

**CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES**

January 14, 2026
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Khanloo, Vice Chair Lu, Commissioners Ferris, Goeppelle, Kennedy, Nilchian, Villaveces

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Kate Nesse, Teun Deuling, Scott MacDonald, Community Development Department; Nick Whipple, Kristina Gallant, Development Services Department; Matt McFarland, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Mayor Malakoutian

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 Chair Khanloo who presided.

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

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

Chair Khanloo recognized Commissioner Ferris on her reappointment to the Planning Commission to serve the remainder of her term.

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

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

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS
(6:32 p.m.)

Chair Khanloo congratulated liaison Mohammad Malakoutian for being elected Mayor at the Council's January 6 meeting.

Mayor Malakoutian offered New Year greetings and expressed appreciation for the Planning

Commission's work during 2025 and noted anticipating continued collaboration in 2026. The Mayor welcomed back Commissioner Ferris and explained that after the resignation and an extensive replacement process, it was determined that Commissioner Ferris should complete the original term.

The Mayor then reported that the City Council held meetings on January 6 and January 13 during which new mayoral and deputy mayor leadership was established along with beginning the process of assigning Council liaisons to all of the boards and Commissions. The assignments will be announced once they are finalized.

There are two major policy areas relevant to the Planning Commission. The first is a parking reform Land Use Code amendment that will be driven both by new state mandates requiring reductions in parking requirements in certain areas, and by the need to modernize outdated local code provisions that no longer reflect current land use conditions. The Council has requested a comprehensive review of the parking regulations beyond the minimum state requirements.

The second topic relevant to the work of the Commission is the Multifamily Tax Exemption (MFTE) program, which has been discussed extensively by the Council and is moving toward ordinance adoption following stakeholder engagement. The MFTE provisions will be integrated into future Land Use Code updates, including Housing Options in Mixed Areas (HOMA) and other amendments, and the Commission will review the components as part of upcoming packages.

Mayor Malakoutian clarified that the MFTE ordinance reflecting the staff recommendations and options had already been approved by the Council. Integration into Land Use Code amendments will occur when those packages are formally introduced.

Commissioner Goeppeler suggested an overview of the MFTE program will help the Commission to better understand its broader framework and its interactions with land use policy. Senior Planner Dr. Kate Nesse said staff will look for time on the Commission's schedule or provide a written update.

Mayor Malakoutian reported that at its January 6 meeting the Council received a significant update on the Eastgate campus, including details in regard to what aspects of the project are functioning well, which areas require improvement, and what actions have been initiated to address outstanding concerns.

5. STAFF REPORTS (6:38 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Dr. Kate Nesse took a few minutes to review the Commission's schedule of upcoming meeting dates and agenda items.

6. WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATIONS (6:38 p.m.)

A. Written Communications (6:38 p.m.)

Dr. Kate Nesse reported that few written comments had been received since the Commission's December meeting. Most of those received were related to HOMA. There was one additional comment that was submitted after the packet was published and was distributed to commissioners. Another, received shortly prior to the meeting that related to the BelRed Look Forward Land Use Code Amendment; it will be forwarded to commissioners.

B. Oral Communications
(6:39 p.m.)

Chair Khanloo reminded the public that the rules adopted by the City Council limit the topics that can be addressed. Under Ordinance 6752, the public can only speak about subject matters that are related to city government and that are within the powers and duties of the Planning Commission.

Era Pogosova spoke representing Theater 33, a nonprofit community theater located in the BelRed Arts District. Gratitude was expressed to the Commission and City staff for the 2009 decision to designate BelRed as an arts district, describing it as a forward-looking policy that has enabled tangible cultural growth. Theater 33's mission of access, education, and community storytelling is directly supported by being located in an arts-intensive area, where zoning, density, and mixed-use policies influence operational stability and program planning. Recent expansion has occurred within the district, including the opening of Studio 33 in December with additional classroom space. There are opportunities for partnerships with other cultural organizations and community groups. The speaker stressed the importance of land use policies that recognize the needs of arts organizations, including affordable and flexible space, long-term stability, and visibility, and urged continued prioritization of arts and culture within the BelRed area to preserve the district's identity and vitality. The Commission was thanked for its leadership and commitment to integrating arts and culture into future planning efforts.

Sandy Vo spoke representing the BelRed Arts District Community Alliance as the organization's executive director and appeared alongside former Arts Commissioner and current board chair Maria Lau Hui. Strong support was expressed for the city's BelRed Land Use Code update process and conveyed appreciation for the longstanding efforts of the Commission and the staff since the district's designation as an arts village in 2009 and the adoption of the BelRed subarea plan. While acknowledging progress to date, the speaker emphasized the continuing importance of prioritizing and preserving arts and culture within the district. Arts and cultural activities contribute to quality of life, fuel local economic vitality, and benefits the well-being of the community. The Commission was urged to ensure that the arts-intensive area provides affordable space for creative production, education, performance, and collaboration; supports creative businesses and artists through affordable live-work housing and retail opportunities; prioritizes publicly accessible cultural amenities such as murals and public art within new development; and strengthens connectivity to support movement and economic interaction across the district. The Commission was encouraged to remain committed to the original 2009 vision of integrating arts and cultural activity into BelRed's long-term development.

Cody Lodi identified as an architect working on multiple projects within the Wilburton and BelRed overlays, and expressed appreciation for recent changes to the Land Use Code, noting that development teams are often among the first to test the implementation of new regulations. After briefly reviewing the most recent draft of the BelRed Land Use Code Amendment, the speaker offered several technical observations. First, the suggestion was made to expand options for access corridors within the overlay to reduce block sizes and improve pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, particularly in light of the area's transit-oriented designation. A reference was made

to shared-use path typologies in the Wilburton code as a potential model for creating flexible, active public connections that could support gathering spaces associated with the arts district. The city was commended for incentivizing mass timber construction as a lower-carbon development approach. The economic feasibility of large-scale mass timber construction is optimized at building heights of approximately 180 feet, which necessitates larger residential floor plates to achieve efficient structural layouts. While acknowledging the current allowance of 20,000-square-foot floor plates, the speaker recommended increasing the limit to 25,000 square feet to better support residential density. Finally, the speaker suggested reconsidering floor-to-floor height and flat plate requirements for above-grade parking, stating that such standards add cost to projects already constrained by site conditions and development typologies within the BelRed area.

Cosmos Darwin identified as a Downtown resident and emphasized the importance of walkability, citing the existing Downtown street grid as a model for creating an accessible and pedestrian-oriented urban environment. A concern was expressed regarding revisions to the BelRed street network as shown in the agenda materials, noting that the working draft appears to remove a substantial portion of previously planned streets. While acknowledging that some proposed streets could render small parcels difficult to develop, the speaker argued that in such cases the city should consider acquiring right-of-way to ensure continuity of the street grid, citing the southern segment of a planned arterial as an example. The speaker also questioned the removal of other proposed streets that do not appear to face similar constraints, including a northern segment that appears to align well with existing property boundaries. Concern was expressed that incremental removal of planned streets could undermine the long-term goal of establishing a complete urban grid. If full street connections are not retained, the city should at a minimum preserve the pedestrian connections, citing an example where the removal of a planned street could limit access to a recently constructed playground. Support was voiced for redevelopment in BelRed, but without sacrificing long-term walkability and connectivity.

Jessie Clawson drew attention to a proposed Comprehensive Plan amendment submitted on behalf of a property owner seeking to change a designation from General Commercial and Low-Rise to Mixed-Use in order to allow residential development above commercial uses. The city staff had suggested including an adjacent parcel in the amendment, and agreement was expressed to taking that approach given that it will create a more cohesive boundary. It was stressed that no specific development proposal had yet been finalized. With regard to the BelRed Land Use Code amendment, enthusiasm was expressed for the early draft. Emphasized was the importance of adopting a code that is immediately implementable. Support was voiced for staff's revisions to the street grid, particularly where they address grade changes and connectivity challenges, but further refinement was encouraged to ensure strong pedestrian connections to light rail stations. The commission was encouraged to advocate for flexible land use allowances across the district, similar to the Wilburton approach, in order to accommodate a broad range of residential and commercial activity. Support was also expressed for larger floor plate allowances to support mass timber construction, and for an amenity incentive system that will provide additional height and floor area in exchange for public benefits such as stream daylighting, open space, and affordable housing. The Wilburton code update was referenced as a successful precedent and a useful model.

Rebecca Bloom spoke representing a real estate investment firm that is actively pursuing a master development plan for a nine-acre site in central BelRed adjacent to the light rail corridor. City staff and the Commission were thanked for their work on drafting the BelRed Land Use Code Amendment. Several development projects are already in the pipeline. The speaker requested that previously submitted master development plans and design review applications be

allowed to vest under the new code while also retaining the option to adopt the new standards. Appreciation was expressed for the inclusion of stream daylighting incentives in the draft code and related Critical Areas Ordinance, with an emphasis on the complexity and cost of such projects and the importance of appropriate incentives to achieve the desired environmental outcomes. With regard to the street network, it was stated that additional emphasis should be placed on pedestrian-oriented streets, but it was questioned whether all proposed roadways are necessary for vehicular circulation. Development intensity may continue to be constrained by high groundwater levels and the cost of structured parking, and the Commission was urged to include flexibility in the parking requirements, particularly near light rail. Additional study of floor plate sizing and tower separation standards is needed. A concern was expressed about the limitations on averaging larger floor plates. There is a need for flexible land use provisions in order to respond to evolving market conditions.

Isaac Patterson, a land use attorney, spoke in a personal capacity regarding the BelRed Land Use Code amendment. Support was expressed for maximizing regulatory flexibility within the amendment. The proposed code appears to be moving in the right direction. The Commission was encouraged to consider the development of an enhanced Multifamily Tax Exemption “supercharger” program for the BelRed area modeled on the Wilburton program that the City Council indicated support for during its previous.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(6:58 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION
(6:58 p.m.)

A. Introduction and Geographic Scope: 2026 Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendments

Senior Planner Teun Deuling explained that privately initiated Comprehensive Plan amendments follow a two-step process consisting of a threshold review to determine inclusion in the annual work program, followed by a final review addressing the merits of the proposals.

The Evans Plaza proposal was the only application submitted before the September 15 deadline. The request involves a Future Land Use Map amendment affecting approximately ten acres in the Bridle Trails neighborhood area that lies immediately north of SR-520 and the BelRed neighborhood area. The site consists of an existing one-story commercial complex with retail and restaurant uses. The proposed amendment seeks a change the future land use designation from General Commercial to Lowrise 2 Mixed Use. Future land use designations establish long-term policy direction for allowable uses and development intensity, while the Land Use Code and zoning map implement those policies. Under the current General Commercial designation, residential uses are largely prohibited except as accessory uses, whereas the proposed Lowrise 2 Mixed Use designation will allow residential development at moderate densities. It was further noted that the Lowrise 2 Mixed Use designation was created during the City’s recent Comprehensive Plan update. The corresponding land use district is still under development as part of the Housing Opportunities in Mixed Use Areas (HOMA) Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA). As a result, no concurrent rezone application accompanies the request.

Teun Deuling explained that the Commission must determine which nearby and similarly situated properties, if any, should be included in the geographic area of the amendment while avoiding unnecessary over-inclusion. The criteria relate to adjacency, neighborhood context, and

shared development characteristics. Properties in the BelRed area are excluded due to differing land use visions and subarea policies. Additional nearby parcels were evaluated based on whether they are part of the PineView neighborhood center within the Bridle Trails area, and whether they share similar development patterns. Properties already designated for mixed-use development or with substantially different land use characteristics were also excluded. Staff did consider whether expanding the scope to include an additional block will be justified given that such expansion will significantly increase the area involved. Based on their analysis, the staff recommended a limited expansion of the geographic scope to include one immediately adjacent half-acre parcel that shares similar access, development patterns, and land use characteristics with the Evans Plaza site.

The options available to the Commission were noted as being to accept the staff recommendation to expand the geographic scope, to decline to expand the geographic scope, or to identify additional parcels for inclusion.

With regard to public outreach and next steps, Teun Deuling noted that notice of the application had already been issued, and said some public inquiries have been received, though no formal public comments have yet been submitted. The outreach will include a presentation to the Bridle Trails Community Club to explain the amendment process and opportunities for public engagement.

The next procedural step will be the threshold review public hearing. If the proposal proceeds through the process, final review will occur in the summer or fall of 2026.

Vice Chair Lu asked how inclusion of an additional parcel in the geographic scope might affect the owner of that parcel, and asked if the owner could opt out. Teun Deuling explained that the Comprehensive Plan amendment process is separate from any future rezoning action. Even if the future land use designation were changed through the amendment process, any subsequent decision to pursue redevelopment or to apply for a rezone will remain at the discretion of the property owner. The existing commercial use on the parcel will remain consistent with both the current and the proposed future land use designations. Asked if the additional property owner had expressed a position, Teun Deuling indicated that no direct communication had been received, but added that all property owners within 500 feet of the amendment site receive written notice of the application and will also receive notice of any scheduled public hearing.

Commissioner Ferris voiced support for adding the immediately adjacent parcel identified in the staff recommendation, but requested further discussion regarding the parcels to the north of SR-520 and east of 140th Avenue NE that had not been included in the recommended scope based on a desire to increase housing capacity. Teun Deuling explained that inclusion of the site could be done if so directed by the Commission. It was reiterated, however, that the staff recommendation emphasizes the Land Use Code criterion requiring that geographic scope expansion be limited to the minimum necessary. Adding the additional area, which is across the street from Evans Plaza, could broaden the scope substantially, potentially extending the amendment beyond the applicant's requested site and encouraging inclusion of other General Commercial properties, which staff view as being inconsistent with a restrained scope determination.

Commissioner Goeppel sought clarification on how the minimum necessary should be interpreted, and requested additional information about what the Lowrise 2 Mixed Use designation will allow under the draft Housing Opportunities in Mixed Areas Land Use Code Amendment, as well as the area's transit connections. Teun Deuling responded by first noting the staged nature of the process, beginning with threshold review to determine if a proposal should

be included in the annual work program, and followed by a review of the merits. The site is a 20-minute walk from the BelRed light rail station. The site is roughly equidistant between that station and the Overlake station. The future land use designation, which is established in the Comprehensive Plan, is implemented through the Land Use Code. The corresponding land use district is under development through HOMA and will allow up to seven stories of mixed-use development.

Commissioner Kennedy asked for confirmation of the location of the half-acre parcel recommended by staff for inclusion. Teun Deuling identified the site on the map as being the southwest corner of NE 24th Street and 140th Avenue NE.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Kennedy, Teun Deuling explained that the area in question is a triangular-shaped block bounded by 140th Avenue NE to the west, NE 24th Street to the north, and SR-520 to the south. The site has five or six different parcels, including a lumber warehouse and associated parking.

Commissioner Villaveces echoed an interest in considering broadening the geographic scope. The parcel to the west is already zoned for low-rise development and could, in combination with expanding the scope to include the triangular block, create an opportunity to consolidate designations and unlock additional housing capacity in the wedge-shaped site between the highway and the adjacent streets and parkland. Teun Deuling allowed that the parcels share similar characteristics and land use patterns, but reiterated that the recommended approach was intended to avoid going beyond what was minimally necessary and beyond what the applicant requested. It is, however, left to the Commission to determine how the minimum necessary standard should be applied.

Commissioner Nilchian voiced support for exploring inclusion of the triangular site to avoid an isolated designation change, and to achieve a more contiguous future land use pattern.

The Chair said it appears that the triangular parcel in question is heavily treed. Teun Deuling said the parcel is indeed wooded. It is owned by Puget Sound Energy and there are no known specific plans for the site. A recent site visit indicated there is currently no activity on the site.

Vice Chair Lu asked for clarification of the purpose and intent of the minimum necessary framework used to evaluate geographic scope, asking if the intent is to limit impacts on surrounding neighborhoods, or to serve another policy objective. Teun Deuling said expanding the geographic scope of proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments is uncommon. When expansions do occur, they are typically limited to a small number of properties. The Evans Plaza applicant has expressed interest in future redevelopment of the primary site, though as yet there are no concrete plans in place. The inclusion of the adjacent corner parcel was recommended in order to maintain consistency and coherence in the future land use map, and to avoid the creation of an isolated designation that is inconsistent with the surrounding area's long-term vision.

Answering a question asked by Vice Chair Lu, Dr. Kate Nesse explained that privately initiated Comprehensive Plan amendments are designed to allow targeted, incremental adjustments between major Comprehensive Plan updates. Council-led subarea planning efforts address broader neighborhood-scale policy changes, while privately initiated amendments are intended to remain narrow in scope. The minimum necessary approach is meant to avoid transforming a limited proposal into a comprehensive area-wide review.

Commissioner Ferris reiterated support for expanding the geographic scope to include the parcels

to the east of the roadway from the primary site. Leaving a single parcel with a different designation will be inconsistent. A future land use change does not mandate redevelopment but merely provides additional flexibility.

Commissioner Goeppeler agreed with Commissioner Ferris.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Kennedy, Teun Deuling explained that the Commission was being asked both to authorize scheduling of the threshold review hearing and to determine the geographic scope of the proposed amendment. The determination made at the current stage will establish the scope moving forward.

Commissioner Kennedy raised concerns about potential limitations that could result from changing the future land use designation from General Commercial to Lowrise 2 Mixed Use, specifically asking what uses might no longer be permitted. Teun Deuling explained that the Comprehensive Plan designation establishes a long-term policy framework, while the specific development standards will be implemented through the HOMA zoning district. A detailed analysis of how individual properties might be affected by rezoning will occur at a later stage. Current uses generally can continue under the nonconforming use provisions if the zoning is changed, and property owners are not required to pursue a rezone following a Comprehensive Plan amendment.

Commissioner Villaveces asked if expanding the geographic scope could create risk for the applicant, including the possibility of a longer review process or a reduced likelihood of approval. Teun Deuling explained that expanding the amendment area could increase the scale of environmental review required under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements; a larger area could theoretically generate greater development impacts. Adding a half-acre parcel would likely have a minimal effect on review complexity, whereas adding an additional five-acre block could significantly increase the scope of environmental analysis.

Commissioner Villaveces followed up by asking whether such an expansion could result in denial of the overall application due to factors beyond the applicant's control. Teun Deuling acknowledged that expanding the scope could introduce additional complexity and risk. Where an application is denied, a three-year waiting period kicks in before the same site can be proposed again for a Comprehensive Plan amendment.

Commissioner Nilchian asked if, under a scenario in which the scope was to be expanded and the environmental review later identified issues with the additional parcels, the application could later be amended to revert back to only the original site. Supervising Civil Attorney Matt McFarland said such reversions are not typical in practice. Privately initiated Comprehensive Plan amendments generally warrant a restrained approach. The unilateral expansion of geographic scope by the Commission could increase neighborhood concern and opposition, thereby complicating or delaying the process. Expanding the scope could introduce uncertainty regarding the ability to later retract added parcels. The Commission was generally advised against overextending the scope beyond the applicant's request.

Chair Khanloo agreed that expanding the geographic scope could introduce unnecessary risk, including the possibility of additional property owners seeking inclusion and further broadening the amendment area. A preference was voiced for maintaining a limited scope in order to facilitate a timely process and to support the goal of enabling housing development at a site that is considered to be within a reasonable walking distance of nearby light rail stations.

A motion to accept the staff recommendation to expand the geographic scope to include the one immediately adjacent parcel was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Villaveces and the motion carried unanimously.

A motion to direct staff to schedule a public hearing on February 11 was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Villaveces and the motion carried unanimously.

BREAK
(7:48 p.m.)

B. Check-in on the BelRed Look Forward Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA)
(7:53 p.m.)

Assistant Director Nick Whipple reminded the Commission that the last review of the scope of the BelRed Look Forward LUCA took place in May of 2025 just as the outreach process was being launched. The Phase I outreach work has been completed and a working draft code has been released for public review. Phase II will result in a revised draft for the Commission to review.

Code and Policy Planning Manager Kristina Gallant noted that the BelRed district comprises a significant portion of the City's designated growth corridor and contains substantial geographic diversity and redevelopment potential. The presence of two light rail stations within the area and planned development in Redmond near the Overlake station are key contextual factors.

The original 2009 BelRed subarea plan vision anticipated transformation of what was a light industrial area into a transit-oriented district centered on green space and multimodal access. Progress since then includes the development of more than one million square feet of office space in the Spring District; more than \$300 million in public transportation and arterial infrastructure investments; the construction of approximately 3,000 new housing units; and light rail ridership exceeding the initial projections following the Redmond extension, with nearly 9,000 daily boardings reported.

The current BelRed Look Forward effort builds on an affirmed vision rather than seeking to replace it. The updated subarea policies and maps that were adopted in October 2024, along with the revised housing and employment growth targets, provide the policy framework that is guiding the Land Use Code update. The reaffirmed vision describes BelRed as a compact, walkable, mixed-use corridor supported by light rail and a multimodal transportation network that features diverse housing options, a connected parks and open space system, environmental and stream corridor restoration, placemaking, and integration of arts and cultural amenities.

The core topic areas being addressed through the Look Forward effort include changes related to land use, housing and urban design, cultural and community connections, transportation and utilities, and stream and environmental systems. While not all policy elements will be implemented directly through the Land Use Code, complementary functional plans and programs will address additional components of the overall vision.

The BelRed Look Forward LUCA was launched by the Council in February 2025. The priorities provided then included strengthening incentives for stream daylighting; exploring incentives for affordable commercial space and performance venues to support arts, culture, small businesses, and related community activity; reviewing affordable housing requirements to balance feasibility

and equity; and emphasizing improvements to the multimodal transportation network to enhance walking, biking, transit use, and overall connectivity.

The Phase 1 outreach effort focused on building shared understanding, gathering early feedback, and strengthening relationships with stakeholders. Internal listening sessions were held with the city departments responsible for implementation. The Bellevue Development Committee was engaged via multiple meetings, and in-person outreach was carried out through tabling at events, including at gatherings of major employers and various community groups. An online questionnaire was distributed to addresses within BelRed, and direct outreach was conducted through individual meetings and conversations with interested parties. The questionnaire was accompanied by a mailer which generated 161 responses. The respondents were asked to identify their top priorities for BelRed, and the most frequently selected priorities were pedestrian and bicycle mobility, parks and open space, affordable housing, and arts and cultural spaces.

Kristina Gallant said several themes came up consistently across Phase I engagement. They included concerns regarding safety and mobility for people walking and biking; a desire for more human-scale design and a comfortable pedestrian environment; a strong interest in the arts and vibrant, connected public spaces; and an emphasis on preserving local identity and small businesses. There was also broad support for the local streets concept as essential to permeability, safety, walkability, economic vitality, and equitable access. There are, however, practical concerns associated with implementing a rigid grid. There were requests made in regard to street planning that better reflects parcel boundaries and site constraints while still addressing critical connectivity gaps. The continuing challenge will be to balance predictability and feasibility with the long-term walkability and network goals.

The approach used for Wilburton was to set up mixed use land use districts. The thinking is that the same could be applied more broadly across similar high-intensity mixed-use areas citywide. The existing BelRed overlay section is currently written in a manner that is relatively isolated from the broader code. The draft reorganizes the code by creating a base section containing provisions common to mixed-use districts generally, supplemented by district-specific overlay provisions for Wilburton and BelRed. Highly district-specific components, such as incentive systems, will remain in the overlays, while the shared framework will improve internal consistency.

Kristina Gallant said the draft proposes updating the zoning so that it tracks one-to-one with the Future Land Use Map for BelRed. The current BelRed districts are highly specialized, whereas the updated subarea plan significantly expands areas designated for higher intensity mid-rise and high-rise development, particularly near station areas. The draft uses updated district names to align with that plan. Two major new subarea plan concepts are reflected in the draft, namely an arts district intensive area, and a set of seven neighborhood districts with distinct policy emphases. In the working draft, the concepts are operationalized primarily through the amenity incentive system where scoring and the resulting floor area allowances could be calibrated differently by neighborhood district to reflect localized priorities. Within the arts district intensive area, the draft identifies a set of prioritized amenities for development to support arts and culture outcomes. The draft recommends a shift toward broader land use flexibility by allowing uses unless specifically prohibited or conditioned, which is consistent with the Wilburton approach. BelRed will also implement the City's evolving citywide approach to nonconforming uses that is being advanced through HOMA.

The local streets framework is a key and complex topic. The concept is policy-driven and has been refined through internal review, though it remains under development. The revised

approach is intended to prioritize the outcomes of connectivity, smaller blocks, and multimodal access rather than requiring a rigid, uniformly spaced public street grid. Under the draft, the number of specifically designated public street segments will be reduced, and areas outside the designated network will be subject to block size limits. Large sites above a stated threshold will still be required to break down into blocks, but they could do so through a mix of publicly dedicated streets and private street typologies, thereby increasing flexibility while still ensuring permeability. The current map has an even grid that can conflict with parcel boundaries and topographic conditions. The revised map focuses on retaining key east–west connections and selected north–south links while relying on block requirements to further subdivide larger sites. The map is anticipated to have one category that reflects publicly dedicated local streets; another that reflects planned segments currently in permitting; and another that identifies interim streets already constructed in partial form. The prior “half street” terminology will be replaced with “interim street” to reflect that early-build segments often require more than half of the ultimate infrastructure. The area where block size limits will apply generally corresponds to where the prior full grid had been extended. Portions of the network, such as within the Spring District, already reflect built-out segments. The map will continue to evolve as the analysis proceeds.

With regard to building design and affordable housing, Kristina Gallant said the draft aligns the BelRed design standards with those adopted for Wilburton, including standards related to height, floor plates and flexibility to support mass timber construction and life science uses. The floor area ratio and height allowances will increase within the transit-oriented development overlay. Staff are recommending moving forward with a single mandatory approach to affordable housing rather than maintaining both mandatory and voluntary options. The proposed structure is consistent with the Wilburton model, including a baseline requirement for rental projects with the ability to reduce the percentage of required units when deeper affordability is provided, and a similar approach for ownership units. The compliance options will include onsite provision, offsite provision, land transfer, or payment of a fee in lieu. The updates under way to the multifamily tax exemption provisions are expected to support project feasibility. It was clarified that the multifamily tax exemption changes are outside the Planning Commission’s review scope and that coordination with the housing team is ongoing.

Kristina Gallant provided an overview of the proposed changes to the amenity incentive system. It was explained that participation in the system is required to exceed the base floor area allowances. The current BelRed tiered system is complex and has tended to produce projects that primarily deliver affordable housing and park improvements, sometimes at the expense of other desired outcomes such as stream daylighting. The draft restructures the system to more closely resemble the Downtown model by removing the tiered structure while retaining the mandatory housing component. Amenity scoring will be adjusted by neighborhood district to align incentives with localized priorities. Within the arts district intensive area, a narrower set of amenities will be prioritized. Even within the arts district intensive area, projects providing stream daylighting or delivering planned park or trail amenities identified in the subarea plan could take precedence, reflecting the substantial cost and complexity of those environmental and open space improvements.

Many of the amenity options in the revised incentive framework are similar to those currently available, but the scoring will be updated. There are several notable changes. The new options in the draft include affordable commercial space, which was introduced in the Wilburton framework and is now proposed as an incentive option in BelRed. The existing green building credit, which currently recognizes only certain levels of LEED certification, will be updated to align with the city’s more comprehensive green building rule. Additional substantial updates are planned for several existing options, including revisions to regional transfer of development

rights provisions in coordination with King County; updates to the public art requirements to align with the Downtown standards that were identified as more effective; and revisions to the outdoor plaza provisions. Additional supporting analysis will inform the next draft, including continued economic and feasibility analysis of cost drivers and project performance informed by development services staff, the housing office, and developer input. An updated affordable housing nexus study is underway to establish the legal basis for inclusionary zoning and to calculate the maximum supportable fee in lieu. Alongside those efforts, implementation review will continue through cross-departmental work to identify technical issues, improve clarity, and potentially refine building and site standards.

Kristina Gallant reiterated that the Phase 2 work is fully underway. A brief presentation was provided to the Bellevue Development Committee earlier in the day; a more detailed session with that group will occur next following month. Steps are being taken to hold an in-person open house toward the end of February as well as other direct outreach efforts. A series of internal deep dives to review the draft language will occur with the implementing departments. A revised draft is anticipated to be released near the end of March, and that will lead into the subsequent stages of review and eventual Council action.

Vice Chair Lu asked staff to define what is meant by “affordable commercial space,” noting that unlike affordable housing, commercial affordability lacks an established enforcement mechanism. Kristina Gallant said the city’s economic development team developed a program concept and associated rules under which eligible tenants will be defined and vetted. The focus is on small businesses characterized by criteria such as employee count and revenue. Affordability will be maintained through a rent cap linked to operating expenses, with rent limited by a specified ratio of operating costs. Economic development staff will verify both eligibility and compliance with the cap. Vice Chair Lu suggested that, because the approach relies on a vetting process and an operating-expense metric, it may be appropriate to consolidate the existing categories such as childcare and nonprofit space into the broader affordable commercial framework rather than maintaining separate incentive categories. Kristina Gallant agreed the approach would be logical, adding that childcare and nonprofit space incentives are legacy provisions in BelRed.

Commissioner Ferris asked about the approximately 3,000 housing units constructed since the earlier planning efforts and inquired about the original housing targets at the time of the 2009 framework. Kristina Gallant allowed not having the historical target in hand and acknowledged the question as needing some follow-up.

Commissioner Ferris commented that development appears to have underutilized the allowed height and intensity and asked if staff had identified adjustments to better unlock the development potential. Nick Whipple said the earlier height limits and thresholds created awkward incentives and projects tended to remain within lower-cost wood-frame construction ranges rather than step into the more costly construction types required for additional height. The draft seeks to align the BelRed standards with those vetted through the Wilburton process. Some BelRed transit-oriented development areas currently have relatively modest height limits that the draft proposes to increase. The expectation is that the proposed changes will better support housing delivery.

Commissioner Goeppele expressed support for staff’s efforts to increase consistency across the code sections and asked whether a BelRed equivalent to the Wilburton catalyst or the related early-start program is being considered for the delivery of affordable housing. Kristina Gallant said no such temporary program is currently proposed. The Wilburton catalyst provision was

used quickly and therefore did not appear necessary in the same way. Nick Whipple added that the pioneer provision, which provides additional floor area opportunities through the amenity system, and the temporary catalyst provision, was rapidly exhausted in Wilburton. Although no catalyst-like program is currently proposed, coordination with the housing office and a feasibility analysis is ongoing. Future discussion could determine whether an early-start incentive is warranted for BelRed. Kristina Gallant said Wilburton included certain requirements, particularly open space requirements, that are not proposed in the BelRed draft. BelRed may have additional flexibility that could reduce the need for a catalyst mechanism. Commissioner Goeppel suggested that since the catalyst concept created an overly aggressive rush, a more limited “catalyst light” approach could still be beneficial to encourage early participation.

Commissioner Kennedy asked how the proposed street framework, including the use of private street typologies, will ensure pedestrian access, particularly given the community feedback emphasizing walkability. Kristina Gallant explained that publicly dedicated local streets and green streets will provide full public standards and high-quality pedestrian environments, but public street standards can limit flexibility in terms of lane widths and overall right-of-way. One option on the private side would be to have something like an alley typology. One of the private typologies is called an access corridor and it basically provides for a two-lane road that can be used for private access to a site. In the draft that option is only allowed to border only one side of a block in order to prevent it from becoming the dominant block-defining condition due to its weaker pedestrian environment. The other private option is an active transportation typology that is intended to retain pedestrian access while providing for additional design flexibility. In both cases there are trade-offs, including operational considerations such as required hours of public accessibility and reduced city control. A deeper and more focused discussion on the street typology topic will be conducted during a subsequent review.

Commissioner Kennedy stated that clearer depictions will help distinguish between public streets, alley-like access corridors, and other private street typologies, and will assist in understanding how people can move through developments on foot or by bicycle. Stressed was the importance of ensuring that pedestrian connectivity is continuous and intuitive so that residents and visitors can traverse the district without encountering dead ends or disconnected pathways. Nick Whipple reaffirming that the mapped local street segments are intended to provide reliable connectivity and to complement the city’s substantial public investment in the arterial network. Publicly dedicated local streets support long-term maintenance, consistent operations, and opportunities for arts and placemaking, and they are viewed as integral to achieving the district’s long-term vision.

Commissioner Nilchian asked for clarification on the definition of a green street. Kristina Gallant explained that green streets incorporate enhanced pedestrian and bicycle facilities, wider pedestrian zones, and natural stormwater management features. They also function both as environmental infrastructure and placemaking elements within the district.

Commissioner Nilchian asked about the timeline for the affordable housing nexus study and how it will influence the BelRed process. Nick Whipple said the study is nearly complete and will be posted publicly by the end of the month. Kristina Gallant said the nexus study is a legal requirement that establishes the legal basis for inclusionary housing requirements by calculating the maximum supportable fee or requirement tied to development impacts, such as the demand for lower-wage jobs generated by new commercial space and housing demand created by higher-income residential development.

Commissioner Villaveces commented on the overall level of detail in the draft and expressed

enthusiasm for the progress made. With regard to the street grid map, the Commissioner emphasized the importance of integrating stream corridors into the public realm network. The Comprehensive Plan envisioned streams functioning as linear parks and organizing public spaces within BelRed. The concept should be more explicitly incorporated into the street and circulation framework. Also highlighted was the district's geographic boundaries and scale as providing a strong opportunity to support car-free mobility through transit access, walking, cycling, and micromobility. Encouraged was development of a robust pedestrian and bicycle network, potentially including separated bicycle facilities, to support access to arts, cultural destinations, and transit stations. Support was voiced for revisiting an early-start catalyst-style incentive program, noting that rapid uptake in Wilburton could be interpreted as success rather than failure.

Chair Khanloo referenced prior commitments to support artist housing and live-work studio space and then stressed the need to have targeted incentives introduced to encourage development of artist-oriented housing and studio uses within the arts district under the goal of enabling artists to both live and work within the area and reinforcing the district's cultural identity.

Vice Chair Lu asked staff to seek more detailed data from Sound Transit regarding the composition of daily light rail boardings, such as the proportion of commuter versus recreational trips, to help inform planning around station areas and street networks. Also requested was updated financial models associated with the forthcoming affordable housing nexus study for the Commission to review.

Commissioner Ferris asked a question regarding the arts district intensive area, noting that the area is also a focus for stream daylighting. Also asked was how staff intends to balance incentives for arts-related amenities like affordable creative or loft space with incentives and requirements related to stream restoration, given that both objectives can be challenging and costly to achieve simultaneously. Kristina Gallant said the district incentive structure will balance multiple priorities. Under the current draft, projects within the arts district intensive area must obtain 75 percent of their amenity-related floor area from at least two items selected from a narrowed list of priority amenities. That list presently includes affordable housing, affordable commercial space, nonprofit space, public art, and outdoor plazas. An important exception is provided for projects that daylight streams or deliver park or trail dedications identified in the subarea plan, which may take precedence even within the arts district. The approach is a way to retain flexibility while preserving strong incentives for both arts-related amenities and environmentally significant improvements, particularly where stream restoration opportunities exist.

Commissioner Ferris noted that the public had commented on building floor plate sizes and asked staff to address whether increasing allowable floor plates had merit, and to clarify how the upcoming parking reforms might affect BelRed.

A motion to extend the meeting to 9:15 p.m. was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Nilchian and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Goeppel agreed with the notion of daylighting streams incorporating pedestrian paths along the stream corridors. Creating public access along streams will help build community appreciation for the environmental assets and generate long-term stewardship benefits.

Returning to the earlier questions regarding floor plates, Kristina Gallant said the draft already

provides greater flexibility in BelRed than in many other parts of the city, particularly for mid-rise buildings under 100 feet, which were identified as the most feasible typology for delivering affordable housing. Significant constraints remain primarily for taller tower forms. The current standards reflect extensive consultation with the development community during the Wilburton process. A comparative analysis with other districts could be provided, but modest increases beyond the current limits are unlikely to be decisive in determining project feasibility.

Regarding parking, Kristina Gallant said the parking reform Land Use Code amendment was initiated by Council on January 13. The direction provided includes not only compliance with the state minimum requirements but also exploration of additional reductions in transit-rich and pedestrian-oriented areas. For BelRed, the current draft applies the Wilburton approach by referencing citywide standards and imposes a flat 75 percent reduction in the required parking. The anticipation is that the forthcoming parking reforms will further reduce the requirements. Parking policy will be addressed comprehensively through the separate parking project. Nick Whipple said the Council direction is to comply with the state law and look for opportunities to go beyond. The parking requirement under state law is zero for sites within a half-mile walking distance of a light rail station. Outside that area the minimum is 0.5 spaces per dwelling unit and a maximum of two spaces per 1000 square feet of commercial development. The future discussion will focus on whether or not to go beyond the state minimums outside of the station walksheds.

Commissioner Nilchian agreed with the suggestion to develop incentives to create walkability around streams and expressed an interest in additional analysis of floor plate sizing, including the distinction between 20,000- and 25,000-square-foot thresholds. Nick Whipple said the current limits reflect the outcome of the Wilburton process. Larger thresholds were not proposed at that time, but staff is open to further discussion. Any change will need to consider consistency across adjacent districts such as Wilburton given the goal of consolidating standards.

Commissioner Villaveces suggested the city should examine international and national examples of successful arts districts, such as those in Miami and New York, as a way to inform BelRed's planning approach. Also requested was an analysis of BelRed's overall development capacity to help contextualize affordability requirements and fee-in-lieu policies. Understanding the scale of potential development will assist in setting realistic policy expectations.

Chair Khanloo suggested that a follow-up briefing on Wilburton's early outcomes could be useful for the Commission, particularly for the newer commissioners. It would be helpful to know if the adopted policies facilitated property transactions or development activity. It was acknowledged that broader market conditions may influence short-term results. Dr. Kate Nesse said the forthcoming Wilburton Sustainable District agenda item could provide an appropriate opportunity to present an update on Wilburton's progress and outcomes.

Vice Chair Lu asked if the proposed street grid directly connects to the BelRed light rail station. Kristina Gallant explained that the light rail alignment generally follows the Spring Boulevard corridor. Adding station locations and street labels to future maps will improve clarity. Vice Chair Lu emphasized the importance of maximizing direct connectivity between the street network and light rail stations in light of the fact that transit access should be a central organizing principle alongside stream corridors. Overlays showing the stations and transit connections would be useful to support future discussion of the street grid.

Commissioner Kennedy requested additional context regarding incentives for linear parks and stream-related improvements, asking for a clearer explanation of how the Critical Areas

Ordinance interacts with BelRed-specific incentives. Illustrative examples showing how developers might coordinate with adjacent property owners to meet the Critical Areas Ordinance requirements while also qualifying for BelRed incentives would be particularly helpful.

Commissioner Villaveces raised the issue of public investment in arts-related amenities, observing that unlike Wilburton, BelRed is envisioned as an arts district and could benefit from city-led projects such as museums, outdoor performance plazas, or other cultural anchors. The city should consider acquiring strategic parcels to develop urban magnets that will draw pedestrians and create activity nodes across the district. In particular a site near the intersection of a stream corridor and the East Rail Trail was highlighted. Kristina Gallant said there is a dedicated arts team that is actively working on public investments and programming related to the arts district. A willingness to coordinate with that group and provide further information on planned initiatives was expressed. Kristina Gallant added that the city currently controls several sites that are being advanced through requests for proposals with development partners. The projects could be highlighted to illustrate the city's role in shaping public-private partnerships within BelRed.

Chair Khanloo reiterated the importance of ensuring that the arts district is highly walkable and accessible and emphasized the role of open spaces, plazas, and gathering areas in creating a vibrant cultural environment. While there have been concerns raised by the development community regarding the open space requirements, such amenities are central to the adopted vision. There are examples from the Spring District where active public plazas have contributed to economic activity and community engagement. The incentive program should be strongly aligned with the goal of delivering arts-oriented public spaces and community gathering areas.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None
(8:58 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
(8:58 p.m.)

A. December 10, 2025

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Commissioner Kennedy. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Nilchian and the motion carried unanimously.

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(8:59 p.m.)

12. ADJOURNMENT
(8:59 p.m.)

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

Chair Khanloo adjourned the meeting at 8:59 p.m.