

CITY OF BELLEVUE
EAST MAIN STATION AREA PLANNING
CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Attachment 1

February 24, 2015
4:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

MEMBERS PRESENT: Christie Hammond, John King, Scott Lampe, Jim Long, Danny Rogers, Alexander Strunkin, Pamela Unger

MEMBERS ABSENT: Chris Breiland, John D'Agnone, Erin Powell, Bill Thurston

OTHERS PRESENT: Mike Kattermann, Janet Lewine, Paul Inghram, Department of Planning and Community Development; Stacy Cannon, Phil Harris, John Murphy, Paula Stevens, Department of Transportation; Matt Roewe, Dan Bertolet, VIA Architecture

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER, APPROVAL OF AGENDA, APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Chair Lampe who presided.

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Mr. Long. The motion was seconded by Ms. Unger and it carried unanimously.

A motion to approve the minutes of the January 27, 2015, Committee meeting was made by Mr. Long. The motion was seconded by Ms. Hammond and it carried unanimously.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT - None

3. PROJECT UPDATE, CAC INFO REQUESTS

Senior Planner Mike Kattermann informed the Committee that City Council will be briefed on all the station area planning work that has been done over the past year and a half. The update will be for information purposes only; the Council will not be asked to take any action.

Mr. Kattermann noted that he had included as Attachment 2 in the packet responses to information requests made by the Committee at the last meeting.

With regard to schedule, Mr. Kattermann commented that the project has been divided into two main components: land use and transportation. He said three additional

meetings had been added to the schedule, March 10, April 14 and May 12, to focus specifically on the transportation issues of traffic, neighborhood access, pedestrian/bicycle station access, and parking. Those discussions will be facilitated by Senior Transportation Planner Philip Harris and the consultants. The schedule is being driven largely by the tentative April 16 open house.

Mr. Kattermann introduced Assistant Planner Stacy Cannon who is focused on public outreach and who will be taking over for Kate March when she takes maternity leave.

4. VISIONING FOR REDEVELOPMENT AREA AND STREET CORRIDORS

Mr. Kattermann introduced Matt Roewe and Dan Bertolet, the consultant team from VIA Architecture. Also onboard as consultants are the Traspo Group, Heartland, EnviroIssues and Environmental Science Associates (ESA).

Mr. Kattermann said part of the vision for the area is the preservation and reinforcement of the existing single family on the west side of 112th Avenue SE. There will be a new edge on the west side of 112th Avenue SE; that will change the nature of the area in part by affecting access to the neighborhood, but also be creating the opportunity to redefine the character of 112th Avenue SE through redevelopment, beginning on the Red Lion site but possibly involving other sites as well. Mr. Kattermann introduced to the Committee the new owners of the six-acre Red Lion site and noted that they would be making a presentation to the Committee in March.

Ms. Unger asked what level of interest has been expressed relative to redevelopment of the area. Mr. Kattermann said the city received a request a couple of years ago for a Comprehensive Plan change and rezone for the Red Lion site. The applicant was encouraged to wait for the station area planning and to work within that context. With regard to the types of uses that would work along 112th Avenue SE, much will depend on the economic analysis to be done by Heartland; their analysis will be unconstrained by the current zoning.

Answering a question asked by Mr. Rogers, Mr. Kattermann said the area to be looked at is the area currently zoned Office/Limited Business (OLB), which is the area bounded by Main Street, 112th Avenue SE, SE 8th Street and I-405. The primary focus will be on the area between the freeway and 112th Avenue SE.

Mr. Roewe said VIA Architecture has been around for 30 years and has worked on transit planning, transit facilities, station area plans, municipal plans, master plans for the private sector, individual architecture, and transit-oriented development projects. He said he had been involved with the Downtown Livability Initiative on behalf of the Fortin Group that has 11 acres by the QFC site.

Mr. Roewe observed that the East Main station will be located only about half a mile from the downtown station, making the relationship with the downtown very important. Much of the ridership will be shared with the downtown station. The other half of the

ridership area is currently underdeveloped. A park will be developed where the alignment goes into the tunnel to the north of the East Main station.

The list of local assets clearly includes the well-established Surrey Downs neighborhood, Surrey Downs Park, the park to be created over the tunnel, the trees along 112th Avenue SE, the relatively new buildings to the east of 112th Avenue SE, redevelopment of the Red Lion site, and the fact that I-405 is nearby brings both access and visibility.

The area to the east of 112th Avenue SE and north of Main Street serves as the front porch to the downtown; it is not developing as quickly as the downtown but it is the first thing one comes through when arriving from the freeway and east side of the city. The Downtown Livability Initiative highlighted the trend toward urban life where people live and work in the downtown. Significant height increases in parts of the downtown are being considered.

While the creek and wetland that runs through the area to the east of 112th Avenue SE and south of Main Street is an asset, it has less than ideal wet soils and if any development occurs pilings will be necessary, making development more expensive and possibly excluding underground parking. Other challenges include the fact that the area also is impacted by noise from the freeway. The freeway divides the city between east and west. Along 112th Avenue SE there are speed, traffic and noise issues, and when the station comes in there will be a lack of connection to the Surrey Downs neighborhood.

Mr. Roewe shared with the Committee a map indicating the existing street grid and connections. He pointed out that like many of the city's large blocks, there is not much of a street grid through the area west of the freeway and east of 112th Avenue SE to the south of Main Street. Access is gained primarily through parking lots and there are no public streets. There is no easy pedestrian access to get between SE 8th Street and SE 6th Street, and there is a lack of easy connectivity to the east side of the freeway, particularly for pedestrians.

Mr. Bertolet noted that one part of the Committee's role is to provide recommendations on potential streetscape improvements in the station area. He shared with the group images of existing conditions of streets oriented to automobiles, and relatively narrow sidewalks with no buffer between sidewalks and the travel lanes. As currently developed, the streets are not necessarily appropriate for the non-motorized demands that will be placed on the area once the station is built.

Continuing, Mr. Bertolet said the sidewalk is the basic component for pedestrian movement. They come in different widths and involve different landscape buffers, but they are a main determining factor when it comes to establishing the character of an area. There are a variety of components, including elements necessary to serve special needs around intersections or other places, enhanced paving, weather protection, and wayfinding. Midblock crossings are also key components and the way the streetscape is designed can determine how effective midblock crossings are. Bicycle facilities are an important element of the streetscape but they generally compete for space with cars.

Work was done as part of the Downtown Livability Initiative to classify streets and map them by type. Streets can be designed to serve specific functions, including commercial pedestrian corridors, perimeter areas and neighborhoods. Main Street has different street type designations for different segments, including perimeter street, commercial street, mixed street, and pedestrian corridor.

Rechannelization, sometimes called a road diet, involves replacing car travel lanes with other uses of the right-of-way. Car lanes can be removed to accommodate elements such as turning lanes and bike lanes. Cities around the nation are starting to realize they can add functionality and safety without sacrificing car volume, and they are finding that aggressive speeding and injury collisions are reduced.

Mr. Bertolet said the city has identified a number of caution areas where there are high volumes of traffic, higher speeds and/or a lack of shoulders. Bicyclists are encouraged to use caution in those areas. Both 112th Avenue SE and Main Street have been highlighted as caution streets.

Answering a question asked by Chair Lampe, Mr. Kattermann said there will be a bike facility as part of the multipurpose path on the west side of 112th Avenue SE between the train tracks and the street.

Ms. Hammond commented that while Bellevue is the fourth largest city in the state, it has always felt like a personal community. With the advent of all the building, the amount of sunshine in the downtown has been greatly reduced. Taking away the setbacks and putting highrise buildings right up to the edge of the street causes the personal community feel to be lost. The area along 112th Avenue SE surrounds a very old neighborhood. The question is how to integrate new commercial development without the neighborhoods losing the intimate community feeling it has always enjoyed. Mr. Roewe said the area around the East Main station is different from the downtown and will continue to be, though it will have a relationship with the downtown. The application of development standards to accommodate the very specific conditions the area currently has will help to retain the personal look and feel.

Mr. Roewe briefly discussed the redevelopment possibilities for the site on which the Hilton is situated and the surrounding properties. He allowed that as redevelopment occurs it will be necessary to include parking sufficient to serve the adjacent uses. The questions yet to be answered include how close new development should be from 112th Avenue SE, what uses should be accommodated, whether the street will have fast- or slow-moving traffic, and whether or not the sidewalk should be moved back to save the existing trees. Some buildings likely will not redevelop, including the Bellevue Club which represents a considerable investment, though the property owner might consider doing something with its parking lot. The parking areas in front and along the sides of the Hilton, as well as the Red Lion site, may redevelop over time. Redevelopment opportunities exist as well on the north side of Main Street and east of 112th Avenue NE.

Responding to a comment made by Ms. Hammond, Mr. Roewe allowed that the entire area east of 112th Avenue SE could turn into a corporate campus, a basketball arena, or a work center that grows incrementally over time. There are already hotel and hospitality uses that would be very symbiotic with the existing uses. The fact that the area fronts a freeway makes it likely to accommodate commercial uses, office space and hotel uses. The properties to the south of the Bellevue Club are more removed from the freeway and could possibly accommodate some housing.

Chair Lampe asked what the greatest demand is around light rail stations. Mr. Roewe said it all depends on the type of station. Stations near hospitals or universities are very different from stations near residential uses. If I-405 was not where it is, the question of uses would be much easier to solve. Healthy urban communities have a mix of uses and the East Main area could easily accommodate a diversity of uses. Mr. Bertolet pointed out that the economic analysis will help answer some of those questions. He said the work of the consultants could be facilitated by hearing from the Committee what types of uses it would like to see in the area.

Ms. Unger said her vision for the area involved mixed use with retail below and housing above. Further to the south some development with apartments or condominiums would be appropriate.

Ms. Hammond said she would like to see something on the order of what is happening in Old Bellevue.

Mr. Long said his concern was that by 2035 the residential density needed to support retail uses may not exist in the area. The downtown is becoming denser and nearly everything anyone could need can be obtained there.

Mr. Roewe pointed out that under the current zoning there are large setbacks and a 35-percent lot coverage limit. When zoning is governed by lot coverage it does not matter how much is developed vertically, thus for most of the properties east of 112th Avenue SE could accommodate a couple of office buildings, a residential project, some small retail uses, and the rest would be used for surface parking. Redevelopment under the current zoning is unlikely.

Answering a question asked by Ms. Hammond, Mr. Rogers explained that the Meydenbauer Center is supported through a two-percent transient occupancy tax. The city has a visitors bureau and the hope is to develop a tourism master plan to drive more leisure travelers into Bellevue. Bellevue really does need more hotel rooms. The Meydenbauer Center itself is not a strong convention center. Ms. Hammond said the existing hotels east of 112th Avenue SE have proven to be good neighbors to the residential area and likely would continue to be a good fit.

Mr. Roewe said the fact that the East Main station will have access to the airport changes the complexities regarding uses and parking demand. New hotels in Seattle are going in with fewer parking stalls per room because of access to the airport. Hotel rooms adjacent

to the station will be used by people coming to Bellevue for various reasons, including conventions and work-related activities.

Mr. Rogers said the number of hotel rooms in Bellevue have increased by 350 percent over the past decade but even more are needed as efforts are ramped up to drive leisure traffic to the city. Hotels are good neighbors to residential, and hotel rooms are good for the city in general.

Answering a question asked by Mr. Rogers, Mr. Roewe said an FAR of 5.0 has been proposed for the DT-OLB. On large sites like the Hilton it would be very difficult to achieve that without a massive amount of height. Even in the downtown they are finding it is more height rather than a higher FAR that is needed in order to make the ground plane and the form of development better.

Ms. Hammond said she would not be happy to see a big box use allowed to locate adjacent to any neighborhood. She said 112th Avenue SE provides access into the city and has huge backups during peak periods. To add the kind of traffic a big box store would bring would not be a good idea. Mr. Kattermann said uses of various sorts will be tested during the process by running some traffic models to determine just what the impacts will be.

Ms. Unger agreed that a big box store would not be a good fit either visually or because of the traffic. She added that if the setback were retained at 50 feet more could be done intentionally to create vegetation strips, trees and wide sidewalks. Mr. Roewe said it is not always the width but the quality that matters. There are many examples of uses like ground-related townhouses with raised stoops three to six feet above the sidewalk; they feel very defensible but they are also well planted, portray a sense of community, and provide eyes on the street. That can be done, however, with 15 feet of space. He added that the new trend in big box retail is more urban in nature and includes other uses integrated or on top. In Vancouver, B.C. there is a Home Depot that is topped with six stories of office, there are grocery stores topped with seven stories of residential, and in the downtown there are highrises on top of a Costco.

Ms. Hammond said a grocery store might work for the site if more residential is also going to be developed there. The site is perfect for a hotel because there is otherwise no real reason to go there. Mr. Roewe agreed that that is the current situation, but the purpose of planning is to consider what could happen in the future. There is a fine line between aspiration and market reality.

Mr. Strunkin said when he started his own company he had difficulty drawing young talent to Bellevue. Many indicated they did not want to live in Bellevue. He said many of his friends who live in downtown Seattle like the fact that they can get around without a car. The younger generation wants to walk to destinations, they want coffee shops, they want to live in a highrise, and they like having many uses in a single building. They also are fully invested in the sharing economy in which they can share cars and bicycles to get around.

Mr. Roewe shared with the Committee a conceptual site development plan for the area between 112th Avenue SE and 114th Avenue SE that included small park areas and plazas, public streets, saved trees, wider and safer sidewalks, enhanced streetscapes, structured parking, active retail, affordable housing and street canopies. The specific configurations included low-rise residential with mixed use; low-rise office with mixed use; residential with building heights up to 160 feet with mixed use; and residential with building heights up to 210 feet with mixed use.

Ms. Hammond questioned why the sites are not redeveloping given that the current zoning allows for much more than what is there. Mr. Kattermann said the answer in part lies in the fact that the sites have current investments that still have value. The current zoning does not provide a sufficient amount of additional value to justify redevelopment. Ms. Hammond asked what the least amount of zoning change that could bring enough value with it to trigger redevelopment. Mr. Kattermann said the answer to that question will in part be addressed by the economic study. However, it is up to the Committee to identify what it ideally would like to see there; those suggestions will be analyzed to determine what it would take to make them happen.

Ms. Hammond pointed out that daycare is always needed. Ms. Unger agreed and said there are not many daycare options in the area near Surrey Downs. Mr. Roewe said it would be an attractive option to be able to ride the train to work and leave a child in a nearby daycare.

Ms. Unger said she also liked the idea of creating more green space. If a road is constructed through the area it could include a plaza with outdoor green space and/or a play area for kids.

Mr. Long asked how a conceptual plan can be imposed on a site that has three different parcels under three different ownerships. Mr. Kattermann said that certainly would be a challenge. The city can put the zoning and the various elements in place that are aimed at achieving a specific vision, and as development comes in it can be channeled in that direction, but the city cannot require certain things to happen.

Ms. Unger suggested input from the wider community will be important and she asked if there will be an opportunity to put the question out there. Mr. Kattermann said the event slated for April will give the public something tangible to react to. The presentation will include a range of scenarios but no final recommendation for a site plan.

Mr. Long asked if there would be any downside to giving the property owners the maximum possible density. Mr. Kattermann said there is always a balance between providing flexibility and enough guidance to achieve an established vision. If simply left wide open, a developer could construct a big box store with surface parking all around it, which is not in keeping with the vision. Mr. Roewe said the zoning can be drafted to require a minimum FAR or other minimum expectations. Much of the downtown is developed under an amenity bonus system that allows developers to pick and choose the

elements they want in exchange for additional height and density. The vision is what informs the drafting of the development codes.

Ms. Hammond suggested that regardless of what uses ultimately end up on the site, the area should be both welcoming and a place people will want to go, which is clearly not what it is currently.

There was consensus in favor of: allowing for a mix of uses, including office, retail, hotel and residential; allowing for a phasing in over time; the need to make the area interesting so that it will draw people for reasons other than the uses; the need for great people spaces and green places; and not allowing the typical big box retail.

Ms. Hammond said the Northgate/Thornton Place develop in north Seattle is a good example of how commercial development meshes well with adjacent residential. The area near the East Main station should be designed to be a neighborhood rather than a large corporate campus.

Mr. Long said the East Main station will be one of only two stations between Mercer Island and downtown Bellevue. As such strong consideration should be given to assuring the area will develop as a signature neighborhood with street trees, setbacks, and lively retail that will draw people to it.

Mr. Rogers stressed that redevelopment of the area will be driven almost solely by the economy. There are a number of software developers who would like to locate office space there.

Mr. Roewe pointed out that the trend is moving away from the traditional exclusive tech campus like Microsoft toward the urban model Amazon is creating in Seattle that is all about neighborhood.

Answering a question asked by Ms. Hammond, Mr. Roewe said having taller buildings between the freeway and the Surrey Downs neighborhood will help to block some of the freeway noise, but it will certainly not block all of it. Taller buildings would certainly keep the neighborhood from seeing the freeway. Ms. Hammond said at a minimum the focus needs to be on protecting those who live along 111th Avenue SE and 112th Avenue SE. The Committee will need to know how tall buildings could be without blocking the sun from falling on established residential properties.

A motion to extend the meeting to 6:15 p.m. was made by Ms. Unger. The motion was seconded by Ms. Hammond and it carried unanimously.

Ms. Unger said development with an array of dense high towers would not be right for the area, but a development pattern like the one shown by Mr. Roewe with a few high towers is reasonable.

Mr. Long said zoning that will allow tall towers is needed, though he agreed they should

be spaced. Tall towers would help to shield Surrey Downs from the freeway noise. By 2030 there will be far more people in Bellevue and places to house them will need to be found. The millennials and the generations that will follow them will be used to living in urban settings.

Mr. Long agreed that if tall towers are allowed there should be some shadow studies done to determine what the negative impacts will be, if any.

Ms. Unger also pointed out that the occupants of high towers might be able to see into the back yards of the Surrey Downs residents, which is something else that should be considered when thinking about building height.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT - None

7. ADJOURN

Chair Lampe adjourned the meeting at 6:14 p.m.