

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION  
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

July 27, 2022  
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Vice Chair Bhargava, Commissioners Cálad, Goeppele, Malakoutian

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Chair Ferris, Commissioner Brown, Commissioner Morisseau

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Emil King, Gwen Rousseau, Department of Community Development

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Robertson

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER  
(6:30 p.m.)

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

Vice Chair Bhargava stated that the meeting and future meetings would be held via hybrid format with both in-person and virtual options via Zoom.

2. ROLL CALL  
(6:31 p.m.)

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Chair Ferris and Commissioners Brown and Morisseau, all of whom were excused.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA  
(6:33 p.m.)

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Malakoutian. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cálad and the motion carried unanimously.

5. STAFF REPORTS  
(6:34 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.

6. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

(6:36 p.m.)

Betsi Hummer, 14541 SE 26th Street, addressed the issue of the Affordable Housing Strategy C-1 Phase 2 to put affordable housing on church-zoned properties. Over 30 percent of the eligible properties are in a single part of the city. The Commission should drive around the neighborhoods where the 25 church properties are located and imagine what it would look like to have apartments on those sites. The Neighborhood Church at NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 140<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE next to Walgreens is a 13-acre site. It abuts the golf course and several apartment developments as well as some state-owned properties. That site should be viewed from a practical point of view. It should be considered how close it is to any parks, to other facilities, to bus services, and other subsidized low-income housing. On NE 8th Street between 132<sup>nd</sup> Avenue SE and 148<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE there are some 1500 apartment units and no parks within a third of a mile. Odle Middle School and Stevenson Elementary are there, as is Highland Village which was purchased from a developer and retained as affordable housing. There are three other low-income subsidized housing facilities next to Highland Village, and up the hill toward NE 8th Street there is more multifamily housing, none of which is within a third of a mile from a park. On 148<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE there are no buses. There is additional subsidized housing along 148<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE and 140<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE not including what is located in Crossroads. Looking at the issue both theoretically and practically will yield the best solutions for putting affordable housing on underutilized church properties.

Heidi Dean, a Newport Hills resident, noted that at the July 25 Council meeting none of the amendments proposed by Councilmember Robertson in regard to the Land Use Code amendment dealing with permanent supportive housing and transient housing were approved. One of the amendments had to do with spacing the facilities. The map associated with the Comprehensive Plan amendment clearly shows the clustering of units. What Bellevue is doing is heading toward socioeconomic red lining in the name of compassion and providing affordable housing. The city is looking at clustering affordable housing in the most affordable neighborhoods. Lake Hills has nine of the properties, and the other targets are Eastgate, Crossroads and Factoria. Two of the properties listed as Somerset are for all practical purposes located in Factoria. The impacts of clustering are clear.

#### 4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

(6:44 p.m.)

Councilmember Robertson reported that the permanent supportive housing LUCA was approved by the Council on July 25 as proposed by the Planning Commission. The Council also took action at that meeting to put a park levy on the November ballot. The Council was provided an update regarding Wilburton, and the Council has been kept up to date in regard to housing issues.

The kick-off meeting for the re-master planning of Airfield Park in Eastgate was held on July 26. That is the Council-preferred site for a new aquatics center.

Once the August break is over, the Council will focus primarily on budget issues.

Commissioner Goeppele raised the issue of remote participation and the requirement to have remote participation approved at the previous meeting and asked if the intent of the Council could be clarified to allow for more flexibility by approving remote participation at the beginning of each meeting. Councilmember Robertson said the code that was approved by the Council does state that remote participation must be approved at the previous meeting. The way the Council has operated for years in regard to remote participation has been to either give approval at the

previous meeting, or at the beginning of a meeting provide a quorum is present in person. The issue should be flagged for the Council to take up. The issue could be fixed by revising the ordinance to state remote participation must be approved by the Commission either in advance of the meeting or prior to the remote participant's participation during a meeting.

Commissioner Calad added that since the Covid situation is not yet settled, it would be better for any Commissioner showing any Covid symptom to stay home and participate in meetings remotely.

Thara Johnson noted that included in the Commission packet were two letters of correspondence, one related to Vizion Zero for Gun Safety, and comments from Betsi Hummer.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None  
(6:52 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION  
(6:52 p.m.)

A. 2022 Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendments: Amendments to Increase Development Potential for Affordable Housing Development on Faith-owned Properties (Affordable Housing Strategy Action C-1 Phase 2)

Assistant Director Emil King said C-1 strategy looks to further increase the development potential for affordable housing on properties owned by religious organizations. The Commissioners were informed that staff were seeking a date for the final review public hearing and to have the Commission identify any additional information needed for final review of the proposal.

Emil King said the Council on May 9 directed the Commission and staff to begin work on the C-1 Action initiative and to analyze how many additional properties would qualify for increased capacity if the distance to multifamily or commercial land use districts were to be expanded from the current 300 feet to either 500 feet or 1000 feet. The analysis was incorporated into the city's Next Right work and was a point of discussion at the Council's regular meeting on July 5. At that time staff informed the Council that three additional faith-owned properties would qualify if the distance were expanded from 300 feet to 500 feet, and that another five properties would qualify if there were an expansion out to 1000 feet. At the meeting, the Council directed staff to work with the Commission to look at properties up to the 500-foot distance, which results in a total of 28 qualifying sites.

Senior Planner Gwen Rousseau said the Comprehensive Plan amendment proposal involved making three changes, the first of which would be to add a note to the land use map reading "Properties owned by religious organizations, as defined by LUC 20.20.128.B.2, and in single family designated areas shown on the map may be reclassified to multifamily through a rezoning process, subject to Part 20.30A LUC, when developed with one hundred percent permanently affordable housing in accordance with housing policy HO- .” Allowing rezones from single family to multifamily land use districts is in direct response to comments made by the Commission and stakeholders during Phase 1 of Action C-1, which expressed an interest in going beyond the then-proposed 50-percent bonus. The suggestion made was that a larger bonus or higher development capacity would be needed to support the creation of affordable housing in single family land use districts. The barrier encountered during Phase 1 was the criteria for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, and the proposed note would add the necessary

language to ensure consistency.

The second change would involve a new policy allowing for the reclassification to multifamily of sites in single family-designated areas on the Land Use Plan Map where specific criteria are met. The guidance directly reflects what the Commission and stakeholders noted during Phase 1 about certain properties located in single family-designated areas being well situated to accommodate higher-density bonuses where they are located near high-frequency transit and near existing multifamily and commercial land use districts. The proposed new policy reads “Allow properties shown in single family designated areas on the Comprehensive Land Use Plan map to reclassify to multifamily when it meets all the following criteria: 1) one hundred percent of the housing being developed will be permanently affordable housing; and 2) the property is owned by a religious organization; and 3) the property is located near high capacity transportation infrastructure and services; and 4) the property is located near other multifamily residential or commercial uses. The specifics necessary to provide clarity regarding eligibility will be part of the Land Use Code amendment during the second part of the initiative.

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The third change would add a second new Housing Element policy directing the city to reach out to religious organizations. The policy would read “Inform and educate religious organizations about the opportunity to develop affordable housing and connect them with partners and resources that can assist them with the development process.”

With regard to public engagement to date, Gwen Rousseau noted that on June 16 a courtesy notice of application and public meeting was mailed to all 500 households within 500 feet of the original 25 qualifying sites. On June 27 an announcement of the virtual information session was emailed to interested parties and posted on social media, and on June 29 a virtual information session was held with just over 20 from the public in attendance. The questions and comments received to date have included the importance of broadening the distribution of affordable housing; streamlining the permitting process to facilitate developments; providing assistance for navigating the development process; incorporating universal design and green building principles; and updating the city’s housing needs assessment to reflect current housing conditions. Questions were asked about whether or not future religious-owned properties would qualify for reclassification; what the household income limits are for living in affordable housing; and whether religious properties would still have exemptions on property taxes. The concerns voiced by stakeholders included the impacts on privacy from new developments, and increases in criminal activities. Upcoming engagement opportunities will include adding frequently asked questions to an EngagingBellevue webpage; stakeholder focus group discussions; a second courtesy notice of the upcoming public hearing; and the final review public hearing on the CPA.

Gwen Rousseau reminded the Commissioners that the initiative consists of two parts: a CPA and a LUCA. The upcoming milestones for the CPA include the final review public hearing in September followed by the Commission making a recommendation and forwarding it to the Council for final adoption by the end of the year. The work on the LUCA will overlap with the CPA process and will begin in the fourth quarter of the year. The LUCA will be before the Commission in early 2023 after the CPA has been adopted.

Commissioner Goepple asked why a rezone was considered rather than something like a conditional use permit, and he asked what “multifamily” means in the context of the different locations and how it will be determined. Gwen Rousseau said the rezone process has certain criteria associated with it and is more rigorous than the conditional use permit process. Where conditional use permits are concerned, the proposed use is already allowed within the zone.

Emil King said one intention is to create some certainty for the future development of faith-owned sites. The rezone process happens prior to someone coming in and thinking about the actual development on a property. The conditional use permit process happens as part of the permitting process and it allows for some discretion. By and large the rezone is the better way to go in that it creates some up-front certainty about what can happen on specific sites. With regard to the definition of multifamily, Emil King noted that R-10, R-15, R-20 and R-30 are the general multifamily categories outside of the Downtown, East Main and BelRed areas. Part of the LUCA process will involve looking at the way to go from the note on the future land use map to a new rezone category.

With regard to high-capacity transportation infrastructure, Commissioner Cálad asked how bringing new affordable housing opportunities online might affect the availability of transportation options and services. Gwen Rousseau said qualifying properties must be located within half a mile of a bus stop that has service at least four times per hour during the day. Adding population near bus stops can trigger changes in the provision of transportation services over time. However, in determining if a site qualifies, the focus will be on existing services at the time of the rezone.

Commissioner Malakoutian asked about the upcoming focus groups. Gwen Rousseau said there are four different stakeholder group categories with which the city is interested in communicating: the faith-based organizations; the affordable housing developers and providers; future residents who would be living in affordable housing; and residents living near affordable housing developments.

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Commissioner Malakoutian asked about the issue of evenly distributing affordable housing around the city. Gwen Rousseau said the project was scoped based on the existing faith properties, which admittedly are not evenly distributed. The initiative recognizes that properties own by faith-based organizations offer a huge opportunity for affordable housing.

Vice Chair Bhargava referred to the first proposed new housing policy and asked what was meant by the reference in the third criteria to services. Gwen Rousseau said the reference was specific to transportation services and allowed that that could be clarified.

Emil King commented that when drafting policies staff always tries to have concise language that allows for flexibility where needed. The LUCA will go into more detail and the staff report that will be made available in advance of the public hearing will clarify all of the points for the record.

Vice Chair Bhargava asked why other infrastructure needs and services that are needed in order for housing to exist and be effective are not considered. Gwen Rousseau said the other criteria involved are generally covered in the rezone process. The specific criteria voiced during Phase 1 were the main things required in order to qualify for the additional bonus.

Vice Chair Bhargava proposed giving consideration to the intensity of multifamily housing property by property as well as other services and proximity with an eye on enabling an environment that is conducive to families in affordable housing.

With regard to proximity to transportation infrastructure, Vice Chair Bhargava noted that often planners draw walk radii around transportation nodes, but bus stations and rapid transit nodes are drawn differently. More weight should be given to the more intensive transportation services.

Gwen Rousseau said generally speaking a quarter mile radius from any transit service is the standard, though for services with higher frequencies a half mile radius is the norm. For the initiative, the larger half mile radius was used given the focus on high-capacity transit. Emil King added that bus service that meets the frequent transit network criteria are treated the same as light rail.

Councilmember Robertson commented that the issues of service and distribution can be considered by the Commission once the LUC is on the table. There will be the availability of properties to rezone to multifamily at different densities, which could be dependent on having services nearby. Just because such specifics are not called out in policy does not mean they cannot be included in the LUC.

A motion to set a public hearing for September 14 was made by Commissioner Malakoutian. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Goepple and the motion carried unanimously.

9. OTHER BUSINESS  
(7:19 p.m.)

A. Remote Participation Approval – None

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES  
(7:21 p.m.)

A. July 13, 2022

A motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Goepple. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cálad and the motion carried unanimously.

11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATION  
(7:22 p.m.)

Betsi Hummer, 14541 SE 26th Street, thanked the Commissioners for their great insightful questions and comments about the Land Use Code amendment. It is good to see all members are taking the issues seriously. It would be easy to just give a blanket rezone to all the church properties without considering the details, such as identifying frequent transit. The fact is the parking lots associated with most affordable housing projects are full because people need their cars to get to and from work and school. The Commission should work closely with the staff to determine other services and qualifications to be included in the rezones.

12. ADJOURNMENT  
(7:27 p.m.)

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Malakoutian. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Goepple and the motion carried unanimously.

Vice Chair Bhargava adjourned the meeting at 7:27 p.m.