

BelRed Look Forward Comprehensive Plan Amendment: Arts and Culture Policies

At this meeting, staff will provide an overview of the BelRed Look Forward initiative and will present a preliminary recommendation on draft Arts and Culture policy amendments (Attachments A & B) to the BelRed Subarea Plan. Staff request the Arts Commission discuss and provide direction on these draft policy amendments, and if feasible, approve a recommendation for submittal to the Planning Commission.

Sample Motion: Move that the Arts Commission recommend to the Planning Commission the proposed amendments to Arts and Culture policies in the BelRed Subarea Plan, as presented in Attachments A and B to this memo or as modified by the Board.

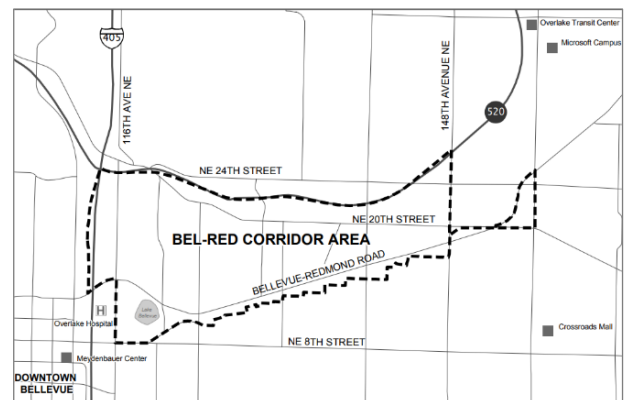
Code and bylaw support: Bellevue City Code section 3.56.070 item I directs the Arts Commission to: “Establish and maintain a long-range plan and strategic vision for the arts and culture in Bellevue (i.e., Cultural Compass), including participation with the planning commission in preparing, reviewing and recommending comprehensive plan updates and subarea plans; provided, that the planning commission shall review and make final recommendations to the city council on all matters which will be adopted by the city council as part of the comprehensive plan;”

Project Executive Summary

After more than a decade of experience implementing BelRed policies and regulations, the BelRed Subarea Plan is being refreshed to reflect new information, increase capacity to meet new citywide housing and job targets, and to strengthen and clarify direction for implementation. This planning initiative, known as the BelRed Look Forward, is being done in concert with the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update.

Context of the Project

After witnessing employment decline in BelRed from 1995 to 2004, Bellevue City Council appointed a Steering Committee in 2005 to study redevelopment of the corridor and to develop a new vision for the subarea. An extensive planning process followed involving multiple stakeholders including former City Council members, representatives from Boards and Commissions, as well as representatives from the subarea and surrounding community. Supported by staff and a consultant team, the committee prepared a final report in 2007. The committee’s recommendations ultimately formed the basis for the new BelRed Subarea Plan and BelRed Land Use Code, which were adopted in 2009. The plan went on to win several awards including the regional Vision 2040 award and the Governor’s Smart Communities Award.



These documents help implement the vision to transform BelRed from a declining light industrial area into an area with “a thriving economy”, “vibrant, diverse and walkable neighborhoods,” “a sense of place,” and “offering a culture-rich environment unique to the Eastside with an arts district... public art and artists living and working in the area... open studios, art walks, and artful expression in buildings and infrastructure...”



Since 2009, over 2,100 housing units and 2.2 million square feet of non-residential space have been developed, and another 3,100 housing units and 1.3 million square feet of office development are in the pipeline, indicating that BelRed is on track to meeting the housing and job growth projected for the subarea by 2030. However, a key feature of BelRed is the plethora of creative businesses dispersed throughout the subarea with a concentration of creative activity occurring around the BelRed/130th light rail station. When employment declined and vacancies rose, artists and arts organizations moved into the area taking advantage of lower costs. Today, the area is home to a myriad of diverse creative businesses and organizations ranging from the Francia Russell Center, the Pacific Northwest Ballet’s premier school of ballet to the West Coast Drum Shop, to the Japanese Art Swords galley, to the Bellevue Cello Academy. The challenge today is how to maintain BelRed’s rich culture as redevelopment continues, especially around the BelRed/130 station.

Policy Updates

The focus of this study session item is on the proposed amendments to the Arts and Culture policies in the BelRed Subarea Plan. This amendment process will follow the same process as the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update with the Arts Commission making a recommendation to the Planning Commission and then the Planning Commission making a recommendation to the City Council. Adoption of the BelRed Subarea Plan Comprehensive Plan Amendment is anticipated in September 2024 as part of the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update.

Arts and Culture policies guide the city’s work to build and sustain BelRed as a destination for creative and innovative communities. Updates to this section focus on policies that support the organization and visibility of the BelRed Arts District as well as on policies that provide for creative space and community connection. Proposed updates along with rationale for modification can be found in Attachments A and B to this memo and are summarized below:

Key Policy Moves

- New policy to provide support and resources to organizations that can help grow, fund, and manage the Arts District.
- Updates to enhance policies calling for funding, integration, and investment in a wide range of art works, projects, and events that enhance visibility of the Arts District.
- New policies to secure long-term affordable arts and cultural space, as well as affordable artist housing.
- New policy to support programs and events that facilitate collaboration between artists, other creatives, and the broader community.
- New policy to develop a dedicated indoor central meeting space for events, classes, programs, and other arts uses.

- New policy to incorporate artistic components and amenities into city facilities.
- Updates to remove implementation policy calling for encouragement of a business improvement organization.

Community Feedback

Proposed policies were released for public review in mid-January on [EngagingBellevue.com](https://www.bellevue.gov/engaging-bellevue). A Policy Open House was also held on January 20 giving the public an opportunity to talk with staff about policy updates and ask questions. Members of the public were asked to provide feedback on policy moves within three topic areas: Open Space and Natural Systems, Cultural and Community Connections, and Land Use and Urban Form. To provide feedback, members of the public were asked to respond to the following three questions:

1. Which of these policy moves sound good to you, and what makes you say that?
2. Are there any ideas or considerations unique to BelRed you think are missing?
3. What do you want Board and Commission members to know as they discuss these policy moves and make their recommendations?

Respondents to the questionnaire on Cultural and Community Connections expressed overwhelming support for policies to secure long-term affordable arts and cultural space, as well as affordable artist housing. One responder wrote, *"Policies for funding art and securing affordable housing and artistic spaces are particularly important so the artists communities currently there don't get driven out by rising costs, and instead become integral in the growth and evolution of the community."* Another noted, *"We don't really have any presentable art spaces to host big performances ...yet a good % of BRK residents can afford and want to participate in such performing arts activities to enrich our lives (and our children's). It will be good to get dedicated funding for 1-2 such venues so we don't always have to go to Seattle downtown to enjoy these type of activities."*

Respondents also voiced strong support for the new policy calling for developing a dedicated indoor central meeting space noting the need for more places for people to *"hang out and vibe."* Several respondents also voiced support for the new policy calling for incorporating artistic components and amenities into city facilities. One respondent wrote, *"this will make the city more beautiful and give it some flavor."*

In terms of what is missing, ideas shared included requests for a skating rink, different types of museums, and spaces for live performances, such as a jazz club. Recognizing Bellevue's tremendous cultural diversity, another respondent felt *encouraging development of ethnic oriented events and art (e.g. Ganesh festival) would be an excellent addition.* Another respondent wrote that "accessibility and parking" were ideas or considerations that were missing.

Members of the public wanted Board and Commission members to know that *the biggest knock that Bellevue has against it is that it's oftentimes seen as a sterile city or the suburbs. With a thriving arts scene, we can take this city to the next level and make it even better!* Another respondent wrote, *"Investing in public art give neighborhoods character and makes them unique, desirable places to live, visit, and patron. I love imagining a future bel red neighborhood that is walkable, bikeable, and full of public art and open green space."* However, another respondent expressed concern writing, *"I fear that you will adopt policies that will drive the cost to live in Bellevue out of my reach."*

Members of the public are invited to Board and Commission meetings to provide input through oral testimony. A list of upcoming and past meetings along with [all proposed policy updates](#) are available on the [project webpage](#).

Connections To Other Subarea Plan Policies

Proposed arts and culture policy amendments are complementary with proposed policies found in other sections of the BelRed Subarea Plan including:

Overarching / General Policies

- **S-BR-2.** Cultivate a differentiated economic niche for Bel-Red and support creative mixed use districts by attracting new innovative businesses and ensuring provision of basic goods and services for nearby residents.

Land Use Policies

- **S-BR-9.** Provide for small artisanal manufacturing and artist live/work and work/live uses.
- **S-BR-26.** Provide for a thriving arts district in this node with abundant space for production, performance, participation and promotion of arts and cultural activities. (Note: Policy is for the BelRed/130 node)

Urban Design Policies

- **S-BR-37.** Encourage place-making and a dynamic public realm by incentivizing integration of art, places for performance, and other artistic expression into publicly accessible plazas, open spaces and other gathering places in both public and private development projects, particularly within the Arts District Intensive Area.
- **S-BR-40.** Reinforce BelRed's unique identity and characteristics through the use of gateways, neighborhood thresholds, and public art.
- **S-BR-41.** Use vibrant color as an accent in the Arts District Intensive Area, such as in murals, furnishings, architectural details, lighting and other features, to highlight and distinguish the area as a creative and artistic hub.

Parks and Open Space Policies

- **S-BR-57.** Centrally locate a large park near the 130th Light Rail Station with dedicated facilities for outdoor performance and community events to serve the needs of the community and the BelRed Arts District.

Discussion

The Arts Commission is requested to discuss and provide direction on the proposed Arts and Culture policy amendments, and if feasible, approve a recommendation for submittal to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission will review the recommendation in the context of the entire Subarea Plan and make a recommendation to the City Council regarding the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan Amendment following a public hearing.

Attachments

Attachment A: Proposed Arts and Culture Policy Amendments to the BelRed Subarea Plan (legislative strike through version)

Attachment B: Proposed Arts and Culture Policy Amendments to the BelRed Subarea Plan (clean version)

Staff Contacts

Gwen Rousseau, AICP, Senior Planner
425-452-2743, grousseau@bellevuewa.gov

Scott MacDonald, Public Art Specialist
425-452-7897, smacdonald@bellevuewa.gov