

Economic Vitality Commission  
10-17-18

**CITY OF ISSAQUAH  
Economic Vitality Commission  
SUMMARY MINUTES**

October 17, 2018

City Administrative Offices  
Pickering Room

1775 12th Avenue NW  
Issaquah, WA 98027

<p><b>EVC MEMBERS PRESENT</b> Jeff Howlett, Chair Chris Beaudoin Samantha Breider Therese Garcia, Vice Chair Karl Leigh Kathy McCorry Ashwin Muthuvenkataraman Kristi Tripple</p>	<p><b>STAFF PRESENT</b> Christopher Wright, Project Oversight Manager Tim Dutter, Economic Development Manager Brianna Ross, Senior Transportation Engineer Keith Niven, Econ. Dev. &amp; Dev. Services Director</p> <p><b>EVC MEMBERS ABSENT (EXCUSED)</b> Amit Bhardwaj Saikat Sen</p>
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**1. CALL TO ORDER**

GARCIA, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:32 PM.

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

a) MOVED BY McCORRY, SECONDED BY BEAUDOIN that minutes of the EVC meeting on September 19, 2018, be approved as presented. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY, 6-0.

**3. AGENDA ITEMS**

**a) NW Gilman Blvd Project (I)**

*Presented by: Brianna Ross, Senior Transportation Engineer*

Ross, Project Manager for the NW Gilman Blvd. Project, made staff's presentation. She presented the framework plan for the project. [HOWLETT joined the meeting at this time.]

Ross's comments included an explanation of the project area; project objectives; the project process and schedule; existing documents that were reviewed in anticipation of the project; the stakeholder meetings and outreach efforts undertaken; key takeaways from the community workshop; the online survey; feedback on Gilman as a community destination; responses to questions about business and economic development improvements; the community goals presented in the online survey and in stakeholder meetings, and confirmed in the community workshop; existing conditions; and an overview map of opportunities for gateways.

She continued her presentation with a list of items for discussion by EVC, specifically around the question of how a street can impact economic development. She presented discussions topics as follows: *Topic 1: Access; Topic 2: Local Business and Economic Development; Topic 3: Visibility of Businesses; and Topic 4: Implementation.* The Commission's discussion included the following.

TRIPPLE said the primary goals are well done and positive. It's important to note that we need to support existing as well as future businesses, she continued, and to recognize Gilman as an important business corridor for the City.

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In response to a question from HOWLETT about zoning, Niven explained that the current zoning on Gilman allows for office, retail, and residential uses. Buildings could be built right up to the street with minimal setbacks, but Gilman also has some features that would not allow that. He gave examples of infrastructure obstacles that will make it difficult to create a high-density, mixed use area, if that is the vision for Gilman. He said it's important to understand the constraints as well as the opportunities for Gilman. LEIGH said he understands there are constraints, but there are also steps the City could take to make Gilman a more active streetscape, and gave examples.

BEAUDOIN said realistically speaking, the City doesn't want to cripple traffic further by keeping Gilman from being used as a thoroughfare. Niven said part of this conversation is about how Gilman should function from both a traffic standpoint and also from a community standpoint as this part of the City redevelops. The Commissioners discussed their perceptions and experiences driving on Gilman now. BREIDER noted the City needs to make Gilman more car-friendly because the retail there, such as Trader Joe's and Target, are not the kind of shopping that people do while walking. Others agreed. *[MUTHUVENKATARAMAN joined the meeting at this time.]*

ROSS said one of our tasks is reconciling the Gilman we have today with the Gilman we want in the future. She noted that right now, the Atlas Apartments building is the only residential building on Gilman, and those residents have indicated they want more walkability on Gilman. Residents who live in other parts of the City are more likely to want to drive easily from business to business. The question of light rail in the future is also a consideration, she said.

BEAUDOIN said Gilman could be made more accessible for both cars and pedestrians, but it won't ever become like Front Street because Gilman moves too much traffic. He also spoke in favor of more intersecting streets. TRIPPLE spoke in favor of keeping visibility for businesses while also creating public spaces or views to make Gilman more inviting. McCORRY said she would like the City to take a look at limiting the use of center "suicide lanes" as they have a high potential for accidents.

Niven noted that each driveway off of Gilman is an important commodity for the business and/or businesses that it serves, and that access to businesses needs to be a strategic part of this conversation. McCORRY agreed, but said improved signage and wayfinding could offset some of those concerns, as well as education and explanations about why a change is needed. TRIPPLE said reducing access would be a difficult conversation for the City to have with businesses, and some businesses could need support and "handholding" while changes are being considered. Perhaps the City could match the community's funds to help businesses with changes due to redevelopment, she suggested.

#### *Topic 4: Implementation Consideration*

Ross noted it is likely that buildings will be redeveloped in phases, and projects are likely to be joint projects between the City and a developer. TRIPPLE said perhaps the City could look at City-led projects in key strategic areas of Gilman as a way to incentivize others to do similar projects. Niven said if an outcome has a perceived benefit to a property owner, the City can broach that kind of conversation; but if the property owner does not see the project as having an economic benefit, they will most likely resist paying for it. If the project is seen as an economic asset, then we can start talking about LIDs and other mechanisms for generating the revenue required. But without a clear vision, we can't know what funding strategies can be used, he added.

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The Commissioners discussed their experiences and difficulties getting on and off Gilman. BREIDER suggested roundabouts might be helpful to motorists, and would benefit businesses by making it easier and more inviting for people to get on and off Gilman to shop. Others agreed and noted where choke points now exist that make motorists reluctant to get off Gilman. It was the general agreement of all Commissioners that Gilman should remain a major thoroughfare because of the number of vehicles that use it daily and its importance to the neighborhood and the City generally.

Ross discussed next steps in the review process, leading to Council consideration in January 2019. She said a letter of support for the general concepts in the plan would be helpful, and invited Commissioners to e-mail her directly with any other comments on the plan.

MOVED BY BEAUDOIN, SECONDED BY TRIPPLE that staff work with the Commission Chair to draft a letter supporting the NW Gilman Blvd. Project framework as presented tonight; that the letter call out the importance of economic vitality and business growth as goals; that the Commission fully supports the use of NW Gilman Blvd. as a major vehicular access roadway in the new plan; and that EVC be allowed to review and comment on the framework as it moves along in the review process. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY, 8-0.

BEAUDOIN said he would like to see the opportunities for pedestrians and better vehicle access fleshed out in more detail in the plan. HOWLETT said he would like to see the vision better defined for the final plan. Wright said the next steps will be for staff to draft the letter in conjunction with the Chair, and send a draft to EVC members for their comments. [*McCORRY left the meeting at this time.*]

**b) ED Strategic Plan Action Steps (D)**

- *Review for Annual Report and Strategic Plan Update*
- *Narrow Down List for 3-5 Action Items for EVC to Focus On*

Wright explained this item, which is part of creating EVC's work plan for 2019, will be postponed to a future meeting in lieu of a more pressing issue that staff would like to address tonight. HOWLETT agreed to the change.

**NEW AGENDA ITEM: Objectives for the Citywide Strategic Plan**

Niven explained the City Council is expected to adopt a Citywide Strategic Plan in the second quarter of 2019. When the Council met last Monday, they added "Social & Economic Vitality" to the final goals and objectives in the Strategic Plan. The next step is to take these objectives and create measurable action items that the City would implement in order for these objectives to be successful. Before staff can start creating those action items, he said, we would like to have a conversation with EVC about the objectives related to economic vitality, and to have the Commission brainstorm activities the City could take to reach those objectives.

He presented two of the objectives in the "Social & Economic Vitality" goal for tonight's discussion. The Commission briefly discussed their perceptions of how the two objectives are similar and where they differ.

**Objective 1. There is an increase in local living wage jobs from a diverse mix of business.**

The Commission's discussion yielded the following points for staff to consider in creating action items for the objective:

- Concrete, unique incentives to encourage (sports medicine/tech) jobs.
- Have a competitive advantage.
- Actively prospect ("hunt") for five medium-size businesses annually.

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- Zoning overlay/business improvement district.
- Provide remote/satellite locations (*also in Objective 4, below*).

The Commission discussed what “living wage” jobs means in this context, and agreed that many of the issues with attracting “living wage” jobs are also issues for Objective 4 (below). The Commissioners discussed having the City streamline processes for getting licenses, paying taxes, and so on that would help create a roadmap for how businesses can operate in Issaquah. BREIDER noted that services such as Start-Up 425 and SCORE are available in Seattle and Bellevue, but the City should incentivize those kinds of nonprofits to operate in Issaquah.

Niven discussed the difficulty some businesses have reported in finding adequate space in the City. HOWLETT asked what is the City doing to incentivize development. BEAUDOIN said the City has to create incentives for businesses to come to Issaquah while also reducing their risk. TRIPPLE agreed, and said because places like Redmond and Bellevue have more resources than Issaquah, the likelihood is that a business will select Redmond or Bellevue over Issaquah because the resources are there. So the question is how do we incentivize businesses to come to Issaquah instead.

BREIDER said she has heard some feedback that Issaquah as a community does not give the kind of support to businesses that would make them want to locate here. Others agreed, and said that the City should be marketing itself as a strong place to locate a new business. TRIPPLE said the City should partner with organizations such as Rotary and the Chamber to promote itself as a business-friendly community. The Commissioners agreed that “branding” the City as being business-friendly is part of the challenge of attracting businesses that offer living-wage jobs.

**Objective 4. There is an increase in new and existing businesses that choose to locate or expand in Issaquah.**

The Commission’s discussion yielded the following points for staff to consider in creating action items for the objective:

- Create a roadmap for Issaquah-centric new businesses.
- Attract SCORE or similar.
- Business start-up and support.
- Encourage/incentivize shared working space and incubator space, like WeWork.
- Develop a business-friendly environment at City Hall; embrace the business climate.
- Support/promote a position that favors a “culture” for business.
- Provide remote/satellite locations.

Niven said staff will take the suggestions EVC has made and develop about five action items for each objective. He asked for any other comments. TRIPPLE said it would be useful for the Councilmembers to understand the ramifications of their decisions on business within the City, and gave examples. MUTHUVENKATARAMAN agreed, and said it might be useful to research what other cities have done to promote a healthy business climate.

BEAUDOIN said at least one aspect of Objective #1 has to be landing a “big fish” in terms of an employer; and if not a “big fish,” then at least a substantial one. A substantial employer also attracts other businesses that want to do business with that employer, he noted. The Commission briefly discussed why Microsoft did not follow through on initial plans to locate a satellite office in Issaquah. The Commissioners also discussed the issues associated with satellite spaces that are not physically located where a company’s headquarters are located.

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Niven said it sounds as though the Commission is realistically talking about businesses in the 20-50 employee bracket as the most likely new business candidates for Issaquah to target. BEAUDOIN spoke in favor of aiming for businesses that will in turn attract other businesses, and noted that the City's "branding" may also be an issue that needs to be addressed.

**c) Future Agendas**

Wright noted item 3(b) on tonight's agenda, ED Strategic Plan Action Steps, will be rescheduled for the next meeting.

**4. AUDIENCE COMMENTS**

None.

**5. OTHER BUSINESS/ANNOUNCEMENTS/SCHEDULE**

The next EVC meeting is scheduled for 5:30 PM on November 14, 2018. Wright noted another student from the Youth Council has shown interest in possibly being a Youth Council representative for EVC.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

With no additional business to conduct, HOWLETT adjourned the meeting at 7:36 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Lowe  
Recording Secretary

***These minutes are a brief summary of the Economic Vitality Commission meeting. For more information or clarification, please contact the Economic Development Department at 425-837-3444.***