Street on the north, SE 3<sup>rd</sup> Street on the south, I-405 on the west and 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE on the east. The area is divided into three subareas, with Area A situated between I-405 and 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, Area B between 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and Burlington Northern/Santa Fe right-of-way, and Area C between the railroad right-of-way and 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.

Mr. Inghram said a package of four different land use alternatives has been drawn together for consideration and discussion. Alternative 1 involves utilizing the existing zoning pattern. The auto uses along 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE may remain, but the sites may also convert to big box uses consistent with the GC zoning, and a limited amount of retail may develop in Area C.

Alternative 2 envisions changes to the zoning to preserve the auto row uses for the long term, but also looks at ways to bolster the retail village concept for Area C, possibly with mixed use, multi-story buildings.

Alternative 3 encourages and supports denser retail uses in Area A, including auto uses and large format retail. Alternative 4 would take the Alternative 3 format a step further by encouraging a more intense retail development in Area B and Area C.

Mr. Inghram said two consultants have been hired to assist in the study. One will conduct a market analysis and feasibility study, and the other will look at the urban design and streetscape issues.

Transportation staff have conducted a preliminary transportation analysis for both the 2011 and 2030 horizons. They found that Alternative 4, which is the most intensive development alternative, would result in a significant increase in vehicle trips in the study area. However, the percentage increase is not so high as to serve as a fatal flaw.

Mr. Inghram said there is growing support for extending NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street from 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE to 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. KG Investments owns the properties through which the extension would run, and they have expressed an interest in seeing the extension developed. The details of where the extension would be located and how it would cross the railroad right-of-way have not been worked out. There remains a great deal of speculation with regard to what will become of the rail corridor; the King County Executive has expressed an interest in seeing it used for high-capacity transit, and the city would like to see part of it used for pedestrian access.

Kris Liljeblad, Assistant Director, Transportation Planning, explained that between 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE there is an elevation change of nearly 30 feet. For that reason, the extension of NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street, if constructed, will likely pass under the railroad right-of-way. The railroad right-of-way may be abandoned and converted to another use, but that is a process that could conceivably take many years. The notion of extending the roadway came to the attention of the transportation department as a result of discussions by KG Investments regarding their interest in parcels to the east of 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. Redevelopment of those properties could foreclose the option of extending NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street unless the city moves to preserve what could be very important transportation system benefits.

Mr. Liljeblad added that under Alternative 4 some 250 additional housing units could be developed on the east side of the railroad tracks, which would increase the travel demands on the local system. The impacts, however, must be balanced against the need to provide more housing opportunities close to the Downtown area.

Mr. Inghram said the issue will be on the agenda again on April 19 when the Planning Commission will be meeting jointly with the Transportation Commission. The schedule calls for moving toward approval of a preliminary preferred alternative by May, and to have a final

recommendation ready to be worked into the Comprehensive Plan Amendment process later in the year. There will be a public process as part of the study that will involve both stakeholders and the general public.

Commissioner Sheffels asked about the economic differences between retaining the auto row uses and allowing redevelopment to more intense retail uses. Mr. Inghram said that issue is under review and will be addressed by the consultant conducting the market analysis. Auto dealerships are unquestionably a good source of sales tax revenues, but other forms of retail can have higher levels of employment, and redevelopment with denser forms of retail may in fact match or exceed the sales tax revenues generated by auto sales. Commissioner Sheffels asked if the City Council expects the Planning Commission to take revenue gains and losses into account in developing a recommendation, and Mr. Inghram said the Council will have an interest in the data.

Mr. Liljeblad added that economics was a major consideration when the Council declared a brief moratorium on the Wilburton area. Some work done by the Finance Department suggests that the anticipated tax losses would be significant in the short term but may not be significant at all in the long term. Mr. Inghram pointed out that some of the auto retail uses along 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE have not seen a lot of investment in their properties over the past few years.

Commissioner Robertson said it would be helpful to know how much sale tax revenue is generated by auto sales in the study area, how many car dealerships are located on auto row compared with how many are located elsewhere in the city, and if there are other major auto rows in the region.

Commissioner Robertson said she also would like to know if any studies have been done relative to retail saturation points. Mr. Inghram said the market analysis will attempt to answer those questions. He noted that there is retail potential in the study area; however, there are a limited number of companies that engage in large format retail.

Mr. Liljeblad pointed out that extending NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street would provide very convenient freeway access for the study area. That in and of itself could be very attractive to the companies that develop retail uses, especially since the area actually has good visibility.

Commissioner Robertson commented that there are some similarities between the Bel-Red corridor area, which is currently also being studied, and the Wilburton area given that both have auto-oriented uses and opportunities for large-scale uses. Ms. Burgess said the two studies are being very closely coordinated.

Mr. Inghram said staff has heard anecdotally that the auto dealers along 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE enjoy being close to the Downtown. He said demographics may play a large role in the decisions made by the auto dealers to locate where they are. Commissioner Robertson suggested the improved access to 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE for northbound traffic on I-405 has undoubtedly had a positive impact on the auto row dealerships.

Mr. Liljeblad said the 2011 and 2030 traffic analyses include the fact that access to the area has improved. The analyses show no capacity issues in terms of concurrency through 2011, though there are some five Mobility Management Areas close to the tipping point by 2030.

Commissioner Orrico asked who developed the objectives for the Wilburton/NE 8<sup>th</sup> study. Ms. Burgess said they were established before the study began in 2003. She said she will verify how the objectives were decided upon.

Commissioner Orrico asked if there are concerns that auto row will degrade over time and that the uses will scatter if auto row is not preserved along 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. Mr. Inghram noted that Michael's Toyota is in the process of moving to the Eastgate area and there are concerns regarding what will happen with their property on 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. There is some speculation that the site could become a used car lot.

Ms. Burgess pointed out that Area A is currently zoned General Commercial (GC), a zone that has no design guidelines or standards. The city is concerned that over time the area could degrade. One outcome of the study could be the application of design guidelines for the area which could help to avoid degradation over time. Mr. Inghram said there is no pressing concern on the part of the city that the higher end auto retailers will want to leave the study area any time soon, especially those that have invested recently in their properties. However, given the current zoning, the commercial mix could change, and the city would have little control over it.

Commissioner Bach commented that as a metropolitan area Seattle is vastly under-retailed; the amount of retail square footage per capita in the area is much lower than in other parts of the country. That is one reason why the retail vacancy rate in the greater Seattle area is so very low. He pointed out that auto franchises that want to move outside a two-mile area from their current location must typically obtain approval from every other dealer in the state. He said during the study special care should be taken to get the thoughts of the dealership owners. There are few places where the dealerships could move away from auto row if they wanted to. It would be helpful to hear from the owner of the Mutual Materials and bus barn sites about their long-range plans.

Mr. Inghram said some are talking about the idea of multi-level auto retail as an option. Many of the dealerships already are maintaining off-site storage lots. Commissioner Sheffels added that dealers are also starting to locate their service operations away from their sales lots.

B. Comprehensive Plan Amendment  
– Crossroads Center Plan

Ms. Burgess said the Crossroads Center Plan has been focused on the commercial area to the north of NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street and along 156<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. There are some five major property owners in the study area. The area has been designated Community Business (CB) for a very long time, and the Crossroads subarea plan has a unique policy that does not allow for multifamily development in the commercial areas, unlike CB areas elsewhere in the city.

Continuing, Ms. Burgess said the Crossroads Center Plan process kicked off in early 2005 with a series of focus groups and interviews with business owners, property owners and area residents. Based on the information garnered, staff worked with a consultant to put together three alternative visions for future land use. Each alternative had the same amount of land use, including 900 multifamily units, but different open space configurations. The alternatives were shared with the community at an open house, following which some long-time community residents voiced concerns about the amount of residential proposed. In subsequent community meetings the concerns continued to grow. Staff concluded that the process was not going well and decided to pause and start over.

Since that time, staff has concluded that the process should continue given the importance of the Crossroads area to the city. There needs to be a plan that will allow Crossroads to evolve over time while maintaining its viability. The major property owners are all committed to working toward the development of a long-term vision for the area as well.

A community open house has been slated for April 4. The old alternatives have been put aside.

At the open house, citizens will be asked to commit to attending a series of meetings aimed at creating new alternatives, a format that is similar to the approach used in developing the West Lake Sammamish Parkway alternatives. The Council is supportive of the new process and the scope of work and has asked to have liaisons appointed from the Planning Commission, the Transportation Commission and the Parks Board. The Council has directed staff to limit the number of meetings during the summer months.

Ms. Burgess urged the Commissioners to attend the April 4 open house at St. Louise Catholic Church.

Chair Bonincontri appointed herself to serve as liaison. Commissioner Mathews was assigned to serve as backup.

8. NEW BUSINESS

A. 2006 Planning Commission Retreat

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Staff to the Planning Commission

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Date

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Chair of the Planning Commission

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Date