

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES

April 25, 2007  
7:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Ferris

STAFF PRESENT: Paul Inghram, Janet Lewine, Cheryl Kuhn, Steph Hewitt, Department of Planning and Community Development

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chair Mathews who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

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

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus.

4. STAFF REPORTS

Comprehensive Planning Manager Paul Inghram provided the Commissioners with a draft copy of the tentative meeting schedule, and copies of a letter received from Igor Chulsky.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

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

7. STUDY SESSION

- A. Land Use Code Amendment  
– Community Retail Design Guidelines

Associate Planner Janet Lewine reminded the Commissioners that the need to revise the Community Retail Design Guidelines is tied to implementation of the Wilburton and Crossroads subarea plan updates. She noted that where applicable the standards will be applied consistently

in other commercial areas outside the downtown. The revisions are intended to promote pedestrian-friendly mixed uses in commercial areas; improve connections to pedestrian and transit facilities; address design issues specific to large retail uses; and address compatibility of the development with adjacent park property and residential neighborhoods. The guidelines will apply to CB and NB districts and will include development on boulevards identified in the Comprehensive Plan as being appropriate for mixed use and pedestrian-oriented development; large-format retail; shopping centers; auto retail; and retrofits.

Ms. Lewine said the proposed guidelines and standards will have to be tailored for the different uses given the broad spectrum. It was the original intent to meet the objectives of the Wilburton and Crossroads updates by including new regulations within the existing structure in the land use code. However, it has become apparent that a restructuring will be necessary. She noted that Attachment A outlines the proposed structure, with the design standards and design guidelines sections repeated for site and building reviews, in that order.

Commissioner Bonincontri asked if guidelines are enforced in the same way standards are enforced. Mr. Inghram said guidelines are enforced, but they allow for a greater level of discretion. In many ways guidelines are very useful for features that are difficult to specifically describe in code language. Something like a cohesive character might be difficult to apply as a standard, but should still be applied as a guideline during the design review process. He agreed that where there is a disagreement with the decision of the city, guidelines can be more difficult to enforce than standards, but they are more flexible.

Commissioner Sheffels commented that the organization is clear and user friendly. Commissioner Bonincontri concurred.

The Commissioners were given a handout summarizing the potential Community Retail Design Guidelines changes, organized into four basic categories, as follows:

*A. Pedestrian-Friendly Mixed Use Commercial Areas*

Building Materials

*Use high-quality building materials where visible. Vinyl, wood roof materials and plastic are prohibited as exterior materials.*

Commissioner Bonincontri observed that new materials are constantly making their way to the market, many of which are large percentages of plastic. She said while the intent is clear, the specific language could preclude some very durable and handsome materials that could be very desirable.

Commissioner Sheffels agreed but said she would include not allowing wood roofing materials for fire safety reasons.

Commissioner Bach agreed as well but questioned requiring high-quality materials, suggesting that developers will want to use the best materials and should not have to be told to do so.

Commissioner Bonincontri added that some materials lend themselves to residential character, and mixed use buildings with residential above may want to incorporate some wood materials.

Blank Walls

*Entrances and windows must cover a minimum of 50 percent of the first floor wall area. Wall must include planting, modulation, materials variation, artwork, or other features*

*to provide visual interest.*

Chair Mathews asked why the 50 percent figure was chosen. Mr. Inghram said that the standards suggested are based on those used in Factoria, the downtown design guidelines, and in some neighboring cities.

Commissioner Bonincontri asked if under the guideline a large format retail store such as Home Depot would be required to have their entrance on a public street. Mr. Inghram said the standard would require window treatment on the wall facing the public street. An exception could be crafted for certain types of uses, but the result could be blank walls facing public streets.

Commissioner Sheffels suggested that a use like a Home Depot, if required to have windows facing the street, likely would only stack boxes and the like in front of them, making the effect from the street worse than a blank wall. Mr. Inghram said he will search for some photo examples of how the standard has been applied elsewhere. He noted that it is possible to create display windows facing the street while allowing for a blank wall inside the building.

Commissioner Bonincontri cautioned that display windows can come to look like billboards, which is also not very attractive.

Commissioner Robertson asked if the windows facing the public street would have to have glass or if they could potentially have an opening into an inner area. Mr. Inghram said there could be a variety of ways of satisfying the requirements.

Commissioner Bach questioned whether the main entrance for a building would have to face the public street so long as there is an entrance facing that way. He asked if the parking lot in front of a building could be considered a public street. Mr. Inghram said a parking lot likely would not be considered a public street. He said the intent of having an entrance facing the public street is to avoid having a wall that looks like the back of a building facing the street. For Home Depot, the wall facing 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE would be required to meet a higher level of appropriate frontage.

#### Upper Floor Stepback

*Include 10-foot minimum stepback at a height between 20 and 30 feet above grade, and extended a minimum of 65 percent of the façade length. Exceptions: protrusion of up to five feet for balconies and bay windows up to 40 percent of the façade length.*

Mr. Inghram said the guideline would apply to building sides fronting a public street or park.

Chair Mathews asked what the 65 percent requirement is based on. Mr. Inghram explained that it is intended apply to the entire length of a building front, while allowing for some flexibility for certain building design features.

Commissioner Robertson asked to see pictures of how the guidelines have been implemented in other areas.

#### Customer Entrances

*Customer entrances should be highly visible and include weather protection that allows for natural light. Orient customer entrances to public streets, pedestrian corridors/plazas, or “activated” private streets.*

Commissioner Orrico observed that if the customer entrance is facing the main street, customers will have to walk clear around the building from the parking lot to get into the building. Mr. Inghram said a pedestrian space could be created in front of the building to satisfy the requirement.

Commissioner Bach said he understands the principle but questioned how it would work in the real world.

Commissioner Orrico voiced the opinion that certain types of businesses should not be expected to be pedestrian friendly. Home Depot is one such use; most people who shop there will need to drive there in order to get their purchases home. Business should not be forced to make their customers walk further.

Commissioner Robertson countered that where a large format use is part of a mixed use development, there will need to be pedestrian connections connecting with the residential uses. The answer may be more flexibility in the design guidelines.

Commissioner Bach cautioned against being too restrictive in building design, noting that uses change over time. Mr. Inghram allowed that that fact is a difficult challenge.

#### Residential Entrances

*Provide pedestrian access to residential uses from public streets, pedestrian corridor/plaza areas, or “activated” private streets.*

The Commissioners had no comments regarding the requirement.

#### View Blockage

*Building orientation, roof design, and roof-top equipment shall be designed to minimize blocking of views of the horizon from public property and public streets.*

Mr. Inghram explained that the requirement would apply to buildings taller than three stories.

Commissioner Orrico asked if the principle could be morphed into an approach to prevent blocking views from private property, specifically residential.

Commissioner Sheffels said it is not within the purview of the city to decide that private property views should be preserved. The issue of views is very broad; some want to see the city skyline, others want to see trees, while others want to see distant features.

Mr. Inghram allowed that height and massing limits are generally used to control view blockage in residential areas. It is generally agreed that public views have higher value than individual private views. Comprehensive Plan policy documents the value of public views from public spaces.

Commissioner Robertson agreed with the principle and stressed the importance of preserving public views in Bellevue. Commissioner Bach agreed that views from public parks should be preserved, but questioned the need to protect views from public streets given that drivers should focus on the road in front of them rather than on distant views. Mr. Inghram noted that throughout the region many of the best vistas are from public streets. However, the guideline may need to differentiate views from public property open to public such as streets and parks, not all public property, such as fire stations.

### Building Setback

*Maximum building setback of 80 feet (to accommodate maximum of one parking aisle, plus sidewalk and landscaping requirements). Exceptions: buildings on a multi-building site where other buildings are located adjacent to the street.*

Mr. Inghram said some prefer to see buildings brought to the very edge of a street, while others want the building set back to accommodate parking in front. The guideline is intended to allow uses some limited access and parking from the front while minimizing it.

### Surface Parking

*Provide wayfinding graphics and high-quality lighting.*

*Screen surface parking areas from public streets, parks and residential districts with an architectural wall and landscaping.*

*Extend pedestrian paving materials across streets and intersections at crossing locations.*

*Use a hierarchy of paving designs/treatments to differentiate sidewalks, shared streets, plazas and building entrances.*

*Parking between buildings and public and private streets should be limited, such as for ADA, loading or short-term parking.*

Chair Mathews asked if the guideline to screen surface parking areas from public streets would allow for breaks in the architectural wall to allow pedestrians to pass through it without having to walk all the way around. Mr. Inghram said the intent is not to encourage pedestrians to walk through the middle of parking lots, nor to wall them off from businesses.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Bach regarding extending paving materials across streets and intersections at crossing locations, Mr. Inghram explained that the intent is not to extend the treatment across the main road, only those streets interior to the development.

Commissioner Sheffels asked if speed humps will be permitted. Mr. Inghram said there are mixed feelings about those structures and said there is no anticipation that they will be required. Commissioner Sheffels said it should be stipulated one way or another if they are to be allowed or not allowed.

### Structured Parking

*Sides facing public or private streets or parks must meet the building design standards, including but not limited to windows, entrances, modulation and building articulation.*

*Minimize garage entrances on public streets. Limit ground floor perimeter that is open for ventilation to 50 percent; maximum opening width of ten feet unless screened.*

*Avoid parking garage façades on residential building fronts, except for parking entrances*

*Finish interior walls and ceilings visible from public streets or public property.*

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Bach, Mr. Inghram said the intent is to have the parking structure meet the same standard applied to the main building. That could mean glass windows.

Commissioner Orrico suggested that City Hall, the CH2MHill building and others provide excellent examples of how to treat parking garages without having to include glazed glass windows. Mr. Inghram said windows would not be required necessarily unless needed to meet the building design standards, which both City Hall and the CH2MHill buildings do. He stressed that the guideline applies only to the ground floor level of parking structures that front a street.

*B. Connections to Pedestrian and Transit Areas*

Pedestrian Connections

*Sites must include safe, convenient and pleasant pedestrian connections to customer entrances, transit stops, parks and designated pedestrian facilities. Exceptions: where physical park connections are not appropriate, pedestrian connectivity may be provided to existing access points.*

Commissioner Orrico asked if there is any development in the city where getting pedestrians is unlikely. Mr. Inghram said he could not think of any. There should be at least a minimal amount of pedestrian access throughout the CB and NB zones.

Private (Internal) Streets

*On-site private streets should be designed for use by vehicles, pedestrians and bicycles.*

*Maximum of two lanes.*

*Must Include pedestrian connections.*

*Ten-foot maximum corner radius.*

*Pedestrian “activated” private streets should also include parallel parking in front of buildings, and sidewalks, minimum eight feet in width, on both sides.*

*Exceptions: Fire and Safety*

The Commissioners had no comments.

*C. Large Retail*

Façade Modulation

*Include architectural elements that moderate the scale, bulk and mass of the building. Maximum length of unarticulated façade is 120 feet.*

*Include horizontal wall treatment.*

*Include smaller building elements with distinct building forms.*

Mr. Inghram said much will depend on the building rather than the specific use within the building.

Building Tops

*Include modulation of the roofline or parapet, so the maximum unmodulated roofline is 50 feet.*

The Commissioners were informed that the Whole Foods building offers a good example. The building is longer, but it incorporates different colors and textures, modulation within the wall and some variation in the roof form.

Ms. Lewine noted that the south wall of Whole Foods facing SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street is just shy of 120 feet long and has no modulation.

#### Individual Retail Frontages

*Individual retail fronts within a larger building should appear as individual buildings.*

The Commissioners offered no comments on this section.

#### *D. Compatibility with Adjacent Parks and Residential*

##### Shield Lighting

*Provide shielded light fixtures to avoid conflict with residential uses.*

Commissioner Sheffels noted that shield lighting has been a very large concern where commercial areas are close to residential areas. The code already dictates how much spillover light there can be and how tall the standards can be. She suggested that the issue may be difficult to address in mixed use developments where commercial and housing uses are combined. Because signage is often lighted, it should be included.

##### Landscaping

*Transition area landscaping applies where large retail directly abuts residential district or public park. Exception: pedestrian open space may be appropriate in lieu of landscaping where it provides a connection to a park.*

Mr. Inghram said many of the parks in the city are already zoned residential, which kicks in the transition area landscaping requirements. In Crossroads, however, the park is not zoned residential so the transition area landscaping requirement is not in play.

#### B. Neighborhood Livability

Neighborhood Outreach Manager Cheryl Kuhn introduced Stephanie Hewitt who joined the Neighborhood Outreach team in January 2007.

Ms. Kuhn explained that the Neighborhood Livability Action Agenda is a response to emerging neighborhood issues. It is the Council's way of dealing with three issues coming up in neighborhoods time and time again: 1) property maintenance; 2) the impact of infill and redevelopment on neighborhood character; and 3) the needs of neighborhoods for additional infrastructure, primarily sidewalks.

Ms. Kuhn said much of the data gathered to date has come from focus groups. The 26 individuals who participated came from a wide range of backgrounds, including neighborhood leaders and the development community. No one took the posture of saying development is bad and that it ought not be done in the neighborhoods. Most, in fact, voiced support for development in their neighborhoods as a sign of growth and vitality; many pointed out that their neighborhoods have reached an age where they need to be updated and made more attractive. However, while holding the view that development is not bad, many offered examples of bad development that has occurred in Bellevue which has had tremendous impacts on the

neighborhood.

Many in the focus groups voiced a desire to see people invest in the neighborhoods and not just in real estate. Most were concerned about “flipping,” which is where people buy houses, rent them out for a short time, and then sell them when the market is right; or people buy houses, tear them down, and rebuild new ones.

Ms. Kuhn shared with the Commissioners a map showing the distribution of all new single family homes between 2000 and 2006, noting the heavy concentrations in the northwest and west Bellevue areas. She noted that nearly a quarter of all single family construction permits issued since 2000, and 75 percent of the tear-downs or demolition and rebuild projects, have been in those two areas.

Home sizes have been increasing steadily. In 1990 only a quarter of the homes built in Bellevue were between 3500 to 5000 square feet; currently, 60 percent of the homes being built fall into that size range; 20 percent are between 5000 and 7000 square feet.

Focus group participants said their primary concern is not with the size of houses but rather homes that are out of completely out of scale and incompatible with their surrounding community. The loss of privacy owing the taller homes with smaller setbacks, the loss of sunlight, and the loss of views were all highlighted by the focus groups. The research data shows that the average size of new single family home in Bellevue is 4268 square feet; the average increase in size for single family homes demolished and rebuilt in 2004 and 2005 was 163 percent; and 96 percent of demolition/rebuilds resulted in a change in architectural style or in the number of stories; 91 percent resulted in a change of height by an average of 27 percent; and the average lot coverage increased by 71 percent.

Ms. Kuhn shared with the Commission photos illustrating the issues, noting that the photos were not intended to offer any judgment regarding taste, beauty or anything else.

Ms. Kuhn said the loss of vegetation is a huge issue for most people. The focus group participants held the view that redevelopment in a manner that results in the loss of vegetation shows a lack of respect for the natural beauty of Bellevue. Of the files reviewed, 97 percent showed a significant loss of vegetation; the figures were compiled using aerial photos before and after redevelopment. The Commissioners were shown some of the photos.

In neighborhoods where there is a great deal of ongoing construction, parents worry that their children are at risk of being hit by a truck. A review of the files showed that 15 percent of the projects had enforcement actions associated with construction or HVAC noise. Photos of construction sites and construction debris were shown.

Ms. Kuhn said several in the focus groups voiced concern over the number of walls and fences being constructed. Their concerns were centered both on the physical and social barriers that result. Fully half of the redevelopment files showed walls, fences or rockeries on the site plans. The focus group participants also expressed concerns over the increase in hardscape and the lack of regulations in Bellevue to prevent the increase. Fully 98 percent of the files reviewed showed an increase in hardscape in the form of sport courts, circular driveways, patios, and additional walkways.

Ms. Kuhn informed the Commissioners that there are steps being taken in other jurisdictions to address some of the concerns highlighted by the focus groups. Some cities have established special review requirements when a proposed development meets a certain threshold. Design

review for single family is not required in Bellevue, but some cities now require it for developments of a certain size or that depart from the normal architecture of a given neighborhood. Bellevue does not currently have any tree retention requirements for redevelopment; other jurisdictions do.

Several cities now have FAR limits for single family homes; Bellevue does not currently take that approach. One approach Bellevue could take would be to change the way height is measured to prevent the building up of flat lots, and some shadow analysis could be required. Bellevue has regulations to address construction impacts, but enforcement is an issue; some additional enforcement methods and education could be considered.

Commissioner Sheffels commented that several years ago the Commission addressed the issue of measuring height from existing grade rather than finished grade. Ms. Kuhn said more review is needed, but in several cases it is clear that lots are being built up in order to take advantage of a view or for other reasons. According to the code, height is measured from the averaged finished grade, not the original grade. The approach for measuring height used in Bellevue is intended to take into account the fact that so many homes must be built on a grade; there is no intent, however, to allow people to build up the height of a flat lot.

Ms. Kuhn said the schedule calls for discussing with the Commission potential intervention strategies during May and June. Hopefully some initial recommendations will be in hand by the end of June so they can be discussed with the Council in July. If the recommendations require Comprehensive Plan or Land Use Code amendments, that work will begin in the fall.

C. Land Use Code Amendment  
– *Crossroads Center Plan*

Mr. Inghram explained that four sets of code amendments will be needed to implement the Crossroads policy changes: 1) directly address the prohibition against multifamily housing contained in Footnote 6 of the Land Use Chart; 2) create a new master development plan process; 3) create a development agreement process; and 4) amend the Community Retail Design Guidelines to address commercial uses adjacent to parks and to enhance guidance provided to commercial and mixed use structures.

Mr. Inghram said the Crossroads Center Plan process did not result in an outright allowance of multifamily; multifamily housing is to be allowed only with specific provisions about quality of design, and the number of units must be limited. Staff believes the provisions as they relate to Area E should be pulled out of Footnote 6 and placed in a separate note incorporating the limit and requiring the master development plan process for mixed use developments that include multifamily housing units. The schedule calls for staying in synch with the design standards update so that the different tools will be in place before the prohibition on multifamily housing in Crossroads is lifted.

Commissioner Sheffels said she spoke earlier in the evening with Crossroads-area resident Pamela Toelle who was very complimentary to staff for the work that has been done and the approach taken. She said the situation is now a win-win for everyone involved, which is far different than the outcome the first time around for the Crossroads study. Mr. Inghram said the key to success was the participation of Crossroads residents.

8. NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Inghram discussed with the Commissioners the tentative schedule of meetings through June.

9. OLD BUSINESS

The Commission discussed topics and dates for the annual Commission retreat. Mr. Inghram noted that Mayor Degginger and all of the principal staff are available on June 27.

Commissioner Robertson noted that she will be out of town on June 27 but available throughout July. She proposed holding the retreat after the new Commissioners are appointed.

There was agreement to seek a retreat date in July.

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Barton Ellison, 17104 NE 5<sup>th</sup> Place, said he is troubled about building height in the Land Use Code amendments. He said his survey of all the buildings on the Crossroads site in the study area shows that none of them violate the 45-foot height limit. The code includes a footnote that allows for an additional 15 feet of height if underground parking is provided. A transition zone should be established on the margin of the park to control building heights legally and equitably; the footnote allowing an additional 15 feet of height should be eliminated so that the overall building height will not exceed 45 feet.

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Mathews adjourned the meeting at 9:08 p.m.

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Staff to the Planning Commission

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair of the Planning Commission

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date