

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES

July 19, 2006  
7:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Mathews, Commissioners Bonincontri Bach, Ferris, Orrico, Sheffels

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Robertson

STAFF PRESENT: Kathleen Burgess, Paul Inghram, Department of Planning and Community Development

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 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 Bonincontri, who arrived at 7:05 p.m., and Commissioner Robertson, who was excused.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus.

4. STAFF REPORTS

Chair Mathews reported that he attended the July 17 City Council public hearing and presented the package of Comprehensive Plan amendments threshold review recommendations. The Council approved the threshold review determinations for the amendments without any discussion.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Arlin Collins, 946 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue East, said his firm, Collins Woerman, was the prime consultant for the Downtown Implementation Plan. He referenced the land to the south of NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street, north of NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street and between 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and said the area has played a key role in the life of the downtown and for the last 20 years has provided a revenue stream from the auto dealerships located there. As the Commission is studying the Wilburton area, it will be important to keep in mind the importance of what is now auto row. The downtown is changing fast; there are slated to be 15 tower cranes in the sky by September with 2000 to 3000 residential units under construction, and that could double again in the coming years, all of which is in keeping with the downtown plan. Those households will need access to large format retail, which the area between NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street and NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street can supply. The area to the west of the tracks has already begun to transition. He said the largest auto dealership in

America is located in Kellogg, Idaho, a town of only 2300 people. The dealership owns eight franchises and sells 1500 cars per month, half via the internet. The telling factor there is that location is no longer a driving factor for auto dealerships. The urban experience auto store, like Lexus is building, is another new format. The current auto row can play a huge role in the future of the city by providing convenient, simple access for large format and mixed use developments, things that cannot happen in the downtown. He said his firm is the proponent for a project on 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE between NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street and NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street that is in the process of consolidating real estate; in time a rezone will be requested to add residential above large format retail, which could yield a lower cost housing alternative.

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

Senior Planner Paul Inghram asked the Commission to provide staff with preliminary direction to enable moving forward with drafting a proposal. He said the Council will be briefed in September following their August break, then staff will continue to work with the Commission developing a draft proposal to be folded into the Comprehensive Plan amendment process, with public hearings and formal adoption by the Council.

The Commissioners were reminded that the study objectives are to encourage economic vitality and appropriate redevelopment; strengthen the auto retail uses along auto row; improve the urban design and identity of the area; and improve circulation in and adjacent to the Wilburton commercial district. The area next to the freeway is zoned Office/Limited Business (OLB); the rest of the study area is zoned General Commercial (GC).

Four alternatives have been developed. Under Alternative 1, the existing zoning is retained. Alternative 2 envisions a zoning change to promote the long-term viability of auto row, and adds zoning allowing an east retail village along 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. Alternative 3 allows for major new mixed retail along auto row while keeping the east retail village concept. Alternative 4 is the same as Alternative 3 but with a much larger east retail village.

Mr. Inghram said the recommendation of staff is based on feedback from the Commission and the public. He noted that there is some level of support in the community for the notion of the retail village concept and making sure it is more neighborhood oriented with residential uses, provided height is addressed to protect against view impacts, and provided potential transportation impacts are also addressed. There has been no strong support for the notion of restricting the zoning along auto row to allow for auto sales only.

The staff recommendation for Area A is to maintain the existing OLB designation and zoning; consider a policy contemplating additional future study to respond to Sound Transit or other major projects as appropriate; and consider elements of Alternatives 3 and 4 to improve urban design and identity. For Area B, the recommendation of staff is to consider a hybrid of Alternatives 2, 3 and 4; consider Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Code amendments to emphasize auto row while maintaining the general intent and range of uses allowed in the GC zone; and consider allowing additional development intensity as an incentive for development that preserves auto sales uses and contributes to new street connections. For Area C, the staff recommendation is Alternative 4. In addition, the staff recommendation is that consideration

should be given to Comprehensive Plan amendments to preserve the opportunity for future transportation connections and improvements within the study area, to enhance the pedestrian and bicycle safety and access, and to phase in traffic calming for NE 5<sup>th</sup> Street timed with development. With regard to urban design, the staff recommendation calls for consideration of a mix of elements to improve the aesthetics of 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and recognize it as a designated urban boulevard.

Commissioner Orrico noted her support for most of the recommendations of staff. She added that particular attention needs to be given to making sure a bonus system is developed that incents structured parking, subject to height restrictions. Traffic calming measures will be very important. She said she does not have enough information to consider expanding the scope of the study area to include the Office-zoned area to the southeast.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Ferris, Mr. Inghram said if the Commission wants to see the study area expanded, a recommendation will need to be made for the Council to react to. If the study area is expanded, the project schedule and budget will need to be revised to include modifications to the traffic modeling and the alternatives. Commissioner Ferris suggested the study area should be expanded. He said the frontage along 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE should be oriented to the street in order to create a successful pedestrian-oriented environment. Urban developments need pedestrian activity on both sides of streets. There is a steep grade coming up toward the apartments at the top of the hill, and the office buildings relate more to the commercial district on the downhill side and the west side of 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE than to the residential property up the hill. As the area is currently developed, the two retail buildings to the east of Larry's Market have no relationship to 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, and unless the east side of the street is considered, the same thing will be repeated all along the street. Mr. Inghram agreed with the comments about the area near Larry's Market where redevelopment is likely. He said the owners of the office properties to the south of the study area have decided not to ask to be included.

Commissioner Sheffels said she lives in the neighborhood to the east of the study area and commented that the office area serves as a buffer between the residential neighborhood and the retail area. She said it would be detrimental to the residential area to permit a higher intensity where the offices are now. The notion behind the east retail village area includes an inward focus rather than an outward focus.

Commissioner Bonincontri agreed that the office area provides for a good transition between uses. She suggested 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE should be designed to accommodate pedestrians, even if only on one side.

Commissioner Bach also agreed that the office area serves as a buffer for the neighborhoods to the east. With regard to 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, he agreed that in order to activate it, it will be necessary to make it friendly to pedestrians. He said he is not ready to make a recommendation regarding extending either NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street or NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street between 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. The citizens have not indicated a strong preference for opening either street. He said his bent is toward Option 3.

Commissioner Sheffels said her homeowners association holds the view that extending NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street is a good idea. The residents believe they would have a much better connection that way with the freeway and the downtown than NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street offers. The impacts on the local neighborhood will not be as great as some think it will be. She noted her support for Policy S-117 which says that 124<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE should not be extended or cut through.

Mr. Inghram commented that new development is likely to occur on several of the properties in the study area, under either the existing zoning or a new zoning layout. If the city does not take a position on the transportation aspects, new development will likely preclude any future connectivity. The policy opposed to allowing NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street to be extended will need to be repealed.

Commissioner Sheffels proposed that at the very least the Commission should recommend squaring off the intersection of 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

Chair Matthews agreed with the need to prevent transportation options from being cut off by new development. He said he likes the idea of allowing additional opportunities for retail to develop along 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, suggesting that if the dealerships want to stay they will.

Commissioner Orrico voiced her agreement for the argument of staff for not expanding the geographic scope of the study area to include the office area to the southeast. She agreed with the need to preserve all transportation options, and said she is leaning more toward Alternative 3 than Alternative 4. There should be bonuses for structured underground parking and affordable housing, and there should be height restrictions and traffic calming.

Commissioner Sheffels said she too is leaning more toward Alternative 3 than Alternative 4. She said she does not support Alternative 2 at all.

Commissioner Bonincontri commented that the Commission will be free to mix and match the elements of the various alternatives in developing a preferred alternative to forward to the Council. She indicated her preference for having some retail uses along 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, but said there is no need to incorporate policy to preserve the auto uses given that businesses tend to determine the best locations for their use. Including incentives for other uses would be a good thing, provided there are height restrictions imposed to preserve the views.

There was agreement on the part of the Commissioners relative to the proposal of staff for Area A.

Commissioner Orrico stressed the need for incentives to keep the auto row uses in place; she said she is fearful of losing them and having them scattered in other places. She said she could support adding retail as a complementary use.

Commissioner Sheffels suggested that there are few incentives the city could structure to keep the auto uses in place along 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. She said some will probably consolidate over time, and others will develop structured parking. Some of the dealerships do not own their own land, and restricting the uses to auto retail will be an undue constraint on the landowners.

Answering a question asked by Chair Matthews, Mr. Inghram explained that the GC zone allows for building heights up to 30 feet. One potential incentive would be to allow for a taller, denser structure to bring about three levels and stacked parking, with auto sales mixed with other retail uses in some manner. It is difficult to predict whether or not the market would embrace the option.

Ms. Burgess observed that under the staff recommendation, auto sales would not be required along 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.

Commissioner Bach commented that the auto dealerships along 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE have been where they are for a long time without any incentives. He proposed that they will continue to

remain along that roadway for some time to come whether incentives are created or not. The fact is it is very difficult to site new dealerships given the onerous restrictions that apply on a number of levels.

Commissioner Ferris suggested that if through the use of an incentive a property owner could get a greater use of their existing land, incentives could be very effective. Absent such an incentive, the auto dealerships will have no reason to try something different. He commented that most of the auto uses in downtown Seattle have moved out; the land values rose to the point where the highest and best use made it impossible for them to compete.

There was consensus not to preclude the notion of developing incentives for keeping auto uses in Area B.

Regarding Area C, there was general support for Alternative 4, and for recommending that the intersection of NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE be squared off.

The Commissioners agreed with the recommendations of staff relative to transportation.

B. Comprehensive Plan Amendment  
– Crossroads Center Plan

Ms. Burgess reminded the Commissioners that the goals of the project are to reinforce the economic vitality of Crossroads, to improve connections to the park and the community center, and to create additional community gathering places. The Council provided direction on the scope and process in March, then in April an open house was held which was attended by some 70 members of the community. People were asked to join workshop groups, and in May three workshops were held; the first was focused on parks and gathering spaces, the second on uses and activities, and the third on transportation. Using those comments, along with the public comments and the observations of the city's boards and commissions, and the project goals, staff and the consultants developed a series of draft alternatives.

Each alternative shows development over 20 to 30 years, each has a mix of retail, office, residential, parks and gathering spaces at differing levels of intensity, and each includes better connections with the park. Two of the alternatives envision development extending into the park, something that would require a land swap and a clear public benefit.

The first alternative has been dubbed Terrace Park. It has a strong park connection, a hotel use, and maintains the existing suburban form. It has tree-lined streets, an improved street connection to the community center, and a multi-use court in the center that could be used for activities such as a farmers market as well as parking. Terrace Park, which has the lowest level of intensity, has the most surface parking and the least structured parking.

The second alternative, Village Green, has a stronger and bigger park connection. It includes more structured parking and less surface parking in a mix of uses that is more intense. A pedestrian connection is included through the main mall to a village green opening onto the park. An additional village green is located near the cinema and to the north of NE 13<sup>th</sup> Street and also to the west of the cinema along NE 13<sup>th</sup> Street. A hotel use is included to the south of Top Foods, and a road running along the edge of the park provides access where currently there is only a footpath.

Central Park, the third alternative, has the most intensive mix of uses. It has the most structured parking, a bigger and grander connection with the park, and both a road serving the hotel and

residential uses jutting out into the park. A green space connects 156<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE with the park through the site. There are additional green spaces scattered throughout the site.

Ms. Burgess said written comments have been received from 38 persons to date, though there is no clear weight of opinion favoring one direction over another. Staff has been updating the boards and commissions and getting their comments. The comments and alternatives will be further analyzed before reengaging with the public in the fall to work toward developing a preferred alternative. Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Code amendments likely will result, along with a need for capital investment on the part of the city.

Commissioner Orrico asked if the public can be said to be generally satisfied with the process. Ms. Burgess said there are some who are concerned about the process; some did not receive timely notice of the last workshop. Commissioner Bonincontri said those who have been participating in the workshops are generally happy with the process. There are some, however, who feel things are happening too fast; they are very nervous about any change occurring at the site, and that group will not be pleased unless the process is stopped altogether.

Commissioner Orrico noted her preference for Alternatives 2 and 3. She said she would like to see more structured parking overall to do away with the sea of asphalt that is currently there. The internal greenery included in those two alternatives is welcome, and it will be important to have the park-side access to the hotel.

Ms. Burgess said the Park Board has expressed an openness to consider the options that push development into the park, though they are not anywhere near ready to make a recommendation.

Commissioner Bach said he continues to have questions about how the shared parking arrangement will work with the residential and retail uses. He said he likes the general idea, but does not want to end up with too little parking. Ms. Burgess said the parking issue has been discussed frequently. She note that the city is planning to reexamine its parking standards citywide. The owner of 40 of the 50 acres in the study area has indicated he would like to see less parking required for retail.

Commissioner Ferris said his company developed Uwajimaya Village in the International District, which has shared parking between the retail and residential uses. He said the parking area is available to the residents only at night but is shared with retail customers during the day. Structured parking is very expensive to build and it does not pencil out to build structured parking for both the retail and the residential components. The cinema at Crossroads, and some of the retail users, will likely object to the notion of their customers having to go down into a parking garage that is not visible from the street. One option would be to construct above-grade structured parking that is faced with retail.

Commissioner Ferris noted his support for the notion of creating pedestrian-friendly retail streets, but suggested that a public/private partnership involving use of the park land will be contentious and difficult to justify.

Chair Matthews allowed that the issue of housing has been a rubbing point for a number of years in Crossroads. However, the quality of housing will make a big difference. Ms. Burgess said housing has been a long-standing issue in Crossroads, and there is a subarea policy on the books prohibiting housing in the Community Business area. The topic was raised in the workshops, and four of the five small groups agreed that there is some potential for housing in the study area; most are at least interested in exploring the options for housing.

8. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Burgess announced that A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH) is seeking a volunteer to help out their citizen advisory board in reviewing applications for its annual affordable housing awards. Commissioner Ferris volunteered.

9. OLD BUSINESS – None

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Mathews adjourned the meeting at 8:59 p.m.

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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