

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

December 1, 2015
4:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-108

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chris Breiland, Christie Hammond, John King, Scott Lampe, Jim Long, Erin Powell, Danny Rogers, Pamela Unger, Bill Thurston

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: Mike Kattermann, Department of Planning and Community Development; Phil Harris, John Murphy, Department of Transportation; Dan Bertolet, VIA; Mon Wig, Leshya Wig, Wig Properties

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER, APPROVAL OF AGENDA, APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 27, 2015, MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 4:03 p.m. by Chair Lampe who presided.

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

A motion to approve the October 27, 2015, meeting minutes as submitted was made by Mr. Rogers. The motion was seconded by Mr. Breiland and the motion carried unanimously.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Renay Bennett, 826 108th Avenue SE, brought to the attention of the Committee the comments made by Senior Planner Kevin McDonald at the October 27 Committee meeting about the margin of error when it comes to transportation modeling. She said the meeting minutes quote him as saying the model is based on an area geographically larger than the study area and takes into consideration land use and the transportation network citywide and regionally. He went on to say the more confined a study area, the more specific the information and the more accurate the model becomes, reducing the margin of error, but he also said the model tends to overestimate, creating some confusion. One of the things the city has done over the years to fudge the traffic numbers is change the levels of service. At first there were only the letter grades A, B, C and D. In time E was added, followed by pluses and minuses, then the city was broken up into Mobility Management Areas (MMA), and then a congestion allowance was created

allowing several intersections within an area to fail. In the downtown MMA, there are 13 intersections that can fail before the area is given a failing grade. The comments of how the city calculates traffic should be taken with a massive critical eye. At the October 27 meeting, Transportation Planner John Murphy talked about the modeling of increased traffic and said the talk about neighborhood improvements is all aimed at making sure people feel safe and comfortable in light of the increased traffic. The neighborhood has been led to believe the city is acting to keep the neighborhood safe from increased traffic, but it would appear that in fact the city wants the residents to feel safe and comfortable with more traffic. That will not be acceptable to the neighborhood and the Committee should take a strong stand against increased traffic in the neighborhood.

3. URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Senior Planner Mike Kattermann reminded the Committee members that the urban design framework is all about setting the context and vision for the area. The existing context for the area is the single family residential, the downtown, the hotels, clubs and offices that exist, and the freeway frontage. There are also emerging context issues to be considered, such as the light rail station, the changing nature of 112th Avenue, redevelopment interests, and potential zoning changes for the downtown. The discussions to date regarding the framework have been predicated on the principles the Committee has worked under from the start, including making sure redevelopment will complement the community and the downtown, and assuring it will draw people into the redevelopment area.

With regard to complementing the community, the principles include making sure uses will serve the adjacent neighborhoods. Additionally, noise from I-405 should be attenuated by building size and placement. Trees and green space have been identified repeatedly as being important for the redevelopment area as well as all public spaces, including the rights-of-way. Having an engaging pedestrian frontage along 112th Avenue SE is important, as is tapering density closer to the existing residential areas. Sunlight exposure and privacy are also important.

The single family residential areas, the park and the high school areas all have well-established characters that should not be changed. The existing office on the edge of the study area has its own character, and the Office/Limited Business district, which has been the focus of redevelopment, also has an existing character. The major edges that help to define the study area are Main Street, which separates the area from the downtown; 112th Avenue, particularly south of Main Street but to some extent north of Main Street; I-405 fronting the Office/Limited Business; Bellevue Way, which represents the western boundary of the study area; and SE 8th Street, which defines the southern border. The Committee has discussed the need to attenuate noise along the redevelopment area; retaining and creating opportunities for trees and green space along the two major corridors of Main Street and 112th Avenue SE; the new park that will be created on the corner by the portal; and opportunities for additional green space in association with redevelopment of the Red Lion and Hilton sites.

Mr. Kattermann said the plan being developed looks out over the next 20 years. The economic analysis suggests that during that time the only site likely to see a full redevelopment is the Red Lion site.

Mr. Kattermann said the redevelopment area includes transitional areas that are intended to buffer the residential areas. There are both multifamily and single family transition areas involved that include height and setback restrictions. He noted that the Committee had also considered shadow and privacy issues relative to various building heights and setbacks. The Committee has also discussed a mix of uses that will maintain a distinction between the downtown and the redevelopment area. The mix of uses discussed included residential, retail and office, all aimed at creating a steady amount of activity at different times of the day.

Currently, the Office/Limited Business district to the north of the redevelopment site has a height limit of 75 feet for non-residential uses, and 90 feet for residential uses. The FAR is 3.0 for either residential or non-residential. Currently, the redevelopment area is limited to an FAR of 0.5 and height ranging from 30 feet to 75 feet. The proposal made by the Downtown Livability Initiative CAC regarding the Office/Limited Business area to the north of Main Street is for an FAR of 5.0 and building heights up to 200 feet, but that will have to be considered in the context of the view corridor previously discussed by the Committee. The wedding cake approach that has been in place for the downtown for many years is designed precisely to provide a transition from the core area where the greatest intensity exists to the edges where there is existing residential. The redevelopment area is unique in that it is its own little district.

Dan Bertolet with the consulting firm VIA shared with the Committee a depiction of one possible buildout option for the redevelopment area. He stressed that it was not intended to represent a final design. As drawn, the spacing of the buildings allowed for solar access and pedestrian walkability, as well as a noise barrier created by locating office between the freeway and the residential areas, though in a way that breaks up the building massing. Mr. Kattermann said the goal was to see if an FAR of 4.0 could be achieved while keeping in mind the restrictions of the view corridor. He said the drawing depicted one way that could be achieved with a maximum height of 230 feet closer to the freeway.

Ms. Unger said she liked the way the buildings were placed on the site in the depiction but allowed that the buildings could in fact be sited in another configuration. Mr. Kattermann agreed and stressed that the Committee was not being asked to establish the final design, only to allow for enough flexibility to be able to mix and match in ways that will accomplish the things talked about in the urban design framework.

Mr. Thurston agreed that it should not be the Committee who decides how the redevelopment area will redevelop. He added that ultimately the city should have the flexibility needed to support a number of different options. What will come out of the redevelopment will in fact be an entirely new neighborhood and it should be very walkable. The Red Lion site will be the lynchpin as it will redevelop first.

Ms. Powell asked if the potential number of parking stalls was reduced in the depiction based on the fact that the redevelopment area is located across the street from the East Main light rail station. Mr. Bertolet said the number of stalls shown was in line with the number of residential units and the amount of commercial square footage as required by Bellevue code for the Bel-Red corridor.

Mr. Bertolet said the space along 112th Avenue SE was drawn showing a continuous and active street wall inviting to pedestrians. He noted that the setback shown was 30 feet from the property line, allowing for street trees and a wide sidewalk. The building types were varied as well with regard to building height, and they were placed to allow both visual and pedestrian access into the open space in the middle of the site, and to allow for maximum solar exposure.

Ms. Hammond said she understood the drawing was hypothetical but cautioned against saying that a particular tower will be for low-income housing. Mr. Kattermann said he could not emphasize enough that the drawings only represent possible outcomes. Redevelopment of the site as depicted will require a zoning change.

Mr. Kattermann said the principle of drawing people into the redevelopment area can be satisfied through the design of the development and the street frontage. Higher densities, either office or residential, lead to more people and more activity. People can also be drawn into the area by having it be walkable with smaller block patterns. Parking should primarily be in structures away from the pedestrian frontages. Access to the light rail station should be optimized to take full advantage of its location across the street. He stressed the need to have eyes on the development area and the station by having active uses and spaces along 112th Avenue SE. Emphasis should be given to creating a place rather than a project.

The blocks in downtown Bellevue are 600 feet long, which is about three times the norm. Portland has 200-foot blocks, which is far more typical, especially of older cities, yielding internal access that helps both in terms of traffic and pedestrian movement. The redevelopment area would benefit from having a smaller block pattern to improve access internal to the site.

Mr. Rogers noted that the drawing included parallel parking along 112th Avenue SE and he asked if another travel lane could be created there if the parallel parking was not included. Mr. Kattermann said in theory another lane could be created there, but whether it would be necessary or beneficial is unknown. The landscape strip, included to preserve the existing trees, would need to come out to have enough room for another travel lane, and that would change the pedestrian-scale nature of the street.

Senior Transportation Planner Phil Harris pointed out the off-street trail running along 112th Avenue SE and noted there is the potential for an off-street pathway along Main Street as well to get across I-405.

Mr. Kattermann pointed out that Sturtevant Creek is piped in places but will be daylighted on its run to Mercer Slough. It has a large wetland area associated with it and it is classified as a fish-bearing stream requiring buffers. To the south of SE 6th Street, the area is heavily constrained by sensitive areas, wetlands and stream buffers, limiting the development potential.

Mr. Kattermann reviewed with the Committee members the view corridor and how it would impact building heights in the redevelopment area.

Chair Lampe commented that the current restriction relative to the view corridor is something the Committee could weigh in on relative to future development. Mr. Thurston said he would not want to see the restriction compromise transit-oriented development just to preserve a view of Mount Rainier.

Ms. Unger said she values views of Mount Rainier. However, unlike the Space Needle or the Eiffel Tower, Mount Rainier is not something people come to City Hall specifically to see. The view is wonderful, but it is not necessarily something that should be preserved to the detriment of the redevelopment area. Mr. Kattermann said the Committee is free to weigh in on the issue, but the policy decision to preserve view corridors was made by the City Council.

4. RED LION REDEVELOPMENT

Mr. Mon Wig with Wig Properties said the work done by the city represents a great start. He said his motivation is to create and build a unique landmark neighborhood district on the Red Lion site, complementary to Surrey Downs, Bellecrest and the downtown. Density and height are needed to create the quality it will take to achieve the goal. Wig Properties purchased the property with an eye on developing it, but even as it is it yields a good return on the investment. It does not have to be redeveloped, but the company is motivated to redevelop it in order to create a unique district. Wig Properties invests in properties and retains them for the long run. What it comes down to is a balancing act between what the city needs, what the community needs, and what Wig Properties needs. In the end, all will benefit from quality and financial viability. Marginal developments do not survive the test of time.

Leshya Wig with Wig Properties said the staff recommendation represents a good start in the right direction. It involves an FAR of 4.0, building heights to 200 feet, and keeps the view corridor intact. One major thing that could be done to improve on the principles is the potential stacking of the buildings. One of the design principles focuses on being able to better provide local services, which could be interpreted to mean retail or restaurants. The ground floor retail shown in the staff presentation would not, however, be viable to lease because it does not have exposure to 112th Avenue SE. If the buildings were stacked, retail uses could be located around the edge of the central plaza and activate it at the ground floor level with shops, thus bringing in the public, not just those who work in the nearby buildings. Stacking would result in small building footprints, leaving more open space and vegetation. Where there is a central courtyard or plaza activated by retail on the ground floor, people will be more likely to come off the sidewalk into the development. Stacking could also result in an open view between the plaza and the East Main light rail station. The fact is that people in the first floors of the buildings will mostly be looking at the buildings in front of them; they will not be looking out to the station or the street. Creating an opening in the middle will put more eyes on the station.

Ms. Wig shared with the Committee an image showing the quality of open space they would like to see. She allowed that the drawing was conceptual but showed a central green courtyard and hardscape activated by surrounding retail uses and a lot of people. The fact that the plaza would be located entirely on property owned by a single owner, coordinating the overall development will be less complicated.

Turning to the line drawings of the view corridor, Ms. Wig noted that about two-thirds of the Red Lion site is impacted. If the C line were to be moved toward I-405, the taller building envisioned for the corner could be stepped back further from 112th Avenue SE. The Committee may want to consider developing two recommendations, one for if the City Council imposes the view corridor, and another for if the Council chooses not to.

Mr. Wig commented that the development hurdles relative to the Red Lion site are much greater than for the other properties in the district, primarily because of the view corridor. Additionally, it will be necessary to demolish the existing building before moving ahead with redevelopment, eliminating the existing income stream. He asked the Committee to consider increasing the FAR for the Red Lion site from 4.0 to 5.0 to accommodate for the view corridor impacts, and to increase the building heights sufficiently to achieve the density needed to provide the open space. The maximum height would depend on the extent to which the view corridor is imposed. He said he was willing to spend the money to earn the additional FAR by providing amenities desired by the community.

Mr. Long asked if under the stacking scenario, what would be done at the base, particularly if the building were pushed toward the east closer to I-405. Mr. Wig said the building could be tiered, getting slimmer on the upper floors. The first floor would house retail uses, and above that could be hotel or residential. Ms. Wig said there is a strong desire to see 112th Avenue SE activated in accord with the design principles. Having retail along the street will accomplish that goal. It would be better, however, if the taller buildings were set back from 112th Avenue SE.

Ms. Unger said it would be a good idea to have a lot of windows facing the open space. To not include windows would make it feel like a closed cement box. Mr. Wig agreed and said from an ambience point of view it would not make sense to block views toward a garden-like environment. Mr. Kattermann said the design guidelines may address that issue as well, but if they do not the Committee could make the recommendation.

Ms. Unger noted that privacy is another big concern and she asked at what height it will be possible to see into the back yards of people living along 111th Avenue SE and beyond. Mr. Kattermann said that has not been calculated, but it might be possible to do so on a very course level. The fact is what can be seen from a particular height will vary by parcel, the landscaping and trees present, and other factors. Mr. Wig added that most of the buildings will be facing south, though some will face west. Ms. Wig pointed out that the trees on the Red Lion property along 112th Avenue SE are quite tall and they are to be preserved.

Mr. Thurston spoke positively about the notion of creating a pedestrian-friendly and activated open space. He said the height tradeoffs are good. With regard to privacy concerns, most back yards in Surrey Downs will not be visible from the redevelopment area given the existing vegetation.

Ms. Unger pointed out that some residents will be losing existing landscaping to accommodate construction of the light rail line.

Ms. Powell voiced concern about the activity area. She said she is very familiar with downtown Seattle and those who hang out in the park in front of the courthouse. It is a beautiful park with big trees and benches, and there is a definite hang-out dynamic there. She said she would like to have more information about light rail stations and what steps are taken to prevent criminal activity from occurring at them. Mr. Kattermann said those are exactly the kinds of things the Light Rail Best Practices CAC looked at and covered in its final report.

Ms. Powell said she appreciates having the open space and activating the street and the area. However, open spaces are not always active in the right vein or with the wholesomeness anticipated. They can become something difficult to police given other people's sense of freedom of expression. Ms. Wig agreed that issue can be difficult to address. She pointed out that the open space will not be dedicated to the city; it will remain private property that can be addressed with private security. The likelihood that the office uses will have their own security is fairly high; the same is probably true of the retail uses. Mr. Wig added that tenants are not prone to simply tolerating vagrancy and illegal activities, which makes it all the more important to provide security.

Mr. Thurston said the concerns are valid. However, having an active neighborhood across the street will help to create a more secure environment for the station. Mr. Kattermann said it is the isolated stations that have the most problems. Where there are people around, it is far less likely for crime to occur, a fact that has been borne out by the research. Typically the crime around light rail stations mirrors the crime that exists in their neighborhoods already; they do not necessarily bring crime to the area.

Mr. Long noted his support for the preliminary work done by Wig Properties to design a development that includes an open space. He agreed that tenants will not be willing to pay top dollar rent for space adjacent to an area that is not secure and well policed.

Ms. Hammond asked Mr. Wig to explain how greater density translates into greater quality of development. He explained that with more density there is more square footage to rent, making it possible to borrow more money against the property for use in quality construction and creating amenities.

5. CONTINUED DISCUSSION AND APPROVAL OF DRAFT VISION STATEMENTS

Mr. Kattermann called attention to the draft vision statements included in the packet. He noted that everything builds off the principles. The vision statements represent a mixture of visionary and strategic statements. He said staff would incorporate the Committee's comments and then bring to the next meeting actual draft vision statements and strategies to be shared with the public early in 2016.

Transportation Planner John Murphy stressed that the task was not to necessarily fully populate all of the strategies. Staff will pull out things that could be strategies and present them at the next meeting.

With regard to pedestrian/bicycle connectivity to the station, Mr. Harris noted that the Committee had previously discussed connecting the station area to destinations both local and regional, so that was included as a vision statement. The Committee had also discussed providing weather protection where pedestrians wait, and the need for signage to destinations beyond the immediate station area for both pedestrians and bicyclists, both of which were also captured as vision statements.

Ms. Unger suggested that while which destinations should be signed could be fodder for discussion, the topic is probably not one for the Committee to address.

Ms. Hammond commented that there is a difference between signage for pedestrians and signage for drivers, and the placement of each type must be done thoughtfully. One place where something better could be done is at 108th Avenue SE and Main Street heading south; the sign for drivers is very small and is located right at the intersection. Mr. Murphy explained that every sign put up in the city is thoroughly reviewed to ensure that a dangerous situation will not be created as a result. Signs are movable and they do in fact get moved where it can be shown they should be moved.

There was consensus in favor of the draft vision statements.

Mr. Harris said the principles related to neighborhood access led to the creation of three draft vision statements: evaluating potential modifications to neighborhood entrances; identifying and monitoring key routes through the neighborhood before and after the closer of SE 4th Street and SE 1st Place; and updating the city's traffic calming guidelines to incorporate criteria and measures for high-pedestrian traffic areas around light rail stations.

Ms. Powell suggested that "discourage cut-through traffic" in the first statement should be changed to read "eliminate cut-through traffic." Persons who do not live in the neighborhoods have no valid reason for cutting through on 108th Avenue SE other than to avoid Bellevue Way and 112th Avenue SE. The development being proposed all around the neighborhood will only make things worse than they already are.

Ms. Unger commented that once access from 112th Avenue SE into Surrey Downs is eliminated it will be appropriate to emphasize identifying and monitoring key routes. It is anyone's guess what the result will really be; the only way to know for sure will be to watch closely. She asked if consideration has been given to installing a green light camera on 108th Avenue SE to identify and ticket those who drive straight through. Mr. Murphy said that possibility has been looked into. However, red light cameras and the like are driven by state law which is explicit about how they can be used, and currently they can only be used to monitor red light violations.

Ms. Hammond pointed out that the restriction against driving straight through the Main Street and 108th Avenue intersection has not stopped people from driving through.

Mr. Breiland said he generally supported the draft vision statements, but added that the devil is in the details. In terms of identifying and monitoring key routes it would be good to include "such

as” and an outline of the city’s thoughts as to particular routes. The statement regarding updating the city’s traffic calming guidelines could also use some “such as” considerations.

Ms. Hammond said she was not ready to give a thumbs up or thumbs down. The access issue will be key to overall success, both for the redevelopment area and the neighborhoods.

Ms. Powell said the access issue is also tied to neighborhood livability. Traffic calming is one element, but really it is the volume and frequency of cars on 108th Avenue SE that is disconcerting. The increased traffic resulting from new development will deteriorate the livability of the neighborhood along 108th Avenue SE. Traffic on that street will need to be managed and curtailed, not just addressed.

There was agreement to continue the discussion of the vision statements at the next Committee meeting. Mr. Kattermann said the next meeting would occur on January 26.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

7. ADJOURN

Chair Lampe adjourned the meeting at 6:02 p.m.