

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION  
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

February 14, 2024  
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Bhargava, Vice Chair Goepple, Commissioners Brown, Cálad, Ferris, Khanloo

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Emil King, Caleb Miller, Janet Shull, Kate Nesse, Department of Community Development; Matt McFarland, Robert Sepier, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Deputy Mayor Malakoutian

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER  
(6:31p.m.)

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Bhargava who presided.

2. ROLL CALL  
(6:32 p.m.)

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA  
(6:32 p.m.)

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Vice Chair Goepple. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brown and the motion carried unanimously.

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS  
(6:33 p.m.)

Deputy Mayor Malakoutian noted that using dollars from the Housing Trust Fund and the Housing Stability Program investments have been made in eight projects that collectively have almost 900 affordable housing units on the Eastside, almost 350 of which are in Bellevue. The Council also recently approved a safe parking program that will accommodate 20 cars and those sleeping in them. The program provides the participants with access to some amenities, including showers and a kitchen in which to cook food, along with case management.

The Council at its February 12 meeting received updates from the human services department

regarding the needs in the community.

5. STAFF REPORTS  
(6:35 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Comprehensive Planning Manager Thara Johnson took a few minutes to review the Commission's schedule of upcoming meeting dates and agenda items. It was noted that an additional meeting may be added to the calendar for April 3 focused on the Wilburton LUCA; the meeting is needed ahead of presenting the LUCA to the other boards and commissions. An additional meeting is also proposed for May 1 for the Wilburton public hearings, one for the policies and one for the LUCA.

Chair Bhargava voiced appreciation for the willingness of the Commissioners to attend extra meetings as they are needed. Thara Johnson echoed that comment.

6. WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATIONS  
(6:41 p.m.)

Chair Bhargava took a moment to note that under Ordinance 6752, the topics about which the public may speak during a meeting are limited to subject matters related to the city of Bellevue government and within the powers and duties of the Planning Commission. Additional information about the new rules of decorum governing conduct of the public during meetings can be found in Ordinance 6752.

A. Written Communications  
(6:42 p.m.)

Thara Johnson noted the receipt of several written comments, including some received too late to include in the packet for the June 24 meeting. The comments primarily related to the Community Engagement Element, but there were also comments related to the tree code and the draft Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Ferris noted that there was a letter sent by the Plush Committee of the Chamber of Commerce that talked about changing some designations. Thara Johnson said the issues raised will be addressed with the Commission.

B. Oral Communications  
(6:44 p.m.)

Alex Tsimerman began by calling the Commissioners dirty garbage rates and Council Nazi pigs. The situation regarding education will change because the Council approved Mohamad Malakoutian to serve as Deputy Mayor, a man who works for Amazon. Bellevue government has officially accepted a corporation, which means there is a classic fascism in place. Everything will be changed and that is happening. At the last Council meeting a full ten people were not allowed to speak. The new bylaws reflect actions taken by the Council in 2022 that stops people from speaking in meetings. No members of the Commissions have stood up to the Council. There is no freedom of speech in Bellevue.

Vice Chair Goepple asked the record to reflect that the previous speaker's comments were a

flagrant violation of Ordinance 6752 by virtue of having no relevance to the work of the Planning Commission and was nothing more than a rambling racist rant.

Suzanne Baugh, a retired commercial real estate broker with 25 years of experience, primarily on the Eastside, and a resident of Lake Heights for nearly 34 years, noted that during that time the Newport Hills Shopping Center has gone from a busy neighborhood retail and service destination to nothing short of a mess. The last 25 years has seen only steady decline, and many opportunities have been taken during that time to address elected officials about the need for redevelopment. In 2016 and 2018 two different developers presented projects that both the City Council and the community viewed favorably. However, because the projects did not fit within the Neighborhood Business parameters, a Comprehensive Plan amendment process was required and attempted. Several Newport area residents testified before the Planning Commission and the City Council in favor of the CPA, but after a small but loud minority voiced intense opposition to changing the shopping center, the owner lost heart and the developers withdrew. Recently an MU land designation was assigned to the center with no evidence that a financially viable project could be achieved with that designation. For that reason, a MU-Low/Medium designation should be approved as part of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan. That would allow for going into the Newport area subarea planning process with a designation in place that will give potential developers a reasonable chance to design a financially viable project. The demographics in Bellevue have changed and more family residential units are needed at different price points to accommodate younger and older residents, as well as more outdoor common area space and potentially incentives that support existing viable tenants. The 1994 Newport Hills subarea plan stated that local businesses, the community and the city of Bellevue should creatively integrate new and existing uses to enhance the area's economic vitality. The Newport Hills Shopping Center has been in decline for years and gets markedly more dangerous every year. It is an eyesore and beyond its usable life. There is every chance that redevelopment will not happen at the MU/L designation.

Matt Ruehl took a moment to thank the person who writes the Commission's minutes for accurately reflecting the comments made at a previous meeting regarding a complicated topic regarding the digital grand connection. With regard to the application of a digital grand connection that involves land, it was noted that most Commissioners likely are familiar with the hazard and inventory risk report 2018-2023 which addresses the emergency management risks facing the city. Along with that is a regional coordination framework that includes signatures from various organizations and cities agreeing to do certain things in certain types of emergencies. Effectively that means there is in place a shared domain of interest, namely emergency management, and a trust network at the leadership level within that domain. The question is what could be done if that same trust network extended down to the gatekeeper digital trust level. For example, something like Alert, King County could coordinate digital messaging on a monthly basis on a pre-existing digital asset. People could be asked to sign up for the digital alert. That would result in something measurable that could shift the needle from three percent to five percent signed up for the King County alert. The free digital asset could be coordinated on the third Thursday of each month, taking only about two minutes for each person involved. The thing about the digital trust network, or a digital grand connection, is that it does not take a lot of money for new assets or infrastructures; it is all a matter of how current assets can be used differently. Just as easily as information can be shared about lahars and earthquake prevention, information can be shared about fentanyl overdoses, or Vision Zero, or hate crime reporting. The Commission was urged to think about digital trust and how it relates to leadership trust within a given domain.

Alexis Chartouni addressed the issue of the street grid around Bellevue station. Attention was

drawn to the detention vault that must be built in order to maintain storm water management for the rights-of-way alone, not including detention for the building. There is vault of similar size already installed on the west side of the property. There is a concrete retaining wall in place needed to hold up the right-of-way due to the elevation changes between the surrounding properties. When future development happens, the wall will have to be demolished in its entirety. The wall is seven feet tall and has a six-foot-wide footing and it runs a full 300 feet on the west side and 300 feet on the south side. Collectively, the wall and the detention vaults represent a considerable private investment in public infrastructure, pushing the project toward financial nonviability, all before any housing is created. The \$3 million cost could provide about ten housing units. The rights-of-way in BelRed simply must be reconsidered. A different approach needs to be taken to preserve land and to reduce costs. More importantly, a regional detention facility would do a much better job.

Loretta Lopez, a board member of the Bridle Trails Community Club, spoke as an individual regarding the public engagement process in the Comprehensive Plan. At a recent Bridle Trails Community Club meeting, which Deputy Mayor Malakoutian attended, one question posed was in regard to the weight given to public comments made by residents of the community as opposed to those made by people who do not live in the community. It would seem that reasonable people would want to know if comments are made by residents or not. While comments from non-residents should be welcomed, the community should know the basis of the opinions and the recommendations that are formed by staff and provided to the Commission so everyone can understand the basis on which the Commission makes recommendations that are then forwarded to the City Council for a final decision. If the community knows the basis of the evidence, there will be more trust in leadership. In the process of receiving comments, a way should be found to make sure the Commissioners know if their decisions are made based on comments made by residents or non-residents.

Pamela Johnston said there was no bait and switch regarding the Kenmore supportive housing situation. The information in hand for two years did not change. The issue is getting information out to people so the people can understand what is going on. It is very important for everyone to understand and buy off on the Comprehensive Plan, not to just give input. During the Great Neighborhoods process, after the public hearing there was a lot of work that had to be done to educate the Council about what the neighborhoods wanted to see in the plan and the staff in the plan that was over the heads of the neighborhoods. There was a great meeting at Stevenson Elementary at which there was a lot of talk and small group discussions. It was disappointing that most of the people were non-residents representing non-profits, but even so it was a good discussion with good comments. There should be more education and Comprehensive Plan discussion before the public hearing. Everyone should come together before it is time for the Council to sign off on it. The extra meetings called for represent a problem in that the April date falls in a week with a school holiday. There used to be big neighborhood education days twice a year. Just having one or two of those would be great for the Comprehensive Plan.

Nicole Myers noted that in the recently released final EIS for the Comprehensive Plan the preferred alternative attaches the highest growth option with 152,000 new housing units. The Commission's recently discussion included ED-30, which is being updated to support a high-quality primary, secondary and post-secondary public education system in Bellevue. Unfortunately, no statement is made about acquiring land even though it is possible more schools will be needed faster than it will be realistically possible to build them. Wording has been added about acquiring land for parks; the same wording should be included regarding acquiring land for schools. Section 1.8 Chapter 10 says there is no difference between the No Action and the preferred alternative in terms of the expected impacts to public services and utilities since both

would have incremental growth, but the Commission should really think about whether or not that is true, especially regard to schools, given the possibility of more than tripling the population in just 20 years. Table 2-4 in the FEIS states that much of the new housing is expected to be well-served by transit, which is an important metric. Unfortunately the map of transit-proximate areas in Section 6.2 shows no transit-proximate areas in the BelRed area where the new station will be, and instead shows transit access in areas that are slated to have bus service cuts once the East Link connection transit map goes into effect. Some of the higher-density areas close to the Downtown will have six-story buildings on small neighborhood streets and the community might question whether parking along the street will be lost to guarantee ladder truck access in the event of a fire, and whether there are sidewalk streetscape expectations for a neighborhood street since the Downtown requirements will not apply, even though it is a Downtown-style building. It should be clear where delivery trucks will park if not on the sidewalk, and it should be asked if buildings will be given even more height and density given the need to have every development pitch in to reach the affordable housing goals. It should not just be assumed that the legwork will happen when staff are having to work on so many different aspects of creating the vision for the city in the future. For the discussion on the agenda, the future land use map key does not line up the text in bold on the left that corresponds to the captions on the right. The FEIS has a preferred alternative map on page 76 that does not show all of Bellevue; it is overlaid partially with the map key, obscuring part of the map.

Heidi Dean reminded the Commissioners that the Council directed that no Neighborhood Business properties would be studied as MU/LM. That was not studied in the FEIS and to change it now would equal a spot rezone during a Comprehensive Plan update, which is not how things are done. Changes should not now be made to lay the groundwork for Rainier Northwest to come in during the neighborhood plan update, which will immediately follow the Comprehensive Plan update. It was not just a small but vocal group involved. Deputy Mayor Malakoutian was a member of the Planning Commission and was present to see the room packet in 2016 with people opposing both rezones. Over 500 handwritten and almost 700 online signatures opposed the move. In 2018 there were 600 online signatures in opposition to upzoning the shopping center. It is also untrue that the site cannot be redeveloped without a massive upzone because the same buyer Rainier Northwest was under contract with in late 2019 is still there waiting to buy the shopping center; Rainier Northwest will not come back to the table. The buyer checks multiple Comprehensive Plan boxes, including housing and neighborhood retail services. It was noted that seated in the audience was a former community club board member who approved the letter sent to the Commission in June and read at the June 28 meeting, and who then along with Suzanne Baugh appeared before the Council asking that the shopping center site be upzoned. Nothing has changed in seven months. Developers look for people in neighborhoods to use as mouthpieces. Some people are doers and some people are complainers. Michelle Hilhorst found Bill Pace to fill a spot; Scott Robertson found a buyer. Suzanne Baugh has done nothing except to complain and to ask that the shopping center be upzoned.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None  
(7:14 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION

A. Planning Commission Educational Series, Vol II, Pt. 2: Reviewing Land Use Code Amendments (LUCAs) and Application of Training to Wilburton Vision Implementation LUCA.  
(7:14 p.m.)

Assistant City Attorney Matt McFarland reminded the Commissioners that the first part of the educational series occurred in July 2023. It covered the Commission roles and responsibilities and reviewing Comprehensive Plan amendments. Along with the session focused on reviewing Land Use Code amendments, the training will lead up to reviewing the Wilburton subarea Comprehensive Plan amendments and the Land Use Code amendments on an accelerated schedule.

By way of reminder, Matt McFarland stated that the roles and responsibilities of the Commission include fact finding and serving as citizen advisors to the City Council. The Commission is not a substitute for the Council and serves at the pleasure of the Council. The Commission follows a process that is relatively concrete with respect to both Comprehensive Plan amendments and Land Use Code amendments; it includes conducting study sessions, holding public hearings, creating a legislative record, applying the decision criteria, and making recommendations to the Council. The Commissioners must understand the difference between policy and the Land Use Code. The Comprehensive Plan is the centerpiece of the city's local planning; it is the foundational planning document providing the framework and blueprint for the city's planning for the next 20 years. The Land Use Code houses the actual regulations.

The Commission is representative of the public, and each member is a citizen advisor to the Council. Each Commissioner brings to the table their own background and experience. The step-by-step best practices for working through reviewing either Comprehensive Plan amendments or Land Use Code amendments begins with a review of the staff recommendation, followed by a deliberation on the staff recommendation, holding a public hearing and weighing the public testimony, and allowing every Commissioner's voice to be heard before voting. The department director, not the Commission, directs operations of the department.

Robert Sepier, assistant city attorney, explained that a LUCA is a Land Use Code amendment. The Land Use Code is the essential compilation of all the legislation the Council has ever passed regulating development within the city. It includes zoning, developer standards, permit processes, appeals, and everything that goes into building something in the city and protecting the environment. The city has specific decision criteria for approving a Land Use Code amendment. A modification must be A) consistent with the Comprehensive Plan; B) enhance the public health, safety or welfare; and C) must not be contrary to the best interest of the citizens and property owners of the city of Bellevue. The essential ingredient for the Commission is criterion A. Criteria B and C are essential ingredients in the Council's recipe, not the Commission's. By adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, the Council has found that the plan meets Criteria B and C.

Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan is required. In Washington state it all starts with the Growth Management Act, which is the central state law. It boils down from there to regional planning in King County, and local planning in the form of the Comprehensive Plan and the development regulations. The various flavors can be unique, but so long as they are compatible, it is okay. In determining compatibility, there must be co-existence in a stable fashion without unduly negatively impacting the plan. A Land Use Code amendment must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, meaning it does not conflict with the Comprehensive Plan, and it must advance or assist in moving forward goals, objective, policies, land uses, densities and intensities.

Strategic Planning Manager Janet Shull said the Wilburton Vision Implementation is not a new recipe. It has been talked about and prepared for; it is known to be popular and of interest to many in the community. The key ingredients are the draft Comprehensive Plan policies for

Wilburton; the draft Land Use Code amendment for Wilburton; the general Comprehensive Plan policies; the environmental review, DEIS and FEIS; the CAC recommendations that serves as the baseline; data concerning city growth, affordable housing, equity and sustainability; staff expertise; and public comment and stakeholder input.

Senior Planner Caleb Miller said the first step is to combine all of the ingredients. In considering the Land Use Code amendment for Wilburton, it is necessary to sift through the environmental analysis, the public outreach that has been done, the economic feasibility modeling, as well as the recommendations from the CAC, city boards and commissions, and Council direction. Each ingredient informs the Commission's decision making for the LUCA, and each plays a key role in the long-term success of the LUCA.

Continuing, Caleb Miller explained that land use districts determine what can be built where, and what it can look like generally. In Bellevue, land use districts have been developed over time as different analyses were completed. For the current exercise, the DEIS was completed in 2023, and the FEIS was completed only recently. Through each, a future land use map was developed based on the various impacts and mitigation measures identified in those environmental analyses; that map will ultimately inform the zoning districts in Wilburton. Land use districts have been standardized across the city instead of being specific to neighborhoods. Historically, the Downtown, BelRed and East Main have had their own specific Comprehensive Plan designations and associated zoning. The same approach will be used for Wilburton in terms of the general bulk and scale of development, with application to different areas of the city in the future as deemed appropriate.

The development regulations are the next level down after zoning and they spell out the fine details of the development requirements, such as bulk, height, form standards, access, public realm, transportation needs, and incentives for public amenities such as affordable housing and open space. While the Downtown, BelRed, Eastgate and East Main have their own code sections, Wilburton will not. The new approach will be to plug in the specific requirements throughout the rest of the code, allowing all of the other code standards apply to Wilburton to standardize and simplify the code. It is admittedly a big lift to standardize and simplify a historical document like the Land Use Code.

The second step involves whisking all of the ingredients together by holding public hearings and considering all oral and written public comments, making adjustments as needed. The public hearing is typically held toward the end of the Commission's review process. It requires two week's public notice and additional opportunities for written and oral comments. If there are changes to a LUCA that come out of the Commission's review process, or if things are heard from the public around which the Commission wants to have more information, the Commission is allowed to keep talking about the issues.

The third step is to bake the recipe, a step that involves evaluating whether or not a proposed CPA is consistent with the decision criteria in the code, and then determining if a proposed LUCA is consistent with the CPA.

Caleb Miller said the Wilburton LUCA schedule calls for the policies to be reviewed alongside the implementing regulations. Five Commission study sessions will be held. During the first the topic will be the land use designations and the future land use map. The second session will focus on transportation, streets and blocks. The third session will take up a review of and site organization, buildings and design. The fourth session will focus on land use, incentives and housing. The fifth session will involve conducting two public hearings, one for the CPA and one

for the LUCA. The accelerated schedule is aimed at achieving a Council adoption of the LUCA by June. Once the Commission's recommendation is formulated, it will be transmitted to the City Council for review and adoption.

Public hearings provide a forum for members of the public to provide input on the CPA and LUCA decisions before the Commission or the Council. The public testimony should be specific in addressing the CPA or the LUCA. The Commission's role is to gather the input and to apply it when making a decision. The Commission may at times make recommendations that is contrary to or unpopular with the public, or even the City Council; it is the Commission's prerogative to do so.

All Commission meetings are governed by the Open Public Meetings Act. As such the public is allowed to participate in the meetings, though public participation is not always required by state law. Under the Commission's bylaws, there is no time limit; the hearings go on as long as members of the public wish to comment.

Commissioner Ferris commented that often things are brought up in public testimony that warrant further pursuit. It would seem better to have the public hearing earlier in the process, at least far enough ahead of the time to make a decision to allow for dialog and consideration of the comments. Matt McFarland said part of that issue lies with the process itself. There tends to be a more robust turnout when a public hearing is noticed, often by members of the public who have chosen not to be engaged during the study sessions. The schedule is not set by the code, but the schedule is designed to make sure the Commission is fully informed on all technical aspects ahead of the public hearing.

Commissioner Ferris said at the very least it would be helpful to have one more study session after a public hearing before making a recommendation. Thara Johnson agreed that similar comments have been made in prior years, particularly where complicated topics were on the table. One complexity is that the public hearing is the opportune time for the staff to present a comprehensive semi-final draft both to the Commission and to the community. Staff does try to include an additional study session after a public hearing, but that is not always possible when there are tight schedules involved.

Janet Shull pointed out that there had been a number of briefings and study sessions on the Wilburton policies, and there has been a lot of community engagement activity along with the Comprehensive Plan amendment team. There will be more of the same going forward. Matt McFarland pointed out that from a legal perspective, the EIS process is designed to provide notice to and gather feedback from the public. Staff are required to include in the FEIS a response to each public comment made during the environmental review process.

Commissioner Khanloo agreed with Commissioner Ferris. The role of the Commission is to listen to the public and to act as a fact finder. Often, however, what the Commission hears is loud voices rather than diverse comments. Having a hands-on, on-site meeting with the public in Wilburton to see firsthand what the issues are would be helpful for all involved.

Vice Chair Goeppelle stressed the importance of focusing on compatibility. It is good to be aware of the relevant policies when working through a LUCA. The staff were encouraged to overshare when it comes to reference documents for purposes of compatibility. Matt McFarland said one thing that helps to understand the distinction between the Comprehensive Plan policies and the Land Use Code is to remember that the policies serve as a blueprint. The Land Use Code is the actual detailed structure and the final plans that come out of the blueprint.

Chair Bhargava suggested that determining compatibility often involves a judgement call. That can change over time as thinking and conditions evolve. Twenty years is a long time. Having a guidance framework for how to track for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan would be helpful.

Chair Bhargava voiced support for using the factfinder analogy to represent and understand the voice of the public. Anything that can be done to incorporate input from the public hearings into the thinking process would be helpful. Specific examples can shed light on conversations.

**\*\*BREAK\*\***

(7:52 p.m.)

B. Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update: Policy Changes in the Land Use Element and Introduction to the Future Land Use Map Categories

(7:59 p.m.)

Assistant Director Emil King reminded the Commissioners the policies have been under discussion for a while, starting with general direction from the Commission and the major policy moves. Things now are at the point of digging into the actual policies and having the Commission weigh in. The work is all leading up to May 2024 when the full draft of the Comprehensive Plan will be brought back to the Commission.

To date comments have been received from more than 5000 members of the community. Targeted outreach has been done to a number of underrepresented groups. The statistically valid survey yielded a lot of input, as did the work of the strategy teams. A comprehensive look is being taken at what the plan will mean for Bellevue residents and businesses, and for those who might want to come to Bellevue in the future. More detail will be shared at an upcoming meeting about the engagement efforts to date. The survey currently posted to EngagingBellevue.com will be live for another two days. There have been about 100 attendees at the community open house event, and the community conversation saw about 65 attendees.

Senior Planner Dr. Kate Nesse said the two biggest updates in the land use strategy subsection involve policies LU-2 and LU-3. Both are about expanding the open space and park system. The section addresses the overarching growth strategy and there were also some changes to LU-1.

Policies LU-12, LU-13 and LU-15 in the residential areas subsection were broadened so as to address more than they did initially. For example, LU-12 focuses on ways to maintain and improve vitality in residential areas just code enforcement, and LU-13 focuses on scale instead of use. The update to LU-15 focuses on the quality of the pedestrian connections.

The neighborhood centers subsection was updated to reflect the Puget Sound Regional Council's hierarchy of regional growth centers, which in Bellevue is Downtown; countywide centers, which is BelRed, Wilburton, Crossroads, Factoria and Eastgate; and city-designated centers which in Bellevue are called neighborhood centers. The name of the subsection was changed accordingly and the policies were updated to focus on the function of the neighborhood centers.

In the past the city has treated mixed use and countywide centers the same. Although the definitions overlap, staff are recommending separating the two given that they have different purposes. Countywide centers are designated by the county and serve the function of focusing transportation resources. They must meet certain criteria about size and the number of housing

units and jobs. The city wants to be a little more expansive in the treatment of Mixed Use Centers.

In the land use compatibility subsection, the policies focus on how land uses relate to one another. Policy LU-24 was added to address commercial displacement, and LU-26 was updated to be more inclusive of the many ways in which development can integrate with the surroundings.

The transit-oriented development subsection policies focus on how land uses relate to each other and to transportation nodes. LU-31 was moved from the Transportation Element given its focus on land use.

A number of changes were made to the policies in the citywide policies subsection. LU-34 was moved from the transit-oriented development section to the subsection to allow incentive systems to be used anywhere in the city. LU-35 was added to celebrate cultural resources, and LU-38 was added to support safe access to public amenities such as parks. LU-39 was updated to expand the list of things to consider in the provision of child care. Three policies were added to the subsection to address air quality.

Dr. Kate Nesse confirmed for Commissioner Brown that the order is regional centers, mixed use centers then neighborhood centers. There are different policies that apply to each of those levels. The city has been using the terms, “countywide centers” and “mixed use centers” interchangeably. Because countywide centers have to go through a process and meet certain standards, tied to transportation infrastructure resources and funding, there was concern about making sure those requirements are met but without limiting the city in how it invests in mixed use centers, particularly in BelRed which is much larger than what is allowed under the county-defined, countywide centers.

Commissioner Khanloo asked staff if they had information about the 5000 who offered comments during the outreach efforts, specifically whether they are residents or non-residents. Emil King explained that as part of all outreach efforts, including the surveys, folks are given the opportunity to enter their demographics. About 75 percent of the respondents do share their demographics. About 90 percent of those who have participated in the outreach are Bellevue residents. Another six or seven percent work in Bellevue but live elsewhere, and the balance of three to five percent visit, shop, dine or recreate in Bellevue. Concerted effort has been put into reaching the younger demographics; renters and people of color are other groups.

Commissioner Khanloo asked about LU-2 and what is behind adding the acquisition of parks. Dr. Kate Nesse said there is no desire to limit the city to its existing parks, rather the desire is to see the parks system expanded. It is important to the Parks Board to see the parks system expanded at the same rate as the population, and one way to do that is through acquisition.

Referring to LU-9, Commissioner Khanloo asked why “with regional partners to achieve a mix of jobs and housing” was removed from the original. Dr. Kate Nesse said old LU-9 is the new LU-10 and explained that there are many ways to work toward a land use pattern that makes it possible for people to live closer to where they work. One way is to work with regional partners, but that is not the only way. The revised language is intended to be broader.

Commissioner Cálad asked for clarity regarding the new LU-25. Dr. Kate Nesse said there is a desire to use the land in the city in the most efficient ways. If there are developers that are developing complimentary businesses, they should be encouraged to share parking facilities.

Emil King said there is always a lot of conversation about parking, the cost to provide it and whether or not parking facilities are the right size. The policy encourages the joint use and funding of shared parking facilities, an approach that could allow for using what otherwise would be parking for other development. Not all buildings are fully utilizing their available parking currently. Dr. Kate Nesse pointed out that the policy has been in the Comprehensive Plan for some time and its wording has not been changed. The only change is that the policy has been in the Transportation Element.

Commissioner Ferris commented that churches have parking lots that generally are only used on weekends. Those parking facilities could possibly be shared on workdays.

Commissioner Ferris asked what the proposed wording of LU-3 is intended to accomplish. Dr. Kate Nesse said “brownfields,” “grayfields” and “greenfields” have been added to the glossary. One focus is on preserving the park-like character of the city. Some areas that are not developed might be critical areas where development cannot happen, but some areas might actually allow some development. If everything else is equal, the intent is to prioritize areas that already have some development for redevelopment over an area that has no development. The recommendation came out of the climate vulnerability assessment as a way to preserve open space in the city. Commissioner Ferris suggested either rewording or adding words to the policy so that someone who does not look at the glossary can understand the intent.

Commissioner Ferris referenced LU-13 and asked if the policy should apply everywhere there is a big transition, not just in residential areas. Dr. Kate Nesse said the policy language specifically calls out residential areas because that is where people are most sensitive to transitions between low density and high density. There are design techniques that are applied in non-residential areas.

Commissioner Ferris called attention to LU-24 and voiced the assumption that as worded the policy allows existing businesses to remain in their current locations even if the land they are on has been rezoned, provided there are no redevelopment plans in mind. Staff was also asked if there will be any effort to help relocate those businesses. Dr. Kate Nesse said there is a new policy in the Economic Development element about helping displaced businesses find new locations within the city.

Commissioner Ferris pointed out a typo in LU-34 where the word “additional” appears twice.

Vice Chair Goepple asked if there is a trend in Bellevue toward worsening air quality and if that is the motivation behind policies LU-39 through LU-42. Dr. Kate Nesse allowed not knowing the current trend in air quality but added that as part of the EIS process an air quality assessment was conducted that resulted in some recommendations. Some of the recommendations are around keeping sensitive uses like housing and child care away from freeways and other places that might contribute to poor air quality to the degree possible, and promoting better indoor air quality if the uses cannot be separated from the sources of air pollution.

Vice Chair Goepple pointed out that about ten percent of the overall policies under discussion relate to air quality. There should be some data in hand about the degree air quality has been deteriorating or is expected to deteriorate as a measure of how much real estate the air quality policies take up.

Vice Chair Goepple asked about old LU-13, which addressed supporting neighborhood efforts to maintain and enhance their character and appearance, and why it was considered to be

redundant. Dr. Kate Nesse said the Racially Disparate Impact Analysis commissioned by the city identified the need to refrain from the use of language that could negatively impact racial equality, particularly around housing but also generally. One thing that was brought up was the use of ambiguous wording like “neighborhood character.” LU-13 was mentioned in particular because it could have the impact of having a group of people living in a neighborhood exclude other people in the name of maintaining neighborhood character. Policy N-14 talks specifically about what “neighborhood character” means and how the vitality of neighborhoods can be maintained. LU-13 is redundant with N-14. Vice Chair Goepple noted not being wedded to words like “character” and “appearance” and more concerned about using the word “neighborhood” in a way that acknowledges it an important value. Additionally, the possibility of neighborhoods evolving over time should be maintained.

Chair Bhargava said the point made during public comment about the need to acquire land for schools was well taken. All public uses of importance to the city should be within the policy framework. Dr. Kate Nesse pointed out that while the city can support the school district’s acquisition of land for schools, the actual acquisition of land for schools is not something the city can do.

With regard to LU-3, Chair Bhargava voiced support for making the language more active in intent about the preservation of greenfields, wetlands and environmentally sensitive areas as the primary driver.

Chair Bhargava asked what the intent is behind the phrase “a substantial portion” as used in LU-8. Dr. Kate Nesse said it is not always in the developer’s best interest to achieve the maximum density, though the city does want to encourage the development of as much housing as possible. Emil King pointed out that LU-8 is an existing policy that has just be renumbered. Others agreed the language could be made clearer.

Chair Bhargava voiced support for including “regardless of household income” in LU-10.

Chair Bhargava suggested that “health and vitality” is a somewhat ambiguous term. Other language could be used to describe the intent throughout the policies.

Chair Bhargava suggested that LU-14 could be more intentional and directive relative to assessing the compatibility of commercial uses. LU-17 is generally well framed but there is wording that could be added around compatibility and economic viability in regard to Neighborhood Centers. With regard to LU-25, the importance of keeping in mind ease of use should be stressed. For LU-27, something should be said about density when it comes to locating new community facilities.

Chair Bhargava added that some of the air quality policies appear to be lifted from the recommendations from the EIS.

Commissioner Khanloo called attention to old LU-18 and old LU-26, both of which had had reference to neighborhood character removed. Whatever term is used, there needs to be some language related to neighborhood character.

With regard to LU-26, Commissioner Khanloo asked why reference to storm drainage and utilities was removed from the policy. Dr. Kate Nesse said the specific policy was not addressed with the Environmental Services Commission, but the policy language was discussed with the environmental services staff. Many of the issues in the policy are required as part of master

planning. Integrating with the surroundings is a broader category that can include some of the design features and heights in addition to storm drainage and the like. Commissioner Khanloo suggested some clarification was needed in regard to what is meant by “surrounding.”

Commissioner Brown suggested something like “integrate with surroundings and provide adequate services or infrastructure.”

Turning to LU-38, Commissioner Khanloo asked why “active living and healthy eating” had been crossed out. Emil King said the changed policy referenced, CPP-H-24, is actually a King County policy, and the changes are theirs. The language of LU-38 as proposed is more concise. Commissioner Khanloo asked if a reference to livability could be added and Emil King allowed that it could.

Vice Chair Goepple recommended keeping the word “neighborhood” in LU-32 in that it sets up the right balance between continuity and change. Support was voiced for removing old LU-13 as proposed given the potential exclusionary nature of words like “character” and “appearance.” The word “neighborhood,” however, should not become a dirty word. Returning to the topic of air quality, Vice Chair Goepple noted having no argument about pulling things from the EIS and brought over into the policies but stressed that some of the air quality policies could be edited and consolidated.

Chair Bhargava asked how specific the city needs to be in incorporating recommendations from the EIS as mitigating strategies. Emil King said the EIS provides a set of potential mitigation measures. The EIS serves as a good technical document when doing the work of drafting the policies. It is good to include items from the EIS as appropriate, but there is no required one-to-one relationship.

Commissioner Brown noted that several of the policies mention annexation and asked if in fact there are any areas left for Bellevue to annex. Emil King said the work of annexation is very nearly at its maximum, but not fully. Dr. Kate Nesse added that the county identifies potential annexation areas and Bellevue has annexed almost all of them. As recently as 2023 a few parcels on Cougar Mountain petitioned for annexation. The Council decided not to annex them at the time because the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update work was under way and they were concerned about the staff workload. Those properties likely will be annexed in the future.

A motion to extend the meeting to 9:30 p.m. was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cálad and the motion carried unanimously.

There was agreement to have staff revisit LU-2 in regard to the topic of school properties; LU-3 relative to more active language and focusing on intent; LU-8 in regard to trying to achieve a substantial portion of the maximum density; LU-13 and the issue of recognizing generally the distinctiveness of neighborhoods; LU-14, again to incorporate more intentional language; LU-17, talking about compatibility and economic viability; LU-18 and the concept of neighborhoods; LU-25 for more information about the potential shared use of parking facilities; LU-26, also with the overarching theme of neighborhood character; LU-27, locating community facilities near density; LU-32, another comment about the word neighborhood; LU-34, correct a typo; LU-38, looking at the specific language of the Countywide Planning Policies and potentially incorporating it. There also was agreement to bring back the grouping of policies relating to air quality. Dr. Kate Nesse added that a call had been made to look at the terms “health and vitality” as used in the policies, and to avoid the use of ambiguous terms in general.

Dr. Kate Nesse reminded the Commissioners that part of the scope when the project was launched in February 2022 included exploring amending the land use categories used in the Comprehensive Plan to more broadly reference the zones. Currently, many of the future land use designations have a one-to-one relationship with zones, and sometimes one-to-two, but they are not very general. There have been comments by the public about wanting to see more general references showing the character the city is looking for by area. For example, Attachment E, the future land use designation crosswalk, the key is focused on low-rise mixed use where the existing zones are Neighborhood Business and Community Business. The future land use designations are the same. The EIS included a study of MU-L and MU-L/M. The staff have recommended mixing all three of those zones together. While studied as separate categories, the three are not necessarily interchangeable, and additional environmental review may be needed to move from one zone to another.

In the residential category, Dr. Kate Nesse highlighted low-density residential, noting the existing zones R-7.5 and R-10, both of which have a one-to-one relationship with the current future land use designation. SF-UR means R-7.5, and Multifamily-Low means R-10. MF-M includes R-15 and R-20. The staff are recommending grouping those three zones under one broad category Low-Density Residential.

Currently, the future land use map is split between all of the subarea plans in Volume 2. The proposal is to locate them all in a single map and housing it in the land use section with the future land use map key. Additionally, the proposal is to take the descriptions for each of the future land use categories out of the glossary and putting them in the Land Use Element. The illustrations will be added to that as a way of visually describing the scale and density without including specific boundaries that are more appropriate as code language.

The designations are proposed to be divided into three categories: mixed use, residential and other. The mixed use designations include the Downtown without any changes; urban core, which is the highest density outside of the Downtown in East Main and Wilburton; highrise, midrise and lowrise mixed use; highrise, midrise and lowrise office; highrise, midrise and lowrise medical office; and highrise, midrise and lowrise residential mixed use. The residential designations are high-density residential, which currently does not relate to any zone; medium-density residential; low-density residential; suburban residential; and large lot residential. The other designations are General Commercial, Light Industrial, Institutional, and Hospital Institutions.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Khanloo, Dr. Kate Nesse explained that all parcels have a zoning assigned to them. Anyone wanting to change their zoning would still need to apply for a rezone, which is subject to a public process and specific review criteria, including consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. Currently, a move from Neighborhood Business to Community Business would require a Comprehensive Plan amendment because Community Business is not consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Chair Bhargava voiced the understanding that the proposed approach enables flexibility in maintaining consistency with the Comprehensive Plan as the city evolves. Thara Johnson said it also streamlines the annual Comprehensive Plan amendment process for developers and property owners.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None  
(9:26 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES  
(9:26 p.m.)

A. January 24, 2024

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Commissioner Brown. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Goepple and the motion carried unanimously.

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None  
(9:27 p.m.)

12. ADJOURNMENT  
(9:27 p.m.)

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brown and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Bhargava adjourned the meeting at 9:27 p.m.



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Thara Johnson  
Staff to the Planning Commission

03/20/2024  
Date



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Vishal Bhargava  
Chair of the Planning Commission

03/20/2024  
Date