

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES

January 8, 2014  
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Tebelius, Commissioners Carlson, Hamlin, Hilhorst, Laing, deVadoss

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Ferris

STAFF PRESENT: Paul Inghram, Scott MacDonald, Department of Planning and Community Development; Patrick Foran, Camron Parker, Department of Parks and Community Services

GUEST SPEAKERS: Ron Sher, Metrovation/Crossroads; Heidi Dean, Newport Hills Community Club

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:44 p.m. by Chair Tebelius who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Laing, who arrived at 7:36 p.m., and Commissioner Ferris, who was excused.

Chair Tebelius introduced new Commissioner John deVadoss.

Councilmember Robertson praised the Commission for scheduling meetings in different neighborhoods in the city in an attempt to find out what should be included in the next Comprehensive Plan.

3. SPEAKERS EVENT - NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS AND COMMUNITY GATHERING PLACES

Chair Tebelius introduced Ron Sher of Metrovation/Crossroads. He said in undertaking any project, the bottom line is that retailers and tenants will not be there unless they can make money. As the Commission evaluates what is needed to make the community work, it should keep in mind the fact that retailers and tenants must be visible, must have some parking, must have enough critical mass in terms of other businesses, and their customers must be able to get to them easily. People like to shop in local community areas in part because they will meet those they know.

Mr. Sher explained that the concept of third places was described by Ray Oldenburg in his book *The Great Good Place*. He implies that in the lives of people there are three places: the place people live and interact with their families, the place where people work and interact with

workmates, and the places where people can sit and encounter others. Third places include spaces like parks, cafés and plazas. The best third places are predicated on civility.

The question is how to get neighborhoods to be third places. Density helps because where there is density people can walk or bike to their destinations. Once people get into their cars it is easier to visit more distant locations and the neighborhood locations often lose out. Third places need several things going on; it is difficult enough to make third places happen, and their locations should be chosen with an eye on having enough things happening to serve as a draw, including successful retail and services. Cities can help third places thrive by making a commitment to defer some costs to the tenants or by providing excellent programming aimed at drawing crowds. People have to be trained to come to third places. Property values around great third places tend to rise as the gathering places thrive.

Commissioner Carlson asked about parking and Mr. Sher said parking is needed but not too much of it. A parking supply large enough to accommodate everyone all of the time argues against a sense of neighborhood, but there should be enough teaser parking to give people the feeling that they usually can park there. Parking for employees should be provided, but it should be hidden. Over time, successful centers can get away with less parking. Whether or not to charge for parking depends on a number of factors, including retail rents and property values. Certainly areas that are struggling, and probably all suburban centers, should provide free parking.

Commissioner Hamlin noted that there was talk at one time of developing residential as part of the Crossroads shopping center. Mr. Sher said talks are under way with a senior housing developer about senior housing at Crossroads. That will give people a way to age in place in a welcoming community, and will at the same time support the Crossroads businesses. The same principle could be applied to a number of areas.

Answering a question from a member of the audience, Mr. Sher said tearing down the old movie theater, developing a new theater and an anchor grocery store provided evidence to the community that Crossroads was moving forward. That was followed with the public market, several restaurants and entertainment, along with a commitment to programming and advertising. No attempt was ever made to compete with Bellevue Square, rather the strengths and diversity of the Crossroads area was made the focus and celebrated. The high-density multifamily apartments in the Crossroads area has certainly contributed to the success of the center.

Commissioner Carlson commented that it is easy to relax at the Crossroads shopping center because it feels safe and he asked how the issue of security is handled. Mr. Sher said one of the most important steps is taken on the leasing side. Diversity and energy are important, and there should be things for the kids to do, but not so much that all of the kids will be drawn to hang out there. In the early days when tenants were desperately needed a lot of kids did hang out there, even so a video arcade tenant was turned down because it would have invited the wrong mix. Crossroads shoppers represent all the ages and much of that is due to managing the tenant mix.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Hilhorst, Mr. Sher said in time the shopping center may want to go multistory, but that will not occur for many years as Bellevue continues to evolve.

Chair Tebelius thanked Mr. Sher for his participation. She then introduced Newport Hills Community Club president Heidi Dean.

Ms. Dean said connectedness is what makes neighborhoods healthy. Connectedness evokes a sense of belonging and being welcomed, as well as a sense of being a part of and invested in something. The benefits of connected neighborhoods include emotional health and a sense of wellbeing, improved safety, a strengthened neighborhood identity, and improved property values. Connectedness also reduces the need to travel far from home for social opportunities. The opposite of connectedness results in political and emotional isolation as well as reduced property values.

There are three components to creating neighborhood connectedness: physical, social and communication/technological. Physical connectedness involves walkability and being able to easily get from one place to another using sidewalks and pathways. Social connectedness involves gathering places and spaces, or third places. Newport Hills is fortunate to have a shopping center that can fill a portion of the need, but social connectedness can also come about through park programming and at churches and schools. Communication/technological connectedness comes about through information sharing in the form of bulletin boards, kiosks, newsletters, informational signage, and online resources.

The characteristics of a health community gathering place are well-lit and open spaces, spaces that are pleasant and comfortable to be in both indoors and outdoors, the potential for quiet interactions, versatility in terms of usage, spaces that facilitate communications between people, and accessibility for all. Technology has made it possible for people to reach out and touch people around the world, but many long for a return to being in touch with the people next door. Places in which to make that happen are needed; such places include open spaces, cafés, town squares and meeting rooms.

Ms. Dean said the Newport Hills Shopping Center is both a blessing and a curse for the local community. It is a blessing when it is full and there is lots of business going on, but it is a curse when it is empty and unused. Gathering places can be identified, however, through an inventory of neighborhood assets, including schools, churches, parks, retail and commercial facilities, clubs, libraries, and even vacant lots where the owner gives permission for their use. In any event, concerted efforts on the part of communities are needed to make them successful.

Commissioner Hamlin asked if consideration has been given to siting something at the Newport Hills Shopping Center that would draw from more than just the local community. Ms. Dean said what is needed is a balance of businesses with a local and more widespread appeal. She said there had been talks about partnering with the Spiritwood folks and with Bellevue College representatives about redeveloping the shopping center with housing above retail for students, but it was determined to be too far from the college. Some zoning changes may be necessary to bring about a successful conclusion.

Chair Tebelius asked Mr. Bill Pace what was behind his decision to expand his fruit stand business to Newport Hills. He responded by saying that the East Link light rail line will eventually shut down his operation in South Bellevue. He said his interest in Newport Hills stemmed in part from the urging of Ms. Dean Commissioner Hilhorst, in part from the fact that the neighborhood is fully supportive, and in part from the belief that his business could help revitalize the neighborhood shopping center.

#### 4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Hilhorst. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hamlin and it carried unanimously.

## 5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Martin Selig, 3123 163rd Place NE, spoke to the idea of getting neighborhoods to work together. He said his neighborhood of Ashbrook, which has 19 homes, has a wetland which at one time was overgrown with blackberries. Several in the community took it upon themselves to chop down the blackberries and replant with native plants. Ultimately the action brought the community members together. The Commission should similarly provide opportunities for citizens to improve their neighborhoods, particularly with regard to parks and vacant properties.

Chair Tebelius noted that the city of Mercer Island called for citizens to volunteer to help chop down invasive plant species. The program has made a big difference.

Ms. Tandana Tolug, 15923 NE 27th Place, said in Redmond said an organization called Green Redmond partners with the city to assist in sprucing up parks and trails. The same model could be implemented in Bellevue.

Commissioner Hilhorst said Newcastle has a similar program, and indeed Bellevue has a partnership program. In Newport Hills the citizens worked with the parks department to plant trees at the pipeline trailhead.

Councilmember Robertson said the Arbor Day program is active in Bellevue as well as other volunteer programs. The city does make some matching dollars available.

Commissioner Laing noted that the city also has a fairly robust network of neighborhood associations, and the city's recently hired neighborhood outreach manager, Michael McCormick Huentelman, who is putting a lot of energy into his role. There is information available on the city's website.

\*BREAK\*

## 7. STUDY SESSION: Parks and Community Centers

Parks and Community Services Director Patrick Foran said the mission of his department is to help build a healthy community. A lot of elements must come together in order to create third places, and the people are more important than the place. In addition to parks and recreation responsibilities, the department focuses on human services and adult misdemeanor probation. On the volunteer front, the department spearheads three major volunteer opportunities: Stewardship Saturdays, the Master Gardeners Program at Lake Hills, and the Master Naturalist Program. There are other volunteer programs as well to which citizens donate some 18,000 volunteer hours annually. It is good to see work done, but the real strategy is to see people come together around a common task. The city is also focused on creating commercial third places.

Mr. Foran said for planning purposes it is critical to understand why people come to third places. Some spaces are successful and others are not and it all comes down to what people want to do and how they envision the space.

Bellevue has been a gathering places for generations. In the early 1900s the Leschi ferry from

Seattle let its passengers off at Meydenbauer Bay. The passengers would then make their way to the Wildwood Park bandstand where they would gather. Currently people choose to use parks for a variety of purposes: some want to sit alone, others want to join in groups for fun and recreation. Downtown Park is a good example where people can come to the park alone and sit alone but still watch people and enjoy all the activities. People come to Bellevue parks to connect with others having similar interests and abilities. They want places in which they can feel comfortable and welcomed, and community centers certainly fill that desire for persons of all ages and ability levels. Parks and community center programs create environments in which people who do not necessarily know one another participate collectively. Third places are also relied on as places to remember things of importance or significance.

Mr. Foran said the Lake Hills and Newport Hills communities were developed specifically to accomplish community. They both include a neighborhood shopping area, recreation facilities, a park and a school. The neighborhood schools in Bellevue serve as third places, but additionally throughout the city there are community organizations that are actively providing third places. Cyber space is quickly gaining ground as a de facto fourth place. The city has on the books an intent to link all of the parks in the system via trails and paths, and stream restoration is a large part of that element. Done right, the trails and streams can become third places in and of themselves. The Burlington Northern/Sante Fe right-of-way is a large-scale opportunity that will over time have a bit impact in leveraging other developments that may want to create a third place by serving as a facilitator. The pedestrian corridor is also a connection feature that serves as a third place; ultimately it will connect to Meydenbauer Bay.

The city has for several years been working with the Newport Hills community and the owner of the Newport Hills Shopping Center to bring about a success. A meeting of the minds is needed relative to mutual and competing interests. The Commission will have a role to play in encouraging that to happen.

The Comprehensive Plan should include an acknowledgment of how important the school district policy is relative to allowing children to attend the schools in their neighborhoods. That policy plays a very important role in keeping Bellevue's neighborhoods strong.

Commissioner Laing said he would like to see a multimodal pedestrian/bicycle grade-separated path following the light rail alignment through the city. He suggested the coming of light rail gives the city a legacy opportunity to provide for safe pedestrian/bicycle connectivity along an easy grade. The city should adopt a sidewalk/trail standard for Sound Transit to follow as they tear up and rebuild facilities along the light rail alignment. Mr. Foran agreed.

## 7. STUDY SESSION: Comprehensive Plan Update

### A. Neighborhood Centers and Community Gathering Places

Comprehensive Planning Manager Paul Inghram briefly reviewed the comments made by the speakers relative to what works well and the achievements accomplished. He asked the Commissioners to think about the policies needed to set things in motion with regard to neighborhoods centers and community gathering places.

Chair Tebelius observed that the restaurant located next to the Lake Hills library for many years served as a community gathering place. She noted that it has since burned down and she asked if in such cases the city gets actively involved in encouraging a similar use to locate there. Mr.

Inghram said there have over the years been local institutions that for one reason or another are no longer around, and the city is keenly aware of how much they are missed by the local populations. He allowed, however, that the city does not have a policy calling for active involvement in seeing similar commercial uses brought in.

Mr. Inghram said streets are not often thought of as public places, but they can often be transformed into public places to accommodate certain events. Museums and churches also serve as third places. He shared with the Commissioners a map of known gathering places and noted concentrations in Factoria, the east part of Bel-Red, Crossroads, and in the downtown, as well as the city's parks, community centers, visitor centers, schools and churches. He urged the Commission to consider the health of the existing commercial neighborhood centers; to consider how to leverage some of the non-commercial spaces; and to consider what if anything should be done in those areas where there are gaps.

Chair Tebelius observed that commercial gathering places must be profitable or they will not remain. Mr. Inghram agreed and pointed out that in 2007 the city worked closely with the Crossroads community and Mr. Sher to create more of an interface between the shopping center and the park. Traditionally, parks in Bellevue have been intentionally designed to be isolated, but more recently that view has been tempered with an eye on energizing adjacent properties. Various pieces are in place in Newport Hills awaiting reimagining that will connect them in ways that will leverage each.

Answering a question asked by Chair Tebelius, Mr. Inghram said the element of closeness has two components. First is the dimensional standard that measures how far one is physically from a third place asset, and there are some areas in the city that are not within a comfortable walking distance from a gathering place. Second is the fact that with the development patterns associated with residential neighborhoods, even being dimensionally close does not mean it is easy to get there. The experience of getting from one place to another certainly is a critical factor to the success of neighborhood centers and gathering places. At the same time, no one has suggested that every neighborhood should have the exact same opportunities and the same number of amenities within an easy distance.

Commissioner Laing pointed out that community gathering places most often include establishments that sell food. If the challenge is a lack of desirable places that provide food, the bigger question would be whether or not there is something from a land use policy standpoint that must be done to allow for food establishments, even if only on a small or limited-scale basis. Most of the larger places include some food services and people do tend to congregate there. Chair Tebelius suggested the issue may in fact be one of economics rather than zoning.

Mr. Inghram said a key question is how to keep zoning from getting in the way while continuing the long-standing policy of protecting the individual identity and character of each neighborhood.

Commissioner Hilhorst pointed out that progress relative to the Newport Hills Shopping Center stalled because the site was lumped in with the Neighborhood Business zone, which applies to multiple areas around the city. The community tried to take an area of 20,000 square feet and allow it to be parted out so that multiple businesses could locate in there, but the zoning did not allow that. Changing the code to accommodate Newport Hills would have in fact been injurious to North Towne by allowing for the construction of a very large space. The Comprehensive Plan should look at ways to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach to a flexible approach that

can be made to fit the individual locations.

Commissioner Laing commented that the approach in place in Bellevue is that zoning and Comprehensive Plan designations must nearly mirror each other. Comprehensive Plan changes are cumbersome but are allowed to occur annually, whereas zoning changes that are site-specific can be accomplished relatively quickly through a quasi-judicial process. The process in fact makes it very difficult to be responsive and flexible. The Commission may want to recommend to the Council adopting a different model like many jurisdictions in the state have done which allow for a variety of uses under general Comprehensive Plan designations.

Commissioner Hamlin commented that the policies in the Comprehensive Plan are in fact rather broad in defining the Comprehensive Plan designations. Without going too far, it might make sense to allow for some variation within the zones as they relate to specific areas that would result in a Newport Hills Neighborhood Business and an Old Bellevue Neighborhood Business.

Chair Tebelius asked if it would take Council approval to move in that direction. Mr. Inghram said he did not believe that would be necessary. He suggested the Commission should first work on policy language that would provide some aim and leaving the task of remapping the entire city to become a work program item to be addressed over time.

## B. Urban Design

Assistant Planner Scott MacDonald explained that the Urban Design element of the Comprehensive Plan is about people and design. It is about people in the sense of how residents, visitors and workers experience the city, and it is about design in the sense that it guides the built environment in the city. The goal of the element is to create a city that is dynamic and engaging, aesthetically appealing, and functionally understandable. The element guides private and public development and investments. The element is currently divided into four main sections: 1) design quality; 2) public places and connections; 3) community design; and 4) landmarks and historic resources.

In 2004 the city made some modest updates to the urban design policies. The planned development of Bel-Red, the building boom in the downtown, increased diversity of the population, and the updated growth projections that have come about since 2004 all necessitate a need to once again review the policies. Mr. MacDonald said staff have identified policy approach, arts and culture, pedestrian space, neighborhood centers and community gathering centers, and environmental design as key topics in need of special attention during the update process.

Urban design applies citywide and evokes the vision of Bellevue. However, within the individual neighborhoods there should be room for a more diverse palette for defining character.

Commissioner deVadoss stressed the need to look for patterns in reviewing the policies in terms of similar geographic areas, populations and attributes to learn what has been done by other cities.

Mr. MacDonald allowed that the current policy language focuses on only two types of neighborhoods: downtown and residential. The update should seek to vary the policy options to apply to the different neighborhoods, particularly given the city's diversity.

Mr. Inghram said the urban design policies get implemented in a number of different ways. They are used during the design review process for major commercial projects. They influence specific programs, including the public art program, and they influence how public projects are designed.

Commissioner Laing said his biggest concern would be to move toward a very prescriptive language in the Comprehensive Plan where aspirational goals and policies absolutely regulate development. The more prescriptive the policy language in the Comprehensive Plan, the more inflexible it becomes. If anything, the Comprehensive Plan language should be streamlined and any overly prescriptive policies should be removed in favor of a higher level of generalization.

Chair Tebelius commented that the Comprehensive Plan is supposed to be broadly written. The tighter and more specific the policy language, the less broad and the less flexible the Comprehensive Plan is. Mr. Inghram agreed policies should not be overly prescriptive.

Commissioner deVadoss cautioned against using diversity as an attribute in the context of the urban design policies in the spirit of not being overly prescriptive. Chair Tebelius concurred, noting that using diversity as a criteria could divide more than unite.

Mr. MacDonald noted that the Urban Design Element is the primary home of the arts and culture policies. Bellevue residents enjoy the arts and the schools have a high level of arts education. Arts practitioners, artists and arts organizations all say that cultural facilities are lacking in Bellevue, and there has been no mechanism for addressing that issue. The top voted idea in Bellevue's Best Ideas was the creation of a large performing arts center in Bellevue.

Mr. MacDonald proposed elevating the section of arts policies to make a clear home for policies regarding arts and culture, and noted the need to expand the policy direction to cover art programs, facilities and the performing arts in addition to public art. He also noted that the public has repeatedly stressed the need to focus on pedestrian spaces relative to walkability, pedestrian amenities, and connections. The pedestrian experience hits on a number of different issues, including public health, aging in place, and even neighborhood identity. The current urban design policies promote similar rather than compatible design; the former is strict whereas the latter allows for variation while still maintaining function. The Commissioners concurred.

Mr. MacDonald said residents have also been clear about their desire to see neighborhoods connected to local services. Specifically they want walkable connections.

Chair Tebelius observed that over the years walkability has meant different things. Some time ago it simply referred to neighborhoods having sidewalks. The sidewalks that have been provided, however, are not necessary conducive to walking in that they are hard, they get dirty and often they are slick with moss. Mr. Inghram explained that walkability goes beyond mere functionality and includes the notion of experience. The city's pedestrian/bicycle plan talks a lot about connectivity across the city. The problem is many cannot even get to things that are already in their neighborhoods. While there is a desire for citywide connections, the urban design policies need to call for local connections that are both safe and enjoyable.

There was agreement that some of the current policies are duplicative and should be either eliminated or consolidated.

Commissioner Hamlin stated that access across the freeways in the downtown is very poor for



pedestrians. He suggested the policies should speak to improving the crossings for the benefit of pedestrians.

Noting in the staff memo the suggestion to identify specific street corridors as priority locations for streetscape improvements, Commissioner Hamlin said that approach would be too specific and prescriptive. Mr. Inghram said there is a map in the current Comprehensive Plan that specifies such streets. He suggested the better approach might be to review the streets individually to determine if they in fact should be called out as needing streetscape improvements. He clarified, however, that the policy does not dictate what the streetscapes should be or which projects will be done in which year; it simply puts in place a program for effecting street beautification.

A motion to extend the meeting by 15 minutes was made by Commissioner Hilhorst. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Laing and it carried unanimously.

Mr. MacDonald commented that the current Comprehensive Plan is almost silent with regard to environmental design. What is needed is policy language that allows for solar, wind and any kind of new technology. Low-impact development elements such as green roofs, green walls and rain gardens can both limit stresses on stormwater facilities and serve as interesting for pedestrians to view.

Commissioner Hamlin suggested policy language encompassing sustainability would be broader and would cover more than just building elements. Mr. Inghram noted that the section is intended to address the urban design aspects of environmental building elements.

Commissioner Hilhorst commented that while some wind power generators are relatively small, some are large structures. The policy language should be aimed at making sure things fit in and will not negatively impact views.

## 8. STUDY SESSION: Eastgate Area Plan

Senior Planner Erika Conkling said the Eastgate/I-90 CAC in its final report recommended a number of changes to the policies for the subarea. The changes were well received by the community and the Council.

Ms. Conkling noted that the Eastgate/I-90 study area included portions of three subareas: Richards Valley, Factoria, and Eastgate. Focusing on the changes proposed for the Richards Valley subarea, Ms. Conkling said the policy recommendations for the light industrial area included maintaining the light industrial uses while allowing for some flexibility to permit technology or research and development uses. The policy recommendations include enhancing and protecting the environmental elements of the subarea.

To the south of the industrial area is what in the report was called the King County site. The area was singled out by the CAC as appropriate for new development, primarily office but with some retail and commercial businesses.

Commissioner Hamlin said the CAC concluded that office fits the King County site because of its low elevation. He stressed, however, that the CAC did not have any strong feelings about how the site should be used.

Chair Tebelius informed the Commissioners that a large capital campaign is under way to raise funds to redevelopment the King County Human Society use on the King County site in Eastgate. The new state-of-the-art facility will serve as a training center for Washington State University veterinarian students. There is the possibility that in time the facility will need to expand to adjacent properties.

Ms. Conkling highlighted the need to make sure a variety of uses will be permitted for the King County site so that as development proposals come in they can be quickly acted on.

Commissioner Laing said it will be necessary to carefully consider the allowed FAR so that the allowed heights can be realized. Commissioner Hamlin clarified that the CAC focused on uses rather than FARs. Ms. Conkling said a process of testing FARs will be done to determine what will work in terms of visual aesthetics and economics.

A motion to extend the meeting for 15 minutes was made by Commissioner Hamlin. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Laing and it carried unanimously.

Ms. Conkling the policy changes relative to the Richards Valley subarea will include mention of the Eastgate vision; new language supporting ecological improvements; language regarding pedestrian/bicycle safety; modification of some existing design policies to encourage the city in a park ambiance; and the question of light industrial property.

With regard to the Factoria subarea, Ms. Conkling said most of the recommendations that came out of the CAC reinforced the 2005 Factoria planning effort. Some small changes are needed, however, to incorporate the Eastgate/I-90 CAC's final report. The existing FAR will be maintained, but language regarding the creation of an activity node around the planned transit hub in Loehmann's Plaza would be appropriate. Some height and FAR increases may be appropriate for the area to the east of the T-Mobile headquarters building. The Mountains To Sound Greenway will need to be mentioned, and the land use policies may need some tweaking to include hotels as an allowed use.

Ms. Conkling said the Eastgate subarea has five subdistricts. The proposed transit-oriented development is centered around the existing Eastgate park and ride close to Bellevue College. The area is anticipated to have the greatest increases in uses and development potential. The area will need to be enhanced with some design features marking it as a gateway.

There was agreement to continue review of the Eastgate subarea plan at a future meeting.

9. OTHER BUSINESS - None

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

11. COMMITTEE REPORTS - None

12. STAFF REPORTS - None

13. MINUTES

A. November 13, 2013

B. December 11, 2013

It was agreed to delay approval of the minutes to the next meeting.

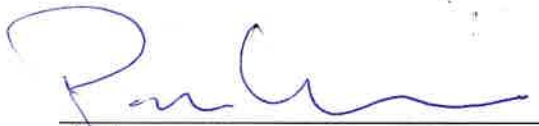
14. NEXT PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

A. January 22, 2014

15. ADJOURN

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Hamlin. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Laing and it carried unanimously.

Chair Tebelius adjourned the meeting at 10:55 p.m.



Paul Inghram  
Staff to the Planning Commission

4/4/2014  
Date



Diane Tebelius  
Chair of the Planning Commission

4/7/14  
Date

\* Approved March 26, 2014

