



# BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION

February 28, 2018

## PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION

### SUBJECT

East Main Station Area Implementation: Transit-Oriented Development Comprehensive Plan Amendments

### STAFF CONTACTS

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### POLICY ISSUES

Implementation of the City Council approved *East Main Station Area Plan (Plan)* requires a Comprehensive Plan amendment (*Land Use Code (LUC)20.30I.130.B.1.a*) with concurrent Land Use Code amendment (*LUC 20.30J.125*) and legislative rezones (*LUC 20.30A*) to implement the vision for the redevelopment area.

In this study session, we are focusing on the Comprehensive Plan amendment. Staff will present an overview of the major features of transit-oriented development areas, considerations for placemaking in general and in transit-oriented development areas, and the preliminary policy concepts for the East Main station area. Using this information, we will focus most of our time on an interactive site planning exercise intended to illustrate how transit-oriented development goals and principles are operationalized on a site and to help identify what changes and/or additions should be considered in the preliminary policy concepts.

This study session is part of a series of Planning Commission review sessions intended to lead to a set of recommendations to the City Council for the Comprehensive Plan amendment, Land Use Code amendment, and legislative rezones by the end of 2018. Please see the timeline below for where we are in the Planning Commission review process (dates shown are subject to change).



CPA    Comprehensive Plan amendment                      LUCA    Land Use Code amendment

### DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

**ACTION**

**DIRECTION**

**INFORMATION ONLY**

## **BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS**

### **What is Transit-Oriented Development?**

The term ‘transit -oriented development’ means development that first and foremost seeks to optimize the benefits of transit investment. Transit-oriented development is commonly defined as the practice of creating compact, walkable, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use communities centered around fixed transit stations providing high quality transit service.

A primary goal is to maximize the amount of residential, employment and recreational activities within easy walking distance to public transportation services, thereby increasing the use of transit and reducing the need for driving. For example, a person who lives in a transit-oriented development but works elsewhere can take transit to and from work and can also easily walk to retail stores and services, such as grocery and dry cleaners within the transit-oriented development area. This mix and intensity of uses with close and easy access to transit can significantly reduce the number of vehicle trips compared to more traditional development.

### **Placemaking**

This section provides an overview of general and transit-oriented development-specific design characteristics. At the study session, we will discuss these further, look at some examples and use these concepts in a site planning exercise.

#### *Elements of Place*

Placemaking is grounded in the idea of building cities for people, emphasizing the importance of lively social and cultural neighborhoods and inviting public spaces. Kevin Lynch, an American urban planner and author widely recognized for his research on how individuals perceive and navigate the urban landscape, paved the way for the modern understanding of placemaking. His book, *The Image of the City* (1960), describes the notion of legibility, which is defined as the extent to which the cityscape can be ‘read,’ allowing people to recognize and organize urban elements into a coherent pattern.

Lynch identifies five elements that influence the legibility of a place:

1. *paths*: routes along which people move throughout the city, such as streets, walkways, transit lines, canals, railways. For many people, these may be the predominant element in how they organize their understanding of the area;
2. *edges*: boundaries and breaks in continuity, such as shorelines, edges of development, walls. These are important in the role of holding generalized areas together;
3. *districts*: medium to large areas characterized by common traits and from which people can mentally enter or exit;
4. *nodes*: strategic focus points for orientation, including public squares, intersections, concentrations of uses or physical character; and
5. *landmarks*: external points of orientation, usually an easily identifiable physical object in the urban landscape, such as a building, sign, fountain or other recognizable feature.

### *Placemaking in transit-oriented development*

In station area planning, the elements of place described by Kevin Lynch should be considered in conjunction with the unique needs and opportunities provided by transit-oriented development. The Transit Oriented Development Institute<sup>1</sup> has identified that, while densities, details, and design vary by project depending on many factors, some common characteristics are typically found in successful transit-oriented development districts. The following description of these common elements is adapted from the Institute's website.<sup>2</sup>

1. Proximity to a transit station

The essential heart of successful transit-oriented developments is proximity and access to a transit station providing high quality service. Transit-oriented development areas should be no more than a one-quarter to one-half mile from a station. This distance enables people to get to the station within a comfortable 5-10-minute walk.

2. High quality walking and bicycling routes

To encourage walking to and from the station, walk and bicycle routes should be safe, comfortable, and pleasant. Pedestrian routes that cross large areas of parking or parallel busy roads with little or no protection from traffic will discourage walking, even for short distances. Bicycle routes should be protected from automobile parking and secured bicycle parking should be provided at destinations.

3. Attractive public spaces

Public space around a station area should be pedestrian-friendly and welcoming to transit riders, residents and other visitors. A successful public space is easy to walk around in, provides comfortable places for sitting and incorporates shade and landscaping, attractive lighting, and amenities. Public spaces that feel welcoming and safe will promote transit use and successful transit-oriented development.

4. Complete mix of uses

A mix of residential and commercial uses in a compact development pattern creates day and night activity and forms the building blocks for complete communities. Uses that are physically and functionally integrated with direct pedestrian connections support walkability and a sense of activity, which in turn support successful transit-oriented development.

5. Human scale development

Buildings and spaces sized to make humans feel comfortable and safe is the starting point for walkable places. A compact, fine-grained network of sidewalks supporting a variety of shops and services adds interest and activity day and night. Buildings with active store fronts, lots of windows, and housing above with balconies add interest and life to a place.

6. Active ground-floor retail and restaurants

Ground-floor retail uses activate the sidewalk and give life to a block. A variety of store sizes with small shops and narrow store fronts in each block can add interest to the pedestrian

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<sup>1</sup> The Transit-Oriented Development Institute is a national planning organization that brings together business and political leaders with experts in rail, urban design, sustainability and real estate development to advance knowledge sharing and TOD best practices. The Institute is a project of the US High Speed Rail Association.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.tod.org/placemaking.html>

experience. Similarly, sidewalk cafes can add unique vitality to any street, make a district more inviting and encourage more pedestrian activity. More activity also increases security with more “eyes on the street.”

7. Tree lined streets

Trees provide a pleasant place to walk or relax in a public space, a sense of enclosure of street space and can enhance the visual character of most streets. Trees also provide a host of other functions including producing oxygen, providing shade, cooling the air, filtering out toxic pollutants, moderating winds, and absorbing rainwater.

8. Reduced and hidden parking

Studies show that people who live in transit-oriented development are more likely to use transit than people who live elsewhere in the region. The plans should acknowledge that people who live in the half-mile radius of a station are more likely to take transit and reduce parking standards. Screening the parking behind buildings, or wrapping parking structures with active uses helps create safe, appealing, walkable places.

### Preliminary goals and policies

Based on the vision and recommendations in the *Plan*, as well as guiding principles provided by the City Council and CAC, staff has prepared a preliminary vision and policy concepts for the East Main station area, included as Attachment A.

When fully developed, the goals and policies will be incorporated into the Southwest Bellevue Subarea Plan, Comprehensive Plan Volume 2. Additional policies related to transit-oriented development in general are also proposed for Comprehensive Plan Volume 1 and will be discussed at a future meeting.

Goals seek to optimize use of the East Main light rail transit station through compact mixed-use development; create a complete and connected transportation system; achieve a distinctive pedestrian-oriented character and lively public realm; create an attractive and functional open space system; and promote environmental sustainability. Each of these goals is supported by a set of policies that support implementing land use code amendments and collectively implement the vision for the East Main station area.

We will review the preliminary vision statement and policy concepts at the study session and test its usefulness as part of the site planning exercise.

### **OPTIONS**

This briefing is provided for Commission discussion and guidance on the preliminary policy concepts – no action is required.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

This briefing is provided for Commission discussion and guidance on the preliminary policy concepts – no action is required.

### **ATTACHMENT(S)**

- A. E. Main Station Area Draft Policy Direction

The Council-approved *East Main Station Area Plan* is located at the following link:  
[https://planning.bellevuewa.gov/UserFiles/Servers/Server\\_4779004/File/Planning%20and%20Community%20Development/East%20Main%20Station%20Area%20Plan.pdf](https://planning.bellevuewa.gov/UserFiles/Servers/Server_4779004/File/Planning%20and%20Community%20Development/East%20Main%20Station%20Area%20Plan.pdf)