

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
ANNUAL RETREAT MINUTES

June 25, 2008
5:30 p.m.

Bellevue Botanical Garden
12001 Main Street

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Paul Inghram, Emil King, Carol Helland, Department of Planning and Community Development

GUEST SPEAKERS: Mayor Degginger, Councilmember Bonincontri

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. Remarks from Mayor Degginger and Councilmember Bonincontri

Mayor Degginger remarked that since the last Planning Commission retreat there has been a lot to do and a lot accomplished. He said Bel-Red, neighborhood livability, light rail best practices Meydenbauer Park and Wilburton are just a few of the items addressed. The workload of the Planning Commission is much higher than any other commission, which necessitates meeting more often. He said all of that makes it necessary for the City Council to stay in close contact with the Commission, which is why Councilmember Bonincontri was tapped to serve as the new Council liaison.

Mayor Degginger said the Council will be very involved in the coming months with making decisions about several issues forwarded to the Council from the Commission. The city continues to grow and good planning and decision making is needed to deal with it.

Mayor Degginger said he returned to Bellevue on June 24 after attending the United States Conference of Mayors meeting. He said it is always interesting to talk with people from all over the country about the problems they face in their cities. In one sense the same issues come up over and over, such as transportation and infrastructure, and climate change and sustainability. The conversations, however, always point out that Bellevue is in much better shape than most other cities in the nation. He said he spoke with the mayor of a city in Georgia that has a population of 45,000 who said he has a \$5 million hole in his budget because of real estate gone bad; the budget situation means he will have to close two fire stations.

Things are not good in cities across the nation, so Bellevue can consider itself lucky in that respect. It is actually a good thing that Bellevue is having to deal with issues related to growth

and how to keep traffic flowing in the downtown with so many cranes in the sky. That does not mean everything will continue to be rosy given the signs of a slowing economy, but even so Bellevue is poised to be in a much better position than many in the coming years.

Mayor Degginger thanked the Commissioners for their earnest and dedicated work on behalf of the city.

Councilmember Bonincontri said the time she spent as a member of the Commission led her to understand the high level of expertise the various members bring to the table. She said that is one of the elements that makes the city such a success. She said that since becoming a Councilmember she has been able to observe firsthand how closely the Council listens to its appointed bodies and how much weight it gives to their recommendations. That is one of the things that makes the city so great.

Commissioner Ferris said he appreciates the fact that the Council pays close heed to recommendations forwarded from the Commission. He said that makes him feel as though the pressure is on the Commission in terms of getting things right the first time. He asked if the Council would like to see the Commission take a different tack or focus on differently.

Mayor Degginger said by and large the recommendations and supporting documentation the Commission sends to the Council are clear and easy to follow. He said it is always helpful to have minority opinions expressed so the Council can understand why some chose to vote against a particular recommendation.

Councilmember Bonincontri said the level of public participation in Bellevue has always been impressive. She noted that while in the past there have been differences of opinion between residents and the direction the Commission and the Council have taken, there has generally always been a certain level of cooperation. In the studies recently completed and under way, that has certainly been the case.

Commissioner Mathews suggested that to some extent the level of community participation and agreement can be attributed to efforts on the part of the city to get clear information out to more people in a timely manner so that everyone can understand the issues.

Chair Orrico said one of the lessons learned from the Crossroads study was to come with an open slate when asking for public input, instead of coming forward with a lot of preconceived notions.

Comprehensive Planning Manager Paul Inghram observed that from Crossroads to Wilburton to light rail and Meydenbauer Park the department has taken different approaches with regard to having citizen committees or not. He asked if having the committees has helped the public focus their comments. Commissioner Robertson said having the light rail best practices committee certainly helped to narrow the focus; the public was heavily involved from the very start and had direct input on the final report. The committee format allowed the public to feel as though they had a direct hand in the process. Committees can afford to take more time to delve into specific

issues, something that is far more difficult for the full Commission given the myriad of issues it must deal with.

Commissioner Sheffels added that the Bel-Red committee benefited from having the light rail best practices committee looking into the particulars; that allowed the Bel-Red group to focus on the larger picture.

Commissioner Ferris suggested that in the same way the Council benefits from having boards and commissions researching, interacting with the public and making informed recommendations, the Commission also benefits from having committees that can take the time to focus on specific issues or topics.

Mayor Degginger said when the notion of forming a committee to conduct a light rail best practices study, many questioned the value of the effort; some suggested that sort of work should be left to Sound Transit. The process, however, has turned out to be a very good use of time and effort and has given the city facts upon which to make solid decisions.

Department of Planning and Community Development Director Matt Terry said the work of the city's boards and commissions should be credited for the city's commitment to the vision over time. In addition to the commissioners being wedded to the vision, there is a great deal of citizen buy-in. Bellevue does a great job of making sure everyone understands what is being done and providing all with a forum to provide comment.

Mayor Degginger said one year the Planning Commission elected to take a tour to see some of the things worked on. He said that was very helpful and suggested the Commission should consider doing that again.

Commissioner Ferris observed that the level of work the Commission has been subjected to from the fall of 2007 to the spring of 2007 has been substantial; the issues addressed represent significant changes in the planning vision for the city. On top of that the Commission has had to focus on all the normal Comprehensive Plan amendments and light rail best practices. At times it became necessary to forge ahead with matters the Commission would otherwise have liked to spend more time on. The design guidelines for Bel-Red are a case in point.

Chair Orrico concurred and pointed out that the Commission is meeting almost as often as the Council. Lately the focus has been on how to get things out the door to the Council in a timely manner. While there have not been any complaints on the part of the Commissioners, there have been concerns raised because the Commission does not want to give short shrift to anything.

Mayor Degginger thanked the Commissioners for their hard work, which always entails time away from family and work.

2. Review of 2006-08 accomplishments from past chairs Mathews and Robertson

The Commissioners were provided with copies of the issues addressed during the last two years. Commissioner Mathews said during his tenure as chair the topic issues focused on were Bel-Red, Crossroads and Wilburton. Commissioner Robertson said the main issues addressed while she has been chair have been neighborhood livability, affordable housing, and Bel-Red. She said the last year has been very rewarding in the way the various boards and commissions have worked together to address major issues.

Commissioner Robertson suggested that some of the issues should be presented next year to the national conference of the American Planning Association. Commissioner Mathews concurred. He said his attendance at the APA conference during his year as chair drove home to him how much Bellevue is doing and well the city does things.

Commissioner Robertson commented that at the APA conferences it becomes clear that in other cities there is infighting among Commissioners and disagreement on almost everything. Bellevue does not experience that because everyone involved is professional and dedicated to the task.

Commissioner Ferris suggested that the direct input from other boards and commissions during the Bel-Red study was very helpful; their insights helped the Planning Commission open their eyes to specific details and gave everyone a sense of ownership. Mr. Terry said in the past PCD has touched base with other boards and commissions on different planning topics, but not to the extent seen as part of the Bel-Red study. He agreed that the benefits were many but added that it was a monumental undertaking to get all of the groups together. There has been talk of scheduling a quarterly meeting of the chairs of the boards and commissions, and possibly having an annual get together of all board and commission members.

3. Remarks from PCD Director Matt Terry and Review of the 2008-2009 Work Program

The Commissioners were provided with copies of the upcoming work program covering the next couple of years. He noted that as it always the case, some of the issues will take less attention than others. Bel-Red and light rail best practices will wrap up soon, but the Commission will still need to deal with neighborhood character, Meydenbauer Bay, the citywide housing strategy, the Shoreline Master Program, and the Eastgate/I-90 corridor study. Other issues in the offing include the downtown incentive system, neighborhood centers, the annual Comprehensive Plan amendments, and the 2011 major Comprehensive Plan update. The Commission will also have on its plate a number of different Land Use Code amendments.

Mr. Terry noted that sometime in the fall, possibly as early as September, Sound Transit will be releasing its East Link draft EIS. That will trigger a review process for the city involving alignment and station location, issues not tackled by the light rail best practices committee. The land use/transportation interface will represent a very large piece of work that will very likely trigger a new round of Comprehensive Plan amendments and other planning efforts that will involve the Commission. The Eastgate/I-90 corridor study will not kick off until some of the

work currently under way is completed; there are some significant issues that will be part of that study, including the annexation of Eastgate and access to I-90.

Mr. Terry said the city has determined that the annexation of Eastgate is inevitable and only a question of time. There are some significant financial issues the city will need to address before that can take place, however.

Mr. Terry commented that the downtown incentive system has served the city very well for the last 25 years or so. Staff has come to the conclusion, however, that some of the fundamental bonuses that provide the wherewithal for development to get to the maximum FAR are going to happen routinely as part of the market environment; it no longer makes sense to offer a bonus for structured parking and the provision of housing. What is needed are incentives that will yield affordable housing, more public open space, and a better pedestrian environment. The development community is very comfortable with the current amenity system, and changing it will have financial implications; accordingly, the study will likely be contentious. The question of building height will inevitably be brought to the table; many believe the current height limits are too restrictive from an urban form standpoint.

Turning to a discussion of the schedule for Bel-Red, Mr. Terry said staff have had a series of conversations internally and with the City Council, particularly regarding how to deal with the debate brewing regarding the amenity incentive system. He said there have been discussions about conducting a Urban Land Institute peer review as a way of providing another perspective regarding incentives. The proposal has been advanced to the Council, which has talked about it during two different sessions. It is fair to say the Council is interested in getting a second opinion, provided the opinion does not come to them in a form that will put them in the position of having a single solution to be either accepted or rejected. The Councilmembers have been clear about wanting the ULI report to come directly to them; they want to be the ones to deal with the incentive system because of the implications for the financial strategy for Bel-Red.

The conclusion of the Mayor, the City Council and the City Manager is that the full incentive system and its structure, the bonus ratios, and the way it is used to accomplish affordable housing and public investment, needs to be dealt with by the City Council. To that end, parallel paths have been created which will leave the ULI panel and Planning Commission working together but on different issues, with both reports going to the Council. The Council will then consider the feedback from the ULI panel and the recommendation of the Planning Commission. It is possible that once the Council has set a direction on the incentive system the Commission will be asked to provide advice on other aspects of the plan that might need to be modified as a consequence.

Mr. Terry said the incentive system is a Zoning Code issue that has ties to the financial plan. The former is under the jurisdiction of the Planning Commission, and the latter under the jurisdiction of the Council. It has been very difficult to sort out who should do what, and the proposed approach provides some needed clarity. In many ways it will make the work of the Commission easier.

No one can say for sure what the outcome of the ULI panel will be. It is entirely possible that they will say targeting investment toward affordable housing and public infrastructure is a good idea, but that the lift contemplated by the proposed FARs is insufficient; they may say it all would work if the FAR was increased both inside the nodes and outside the nodes. If that is their finding, the Council and the Commission will be forced to confront the question of whether development in Bel-Red is truly competitive with the downtown.

Mr. Inghram said the proposed approach will allow staff to better address questions raised by the Commission and move away from having the Commission do everything; the focus can move toward the right FAR for the land use vision as opposed to finding the right FAR to satisfy the financial needs.

Mr. Terry said the Council would like to get the Bel-Red work done by the end of the year. The longer Bel-Red stretches out, the more it will preempt focusing on other issues. He said that is the motivation for getting the work done sooner rather than later. However, no one is wanting to see the work done quickly at the expense of being done right, so if it takes more time to do it right, no one will argue.

It is possible the Commission could finish its work by the end of August. That would enable conveying a recommendation to the Council sometime in September along with the ULI panel results. Mr. Inghram added that if the Commission's recommendation is to the Council by mid-September, the Council will have time in September and October to work through the incentive and financing issues.

Mr. Inghram said the proposed schedule includes having a meeting every Wednesday in July, though it may not be necessary to have a meeting on July 30. He highlighted for the Commission the topics indicated for each meeting.

The Commissioners indicated the dates in July on which they would not be available to attend a meeting. It was noted that absent Commissioners could participate by conference phone.

Mr. Terry took a moment to explain to the Commission the reorganization under way in PCD. He said a new Development Services Department is being created. The development services initiative directed by the City Manager in 2001 aimed at improving customer service and overall performance in the permitting arena has been extraordinarily successful. The Planning staff will remain to do the things they have always done but will also be asked to lead a strategic planning effort for all cross-departmental initiatives, including the environmental stewardship initiative and the long-range capital planning initiative. Mike Brennan will be the new department director for Development Services effective the middle of July. Land Use Director Carol Helland will continue in her role but will also function as the bridge between long-range planning and implementation.

Ms. Helland reported that candidates for legal planner are being interviewed. The hope is that a selection can be made in about a week. She said the legal planner will report to her.

4. Discussion of Planning Commission Procedures and Feedback to Staff

Mr. Inghram asked the Commissioners to comment on how the Commission meetings function, and changes that might be needed to the agenda and packet materials. He shared with them a sample agenda that might be better streamlined and clear about when actions are anticipated.

Commissioner Sheffels commented that generally the public is not interested in the approval of the minutes and suggested the action to approve them should follow public comment.

Chair Orrico said she could see no reason to include approval of the agenda on the agenda given that the Commission does not have a consent agenda.

Commissioner Robertson noted that the Commission has always had two opportunities for public comment and pointed out that other commissions offer only one per meeting. Mr. Inghram allowed that having two opportunities per meeting is specifically stated in the Commission bylaws, though he said the bylaws could be amended. The second public comment opportunity is not usually used by the public, but it does provide for the opportunity.

There was agreement to continue having two opportunities for public comment per meeting.

Commissioner Lai suggested that each item should have an allotted time to make sure that each item on the agenda will be afforded time for full discussion.

Commissioner Ferris suggested that while the informal manner in which the Commission discusses issues can be beneficial, the chair should always make sure every Commissioner is given the opportunity to provide input. The more interaction the better.

With regard to meeting start and end times, Commissioner Robertson said she would like to go back to starting at 7:00 p.m. Commissioner Ferris said regardless of the start time, 10:00 p.m. should be the meeting end time.

Commissioner Mathews said he prefers starting at 6:30 p.m. and getting out somewhat earlier in the evening.

Commissioner Lai said he would accept starting either at 6:30 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. Commissioner Sheffels said her preference was for a 6:30 p.m. start but would not argue one way or the other. Chair Orrico said she prefers the 6:30 p.m. start.

Ms. Helland noted that the Commission no longer schedules a break during the meetings. She said often a five- or ten-minute break makes it much easier to focus on the second half of the meeting and move through it more quickly.

Chair Orrico suggested that knowing whether or not there will be something substantial to eat at the meetings is critical, especially for meetings that start at 6:30 p.m. and run until 10:00 p.m. or later; often Commissioners do not have time to eat before coming to the meetings, and cheese and crackers or cookies is not enough to tide them over. Not having food would be fine so long as it would be that way every time and the Commissioners could plan accordingly.

It was agreed sandwiches or the like should be served at the meetings.

Chair Orrico said staff should always assume the Commissioners have read the packet materials and should streamline their presentations to avoid duplicating information. Mr. Inghram agreed and said staff needs to do a better job of being clear about what the Commission is expected to do with regard to each agenda item.

Commissioner Ferris said his work in the community puts him in contact with people who have an interest in the work of the Commission. He said his first reaction is to ask those who want to offer comment or direction to put their thoughts in writing or attend a Commission meeting so the full Commission can have the benefit of their thoughts.

Commissioner Sheffels said she recently was contacted by someone wanting to talk about transfer of development rights. She said the session was very informative.

Mr. Inghram said the Municipal Research Service Center says there is no clear standard of behavior for planning commissioners with regard to ex parte conversations on items that are not quasi-judicial. To a large extent the role of the Commission is to be out there and available for the public, though the public could get the wrong impression if Commissioners spend a lot of time listening to those with a vested interest in the work of the Commission. Commissioners certainly have the option of telling people they want the full Commission to hear comments and invite attendance at Commission meetings.

Chair Orrico noted that when she receives email from members of the public she forwards it to staff who in turn forward them to all the Commissioners.

Commissioner Robertson said she has gladly welcomed comments from both the development community and everyday citizens regarding the large planning efforts such as Bel-Red.

Mr. Terry asked the Commissioners to keep in mind that at some point city decisions are the result of large-scale negotiations.

Ms. Helland allowed that perception shapes reality. While it is substance that is important, it is the process that shapes the substance. She said Commissioners should always be mindful of making sure everyone is equally involved and that everyone has the same information.

5. Review of Select National and Local Planning Trends

Mr. Inghram provided the Commissioners with copies of a memo put together by staff listing national and local planning concepts that could relate to the future of Bellevue. As an example he noted that currently the Comprehensive Plan does not directly address climate change from a land use standpoint, though there is an environmental stewardship initiative being spearheaded by the City Manager's office.

Mr. Inghram said the regional population is projected to grow by 1.7 million people by 2040. Bellevue is one of the five regional urban centers in the four-county region, so the city will be expected to accommodate a large percentage of the growth.

The demographics of the city have changed remarkably over the last ten to fifteen years. The city's foreign born population is currently close to that of Seattle. Nationally there is a shift toward minority populations making up the majority of populations. Another trend is that the minority populations are moving out of the center cities into suburbs and other areas.

Commissioner Ferris observed that the Governor has approved goals having to do with carbon emissions. He suggested those goals could have significant impacts on planning efforts and the Commission should start the process of understanding just what will be expected.

Mr. Inghram commented that seniors 75 years old and older represent the fastest growing segment of the city's population. That trend has a number of implications from an urban planning stance; it will affect driving patterns, housing needs and medical services.

Mr. Inghram said some issues raised at the last APA conference are relative to Bellevue. One issue was how to make urban areas appropriate places for kids and families. A condo across the street from a park may in fact be as attractive as a single family house with a back yard. Another was the carbon footprint issue and how it might be addressed in land use codes. The climate issues will not be fixed by land use planning, but there are a number of aspects of land use planning that relate to climate issues.

Commissioner Sheffels suggested that with the major Comprehensive Plan update coming up, it would be helpful to start a notebook of ideas and background that will inform the update process. As articles are found, they should be added to the notebook.

Ms. Helland commented that her land use staff do not often have the opportunity to make presentations. She suggested they could start bringing topics forward as they arise; that would give them opportunity to gain experience in making presentations while serving to inform the Commission and the public.

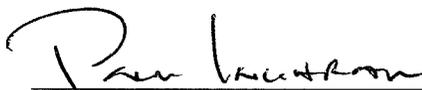
Mr. Terry said staff has been pushing the Council pretty hard to address capital and infrastructure financing challenges. In those discussions it has become painfully aware that the city may not have the wherewithal to do much more than basic infrastructure, which will not set the city on the path to becoming more than just adequate. The Council is asking itself what it is willing to

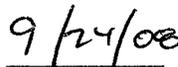
do if adequate is deemed to be not good enough. With limited resources, the city can build streets but not great streets that are pedestrian friendly with attractive open space elements; to move in that direction would mean spending more on streets and less on something else. The current Council is the first Council in over a decade to raise property taxes, and they did so reluctantly but in recognition of the need to address capital needs.

Commissioner Ferris urged the Commissioners to take advantage of planning training sessions as they are offered in the area. Chair Orrico agreed and suggested that at the very least the Commissioners should attend the APA short course sessions offered in the state.

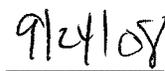
6. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 8:12 p.m.


Staff to the Planning Commission


Date


Chair of the Planning Commission


Date