



# Bellevue Planning Commission

July 24, 2024

## PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM

### SUBJECT

Wilburton Sustainable District Opportunity Assessment

### STAFF CONTACT(S)

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### POLICY ISSUES

In December 2020, the Bellevue City Council adopted the 2021-2025 Sustainable Bellevue Environmental Stewardship Plan (ESP), which outlines a suite of 78 actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance the natural environment in Bellevue, improve livability, and prepare for climate change. The ESP includes Strategy M.1. Sustainable land use. The first action item within that strategy is **M.1.1 Sustainable district**. *Explore creating a sustainable district, such as an EcoDistrict, in downtown, BelRed, or Wilburton, to encourage district-scale sustainability. Establish district-scale sustainability goals with partner organizations.*

Among the three neighborhoods referenced in Action M.1.1, the Sustainable District Opportunity Assessment (SDOA) evaluates the Wilburton Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Area (generally defined as the area bounded by NE 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Interstate I-405, Lake Hills Connector, and 124<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE to 118<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE). The SDOA has been conducted in close coordination with the Wilburton Vision Implementation initiative launched by Council in 2022.

### DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

**ACTION**

**DIRECTION**

**INFORMATION ONLY**

Staff will provide an update to the Planning Commission on the Wilburton Sustainable District Opportunity Assessment (SDOA), including key sustainability opportunities, alignment with other Wilburton planning and policy work, stakeholder engagement, and implementation frameworks. This presentation is for information only.

### BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Sustainable Districts, sometimes called Eco-Districts, are not a new concept; there are existing examples from as far away as Europe and East Asia, and as close as Portland, Vancouver (British Columbia), and Seattle. A sustainable district is conceptually similar to other urban districts such as an arts district, international district, etc. Like those examples, there is no single definition for a sustainable district – each city defines for itself the best location and approach. Common elements of eco-districts or sustainable districts include district-specific development standards (e.g. green building), shared infrastructure such as district energy or green stormwater, explicit prioritization of pedestrian and bicycle mobility, abundant greenery/natural areas, and keystone gathering spaces such as pedestrian promenades or parks.

In 2022 the Wilburton Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Area was identified as the most promising location to explore creating a dedicated sustainable district in Bellevue, given the convergence of amenities and opportunities in the neighborhood. This location leverages the significant local and regional investment focused in the Wilburton TOD Area, including light rail, the Eastrail, the Grand Connection, city-owned properties, and the Wilburton Vision Implementation.

In fall of 2023, staff from the Strategic Planning and Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI) teams coordinated on a joint Scope of Work and hired a consultant to provide integrated support for both Urban Design Guidelines and other Wilburton Vision Implementation support, and the Sustainable District Opportunity Assessment (SDOA).

This integrated approach has allowed the SDOA to proceed in close coordination with other related Wilburton-specific planning and policy work, including:

- Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA)
- Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA)
- Urban Design Guidelines
- Grand Connection Crossing & City Sites.

### **Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA)**

In May 2024, the Planning Commission forwarded to Council a recommendation to adopt the Wilburton Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA), as amended by staff based on previous Commission input. The CPA recommendation included policies, the Future Land Use Map, and Subarea Plan boundary, and collectively implements the vision for the Wilburton TOD area. During the City Council June 25 study session, Council provided staff with direction to return with an Ordinance approving the CPA as recommended by the Planning Commission. Staff also provided Council with a brief information-only update on how the proposed CPA informs work on a sustainable district in Wilburton through the Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA) and other implementation tools identified through the Sustainable District Opportunity Assessment.

The Wilburton CPA proposes a policy foundation for ambitious, district-scale sustainability solutions in Wilburton. This includes proposed policies that support the city's sustainability goals in general, such as the land use emphasis on mixed-use and transit-oriented development, expansion of urban tree canopy, and provision of natural spaces. The Wilburton CPA also directly supports the sustainable district concept through environmental policies such as S-WI-42 *Support the development of an environmentally resilient neighborhood through a **sustainable district framework**, code updates, and public-private partnerships*. Other environmental policies in the CPA explicitly support net-zero emissions development, creation of district energy systems, and district-scale green infrastructure opportunities.

## Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA)

Certain elements of the sustainable district concept have been included in the draft Wilburton Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA), which is currently available for public review and stakeholder and community engagement through the summer. These elements are focused on proposed land use requirements, development standards, design guidelines, and incentives related to green building, green factor/landscaping, and connection to district-scale systems such as district energy. Design guidelines are integrated into the LUCA to assist new development in effectively implementing the city's sustainable district priorities and concepts through the design of buildings, sites, and open spaces.

## Grand Connection Crossing & City Sites

The SDOA is also being conducted in close coordination with the Grand Connection Crossing team; in particular, early planning for the two city-owned properties on either side of I-405: the Metro and Lincoln Center sites. The Lincoln Center site is fully within the proposed Wilburton Sustainable District boundary and is being considered as a key opportunity site for demonstrating city leadership in innovative sustainability practices.

## CORE SUSTAINABILITY GOALS AND CONCEPTS

The Wilburton Sustainable District aims to serve as a model of sustainable urban development, contributing to a more resilient, equitable, and vibrant future. The district aims to embody the overarching values of Bellevue's Environmental Stewardship Plan, which include:

**Sustainability:** Reducing environmental impacts through innovative infrastructure, sustainable building practices, and the conservation of natural resources.

**Resilience:** Building a district that can adapt to and thrive amidst environmental, social, and economic change.

**Health and Wellbeing:** Ensuring the district promotes physical and mental health through access to green spaces, clean air, and active transportation options.

**Equity:** Creating a community where all residents have access to opportunities, services, and amenities, regardless of their social or economic status.

The SDOA process has identified five core action categories to promote the overarching values described above:

- Mobility
- Water & Ecosystems
- Energy
- Resources & Materials
- Livability & Wellbeing

## KEY SUSTAINABLE DISTRICT OPPORTUNITIES

The Wilburton SDOA has identified several key district-scale opportunities to advance its sustainability goals:

**District Energy:** King County Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD) operates a large sewer main that runs north-south through Wilburton, underneath the Eastrail corridor. This provides the opportunity to create a significant district energy system based on sewer heat recovery, a well-established technology that pulls heat from wastewater infrastructure and pipes it to surrounding buildings. This approach allows connected buildings to reduce or eliminate dedicated in-building heating and cooling systems, which reduces cost and supports all-electric buildings by reducing peak loads and associated strain on the electrical grid.

**Shared Infrastructure:** Besides energy, other infrastructure systems can also benefit from operating at a district scale, including shared parking and stormwater systems. In both cases, sharing infrastructure among multiple buildings can reduce development costs, right-size infrastructure, optimize the location of that infrastructure, and creates the possibility for meeting multiple neighborhood needs through integrated solutions such as stormwater parks.

**City-owned Properties:** Developable parcels owned by the city, in particular the Lincoln Center site, present opportunities for the city to demonstrate leadership and innovation through high-performance building approaches such as Passive House or mass timber, setting an example for private development that supports the sustainable district concept.

**High-Performance Buildings:** The Sustainable District Strategy identifies several pathways to encourage the private sector to construct high-performance / 'green' buildings within the proposed district, including but not limited to land use incentives referenced in the LUCA. Incentives or direct support from the city (e.g. technical support) would be contingent on building projects meeting certain minimum performance standards such as LEED certification, Living Building Challenge, use of low-carbon building materials, and provision of publicly accessible green space beyond what is required by code.

**Sustainable Mobility:** In her opening comments at the December 2023 stakeholder meeting, Bellevue Mayor Lynne Robinson described part of the vision for a Wilburton Sustainable District as a place where a resident had the option to live without a car (as distinct from a 'car-free zone'). The opportunity to make cars optional, rather than necessary, for people living or working within the district is supported by the Wilburton Community Vision of this area as Bellevue's next great mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented urban neighborhood. It is also supported by close proximity to three light rail stations, connections to Eastrail, expanding citywide bicycle infrastructure, and the Grand Connection. Next-generation micro-mobility and on-demand transit options such as the Bellhop can help to address 'last-mile' connectivity.

## **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

As part of the integrated SDOA + urban design approach, the city conducted two stakeholder workshops in December 2023 and February 2024. These workshops brought together Wilburton residents and property owners, key regional and local stakeholders such as King County Parks and WTD, Bellevue School District, and the Bellevue Downtown Association, and subject matter experts in various aspects of sustainable design and development.

These half-day workshops introduced participants to sustainable district principles and precedents, and solicited feedback on how those principles could best be applied in Wilburton. Stakeholder input on sustainability priorities and actions is summarized below. These represent the highest-priority actions, as voted on by the group; this is not the full list of actions being considered. Summary of key stakeholder priorities:

- High-performance buildings (LEED, Living Building Challenge, Passive House) and innovative building techniques/materials
- Connection to district energy, such as a Sewer Heat Recovery system
- Encourage or require all-electric buildings (no new fossil fuel hookups)
- Establishing targets for on-site stormwater collection and reuse, and/or using non-potable water for landscaping or certain in-building uses
- Encouraging shared above-grade structured parking
- Creating connected habitat (including potentially daylighting and/or restoring Sturtevant Creek)
- Create new natural landscapes for human enjoyment (including potentially daylighting and/or restoring Sturtevant Creek)
- Add new pedestrian pathways and through-block connections
- Salmon Safe certification for all new developments (district-wide)
- Limit use of toxic building materials

The SDOA team will conduct another stakeholder meeting in 2024 to present and get feedback on a draft Sustainable District Strategy. The team will also identify ongoing engagement opportunities as part of the next phase of sustainable district work.

## **IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORKS**

The SDOA team reviewed several third-party rating systems as potential frameworks to help guide sustainable district implementation. A matrix comparing the results of this review is available as Attachment A.

### **LEED for Communities**

The rating system selected by the project consultant team as most appropriate for consideration is LEED for Communities, which is a certification pathway within LEED for Cities & Communities and is part of the U.S. Green Building Council's suite of building, neighborhood, and city level sustainability certification programs. LEED for Cities & Communities was released in early 2024 and integrates two existing rating systems – LEED for Neighborhood Development (ND) and LEED for Cities – into a single system.

Based on an initial self-assessment of the LEED for Communities checklist, it appears that a Wilburton Sustainable District would be able to achieve certification. A decision on whether to pursue certification has not been made at this time, and staff have not made a recommendation on whether to pursue certification. Further analysis is needed of the costs and benefits. However, the LEED for Communities framework is useful to the SDOA process, independent of the decision whether or not to certify.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

The SDOA is currently wrapping up the phase of work focused on integration with design guidelines and the LUCA, which will culminate in a Sustainable District Strategy. The ESI team is preparing to launch the second phase of work, which will focus on stakeholder partnerships, early project planning for major opportunities such as district energy, and other implementation planning.

#### **ATTACHMENT(S)**

A. Rating System Evaluation Matrix

#### **REFERENCE MATERIALS**

[Sustainable Bellevue Environmental Stewardship Initiative Plan  
Draft Wilburton Comprehensive Plan Amendment](#)