

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

March 31, 2004
7:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Schiring, Vice-Chair Lynde, Commissioners Bach, Bonincontri, Maggi, Mathews

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Robertson

STAFF PRESENT: Kathleen Burgess, Steve Cohn, Ellen Miller-Wolfe, 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 Schiring who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Bach, who arrived at 7:05 p.m.; Commissioner Bonincontri, who arrived at 7:07 p.m.; and Commissioner Robertson, who was excused.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus.

4. STAFF REPORTS – None

5. PUBLIC COMMENT - None

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

7. STUDY SESSION

A. 2004 Update to the Comprehensive Plan
– Economic Element

Steve Cohn, Associate Planner, said the current Economic Element is a hodgepodge of ideas constructed over many years. The intent of the revision is to refocus the element purely on economic development. Some parts may be dropped, and other parts will be shifted into the Land Use Element. The city has become much more proactive in the last couple of years in focusing on economic development. The new element will reflect those changes.

The state recently has developed some guidelines for what should be included in an economic

development element; there previously has been no such guidance. The first suggestion is to include an analysis of the local economy. Within the region, the highest levels of employment are in downtown Seattle, in and around the University of Washington, and downtown Bellevue. In addition to the Downtown, there are several regional employment centers within Bellevue: Factoria/Eastgate, SR-520/Bel-Red, and 116th/Bellefield. In 2001 there were over 120,000 persons employed in Bellevue, and over half of the total jobs are in the Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Services (FIRES) category. The term “services” can include everything from janitorial to jobs such as accountants, consultants, attorneys, software, developers, and medical services.

Mr. Cohn noted that there were close to 63,000 FIRES jobs in 2001. That number represents 40 percent of all FIRES jobs on the Eastside. The number of technology jobs on the Eastside as a whole, including Bellevue, grew from 37,000 to 74,000 between 1995 and 2001.

The population of Bellevue accounts for 20 percent of the population of the Eastside as a whole. However, Bellevue is home to 26 percent of all Eastside jobs in the construction sector; 35 percent of all Eastside jobs in the education/government sector; 44 percent of all Eastside jobs in the FIRES sector; 22 percent of all Eastside jobs in the manufacturing sector; 40 percent of all Eastside jobs in the retail sector; and 45 percent of all Eastside jobs in the warehouse/communications sector. It is not surprising that Bellevue has a large percentage of the office market, but it is surprising that Bellevue has a large percentage of the retail market. Retail businesses tend to follow population growth, but Bellevue perhaps due to its location, has been retaining far more than its expected market share. The data indicates that Bellevue is slowly losing its overall share of the retail market, but the percentages are still very strong.

Mr. Cohn asked the Commissioners to compile a list of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. Vicki Orrico, who will become a Commissioner in June, was also asked to participate. The following lists were developed:

Strengths:

- Geographical location: center of the Eastside
- Faster permitting processes
- Adjacent freeways: good access
- Variety, diversity of building infrastructure for retail, office
- Strong infrastructure in place to support businesses
- Convenient services to support those who work in Bellevue
- A highly intelligent population: strong educational centers and public schools
- A strong business base with supporting services
- A political climate open to growth
- Strong business organizations and service groups
- Strong partnerships between government and the private sector
- A good transit center
- Good pedestrian access
- A diversity of residential units accessible to the business workforce
- Economic diversity
- Strong, stable employment
- Continued development of infrastructure and facilities
- Overlake Hospital
- A low crime rate
- Technologically savvy residents
- An interest in the arts

- Great parks

Weaknesses:

- Lack of affordable housing
- Traffic problems: congestion, cut-through traffic, lack of options, neighborhoods not well served by transit.
- Lack of short-term parking in the Downtown area
- A high office vacancy rate
- A limited amount of vacant land
- Limited ped/bike facilities
- Lack of waterfront access, an amenity that could attract businesses
- High land costs
- Limited conference options: most facilities small
- Incomplete technology infrastructure: some areas without cell phone coverage, others have no DSL available
- Weak neighborhood shopping centers
- Lack of a 24-hour Downtown
- Cultural barriers to connecting with the business community

Opportunities:

- High office vacancy rates results in availability of large blocks of space
- Transportation projects planned to reduce congestion and improve circulation
- A focus on increasing the supply of affordable housing
- Upgrades to the Comprehensive Plan
- Additional hotel/conference space
- Efforts to acquire more waterfront access
- A focus on improving the neighborhood shopping centers
- A focus on addressing infill development and redevelopment
- The development of biotech industries associated with the hospital
- Planned improvements to the transit system
- A strong ethnic population mix: strong trade connections
- Bellevue Community College: becoming a four-year college

Turning to the current Economic Element, Mr. Cohn said there are six goals. Goal 2 and Goal 5 appear to be saying essentially the same thing. Of the six, the first three appear to be the most important; the latter three goals are important but could work just as well as policies. The background section makes the prediction that Bellevue could have as many as 106,000 jobs by 2010; that threshold was actually attained by 2000. All of the information in the background section needs to be updated. The Economic Element talks about Bellevue as a facilitator, but nothing is said about Bellevue as a catalyst. That notion will become the focus of the update.

The section of the current element that focuses on the role of the city in economic development contains important information, but the update can include narrative that places the city role in context.

Of the thirteen policies contained in the current element, policies EC-3 and EC-4 appear to be the most important; both grew out of economic summits conducted in the early 90s that focused on what the city should do. In the revision those policies will be focused more on what the city should be doing in the future.

The section discussing the role of Bellevue in the region is basically focused on the Downtown area. As the section is reworked the focus will include the growth and development occurring in other areas of the city. The final section of the current element, which talks about the appropriate mix of development within the city, will shift to the land use section.

Mr. Cohn said the new Economic Development Element will be focused on four specific areas: 1) the business climate; 2) quality of life and a vibrant economy; 3) planning for future market demands; and 4) economic development strategies. The new element will have clearer organization, and it will offer readers a better idea of where the city is heading.

B. 2004 Update to the Comprehensive Plan
– Vision

Ms. Burgess highlighted the need to update the vision section of the Comprehensive Plan, pointing out that the current vision has a horizon year of 2010, which is only six years away. The Commission at its March 10 meeting brainstormed ideas for the vision statement. The current vision is written in a very generic style.

Ms. Burgess drew the attention of the Commissioners to the draft vision outline on page 28 of the packet. She noted that as proposed there would be three specific sections: Essence of Bellevue, or Bellevue today; Challenges for Tomorrow, focused on the near future; and Vision 2025, with a much wider view. With regard to the first section, she said Bellevue is a maturing community. It has developed close to its outer physical limits; there is very little vacant land remaining, and the infrastructure is largely in place. The challenge for the near future will be to transform from an expanding community to a maturing community. By 2025 Bellevue will be a gracefully maturing community with high quality services and a high quality of life.

The current plan does not highlight the strong sense of community that exists in Bellevue. That idea should be folded into each of the three themes.

Ms. Burgess said the issues raised in the brainstorming session will be converted into text and folded into the vision.

Commissioner Maggi highlighted the need to mention both Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish in the section talking about Bellevue as a city in a park. Ms. Burgess said the lakes should certainly be given some focus in the Challenges for Tomorrow section when talking about the need to enhancing the city in a park concept. She added that despite the miles of shoreline within the city the public has very little access to either lake.

Commissioner Bach thought some attention should be given to the issue of continuing to develop the health care industry in Bellevue.

Commissioner Maggi suggested that another word should be used in place of “maturing.” She proposed that the word could be considered to have negative connotations. “Growing,” “strengthening,” “vibrant,” “dynamic” and “established” were words tossed around as possible replacements.

Commissioner Maggi felt there should also be some mention of the growth of fire and police stations. Ms. Burgess said those can fall under the services section.

Commissioner Bach thought something should be included about the pace of cultural development.

Commissioner Maggi proposed giving some focus to the youth of the community in the vision section, especially the need for facilities for the youth.

Commissioner Mathews said he was not fully satisfied with the term “Essence of Bellevue.” Ms. Burgess said the title used in the current vision is “Bellevue Today.” She said she would search for another term.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. February 11, 2004

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Lynde. Second was by Commissioner Mathews and the motion carried without dissent; Chair Schiring abstained from voting.

9. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Burgess noted that at the March 10 meeting a question was asked during the discussion about the Utilities Element about gray water management. She said the Utilities Department considers gray water management a two-part health issue: reclaimed, highly treated waste water, and domestic gray water. The Comprehensive Plan addresses treated reclaimed water opportunities. The city is reluctant to get into domestic gray water management given that the state and county have jurisdiction over public health issues.

The Commissioners agreed to set aside both April 14 and April 29 as possible dates for the annual Commission retreat.

Ms. Burgess reminded the Commissioners of the April 6 tour of the new City Hall building.

10. NEW BUSINESS – None

11. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

12. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Schiring adjourned the meeting at 8:49 p.m.