

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC

Ordinance imposing an emergency Interim Official Control on Part 20.25A of the Land Use Code (LUC) to reinforce historical and cultural qualities in the Downtown-Old Bellevue (DT-OB) Land Use District, along Main Street between 100th Avenue and Bellevue Way, and require that new development is compatible with adjacent development, unique design features, and established small-scale and pedestrian-oriented street frontage in Old Bellevue; providing for severability; and establishing an effective date.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**ACTION**

City Council consideration of an Ordinance that imposes an Interim Official Control (IOC) for the Downtown-Old Bellevue (DT-OB) Land Use District, along Main Street between 100th Avenue and Bellevue Way.

This agenda item also provides Council with requested background information regarding code and policy in the DT-OB Land Use District and seeks direction from Council for a future workplan to update city regulations and/or policy for Old Bellevue.

RECOMMENDATION

Consider adopting Ordinance No. 6903 and directing staff on the scope of any future city workplan to update regulations for Old Bellevue.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Consistent with Council direction on December 2, 2025, this agenda item provides background and context regarding city code and policy for Old Bellevue, provides the requested IOC Ordinance for Council consideration, and seeks direction regarding a future workplan to update city regulations and/or policy for Old Bellevue.

Prior Council Discussion

On December 2, 2025, Council considered a proposal from Councilmember Robinson for an emergency IOC for Main Street in Old Bellevue—extending from 100th Avenue to Bellevue Way (hereinafter “the IOC area”). At this meeting, Council discussed the unique historical and cultural value in, and the small scale, pedestrian-oriented identity of, Old Bellevue. Council also considered the option of utilizing an IOC to maintain and reinforce the character of Old Bellevue along Main Street while the city develops a workplan to update development regulations to best align with Council’s vision for this unique part of the city.

After deliberation, Council authorized city staff to exceed the eight-hour limitation to develop an IOC for Council consideration. Council also requested more information about future workplan options to update city code and/or policies for Old Bellevue and the IOC area.

Current Old Bellevue Policies and Regulations

Old Bellevue is a unique Land Use District within the Downtown Subarea. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes that Old Bellevue, particularly along Main Street between 100th Avenue and Bellevue Way, is a human-scaled neighborhood that functions like a traditional “Main Street USA,” with low traffic speeds, a pedestrian-friendly environment supporting small shops, and unique façades gracing some of Downtown’s oldest buildings. The Comprehensive Plan encourages preservation and retention of the character of Old Bellevue, including protection of the historic façade treatments of older buildings in the IOC area.

None of the properties in Old Bellevue are designated as national or state historic landmarks or places, and Old Bellevue is not a designated local historic district under the Comprehensive Plan or city zoning. In addition, the city has not completed any formal historic or cultural resource inventory for Old Bellevue or the IOC area in approximately (30) years.

The most recent Historic and Cultural Resources Survey and inventory for Old Bellevue was completed in March 1993 and updated in July 1997. This Survey identified eight (8) properties within the IOC area as having historic and cultural value. Four (4) of these 8 properties have been redeveloped subsequent to the completion of this Historic and Cultural Resources Survey.

The city also completed a new Historic Resources Survey in 2023 in connection with the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, which utilized updated methodology and included a review of resources and properties that are or will be fifty (50) years old or older during the applicable long-range planning period. However, this recent Historic Resources Survey was only a first step toward providing an inventory of the entire city and did not extend to Old Bellevue.

The Land Use Code, like the Comprehensive Plan, explains that the purpose of the DT-OB Land Use District is to assure compatibility of new development with the scale and intensity of the area, and preserve the social and historic qualities of this area. Current regulations recognize that the city values the high-degree of design detail inherent in the historic construction, storefronts, welcoming entrances, and sidewalk paving patterns along Main Street and the Grand Connection. The DT-OB Land Use District has specific dimensional, street, and pedestrian-oriented frontage requirements, as well as specific design guidelines associated with the portions of the Grand Connection that are located in Old Bellevue.

Current city policies and development regulations encourage, but do not mandate, that development maintain the unique historic and cultural resources identified in Old Bellevue. The code provisions provide maximum flexibility for the property owner in connection with redevelopment, while also imposing specific dimensional requirements and design standards. These policies and regulations balance historic and cultural resource preservation and documentation with city priorities supporting growth, housing production, and mixed-use development and redevelopment in this area of Downtown.

Proposed Interim Official Control

An IOC is an emergency control, authorized by the Growth Management Act (GMA) at RCW 36.70A.390. The notice, public outreach, and public hearing that would otherwise be required prior to Council adoption of a LUCA are not required prior to adoption of a temporary IOC of this nature. This

allows the IOC to be put in place quickly, but a public hearing must be held within sixty (60) days of IOC adoption. The IOC may be effective for six (6) months, and the IOC may be renewed for one or more six-month periods if a subsequent public hearing is held and findings of fact are made prior to each successive renewal.

The IOC before Council, as drafted, is narrowly tailored to apply to the IOC area in Old Bellevue as a temporary measure. This IOC provides a path to preserve and protect the historic façade treatments of older buildings in Old Bellevue while Council processes and considers permanent development regulations for Old Bellevue. Through preservation and protection of façades and the design features of façades of existing buildings in the IOC area, the IOC will implement city policies addressing the unique historic and cultural value, and human-scaled identity, of Old Bellevue and will ensure compatibility with surrounding development in the IOC area.

If a property owner or applicant establishes within the IOC area that the façade of an existing building in the IOC area is less than fifty (50) years old or has no historic or cultural value, then the existing façade may be demolished. However, the IOC imposes updated design requirements for façade redevelopment in the IOC area following demolition. These include incorporation of the design features, proximate scale, and pedestrian orientation of existing façades, up to the second floor of the project, when redevelopment occurs. New facades built between or among existing structures that are 50 years old or older are required to design the rebuilt façade, up to the second floor, to align with adjacent façades and cornices, storefront entrances, and windows to be compatible with the unique design features of the built environment facing Main Street.

The IOC does not change dimensional requirements, baseline development capacity, existing street and pedestrian-oriented frontage requirements, or design guidelines associated with the Grand Connection in Old Bellevue. This IOC will not impact development projects the city has approved in the IOC area prior to the effective date of the IOC, or projects that have submitted complete land use or building permit applications prior to the effective date of the IOC. Following expiration of the IOC, permanent regulations in Part 20.25A LUC adopted by the City Council will control.

Options for Workplans for Old Bellevue

Going forward, Council has a two primary workplan options available to consider updated development regulations and/or policies for the IOC area. Each option will result in some level of impact to the city's code and policy legislative workplan. Additionally, Council may ultimately decide after the IOC period that current city regulations and planned amendments do, in fact, provide sufficient protection of the unique character of Old Bellevue.

Option 1: Exclude the DT-OB Land Use District from the Housing Opportunities in Mixed-Use Areas (HOMA) LUCA and address changes to Old Bellevue regulations in Downtown Livability 2.0.

Old Bellevue is currently included in the HOMA LUCA that the city is processing. The HOMA LUCA, which was recommended by the Planning Commission on January 28, encourages housing development through zoning changes, higher density, taller buildings, removing obstacles to housing production, and the creation of an affordable housing program in various mixed-use areas of the city. Council will consider the HOMA LUCA, and its application within Old Bellevue, in the first quarter of 2026.

Old Bellevue will also be included in the Downtown Livability 2.0 work program, which will most likely be initiated by Council in Q1 of 2026. Downtown Livability 2.0 is intended to identify and address implementation gaps in the Downtown Code, Part 20.25A LUC, and the Downtown policies adopted in 2017, as well as explore additional strategies to enhance Downtown livability. Downtown Livability 2.0 will also consider measures to protect historic façades and other significant design features in Old Bellevue.

In the near term, when Council processes the Planning Commission recommended HOMA LUCA, Council will need to consider the effects of the recommended HOMA LUCA on Old Bellevue and the IOC area. Specifically, the recommended HOMA LUCA proposes the following changes that may affect current city regulations in Old Bellevue:

- Requiring projects that exceed base height or floor area ratio (FAR) to earn the first 25% of amenity points through affordable housing, either via fees or on-site units;
- Allowing an additional 1.6 to 2.25 FAR in exchange for providing affordable housing;
- Increasing allowable lot coverage by 5% when an affordable housing threshold is met;
- Reducing required outdoor plaza space by 3%;
- Allowing elimination of the 15-foot upper-level stepback along Main Street when an affordable housing threshold is met;
- Allowing upper-level stepbacks anywhere below 110 feet instead of between 25 and 40 feet; and
- Allowing larger floorplates for buildings under 80 feet when an affordable housing threshold is met.

When Council considers this recommended HOMA LUCA at a later meeting—and if Council takes action to adopt the proposed IOC—Council could choose to remove the DT-OB Land Use District or the IOC area from the HOMA LUCA. This would allow the IOC to remain in effect without further changes to the IOC area while Council considers proposed changes within Old Bellevue or the IOC area through a targeted LUCA in connection with the subsequent Downtown Livability 2.0 workplan.

A targeted LUCA for the IOC area in Downtown Livability 2.0 could also provide options to update the city's incentive program for façade preservation in Old Bellevue and/or build off the façade protection and design requirements in the IOC. This targeted LUCA in Downtown Livability 2.0 provides a path to update city regulations within the IOC area, through permanent design requirements and standards, without formally exploring or establishing a historic preservation program for Old Bellevue.

Finally, a targeted LUCA of this nature could most likely be accomplished without the need to amend the City's Comprehensive Plan. Old Bellevue is already included in the Downtown Livability 2.0 workplan, and updating the City's Historic and Cultural Resource Study and developing a targeted LUCA in connection with Downtown Livability 2.0 would not be disruptive to the city's anticipated 2026 planning, land use, and code and policy legislative work programs. The outreach, public notice, and stakeholder and community input on the targeted LUCA would be included in the Downtown Livability 2.0 workplan.

Option 2: Initiate a new historic and cultural Comprehensive Plan Amendment and subsequent LUCA.

At the other end of the spectrum, Council could provide direction to explore both a Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) and LUCA to formally preserve historic and cultural resources in Old Bellevue (and throughout the city). Although it is premature to delineate the exact scope and content of this CPA and

LUCA work program, the primary focus would most likely include consideration of national, state and local historic and cultural resource preservation options for Old Bellevue. This new framework would require consideration of tools outside of the city's LUC-based regulatory authority—grants, other funding mechanisms, and programs that require some level of formal historic designation. This workplan would also require city collaboration and coordination with the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) and King County.

The Comprehensive Plan already contains Urban Design policies that consider establishing a local preservation program to increase historic resources protections. Eventually, more robust formal policy and code development could include Council consideration of an ordinance to establish a procedure for designating local landmarks, Council consideration of a formal Historic Preservation Program for the city, and consideration of establishing local historic districts within the city. This CPA and LUCA workplan would be a multi-year process that requires a significant devotion of city resources; coordination with Federal, State, and County agencies; and robust public outreach and stakeholder input.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

The Comprehensive Plan recognizes and encourages preservation and retention of the unique character of Old Bellevue, including but not limited to the historic façade treatments of older buildings in Old Bellevue, and also includes broader policies addressing historic resources protection:

Policy S-DT-91: Encourage redevelopment to maintain some of the historic facade treatments of older buildings in this district.

Policy S-DT-94: Reinforce the unique character of the Old Bellevue area by encouraging residential development, specialty retail, and other development with an emphasis on pedestrian activity.

Policy UD-62: Preserve, enhance and interpret Bellevue's historical identity.

Policy UD-63: Consider establishing a local preservation program to increase historic resources protections.

Policy UD-64: Develop opportunities for preservation, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of historically significant sites and structures and education about those sites.

Policy UD-66: Establish a process of conducting historic surveys that identify, document and evaluate historic properties.

Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact to the city associated with adoption of the IOC Ordinance. Depending on the scope of any future workplan that may be initiated by Council, there may be a fiscal impact associated with the future workplan. This could include costs associated with hiring third party consultants, vendors, or independent contractors to facilitate a future workplan to update the City's Historic and Cultural Resources Study for Old Bellevue and/or costs incurred in connection with any future workplan initiated by Council to update code or policy for Old Bellevue.

OPTIONS

1. Adopt the Ordinance imposing an emergency Interim Official Control on Part 20.25A of the Land Use Code (LUC) to reinforce historical and cultural qualities in the Downtown-Old Bellevue (DT-OB) Land

Use District, along Main Street between 100th Avenue and Bellevue Way, and require that new development is compatible with adjacent development, unique design features, and established small-scale and pedestrian-oriented street frontage in Old Bellevue; providing for severability; and establishing an effective date, and provide direction on the scope of any future city workplan to update regulations for Old Bellevue.

2. Do not adopt the Ordinance and provide direction on the scope of any future city workplan to update regulations for Old Bellevue.

ATTACHMENTS

Proposed Ordinance No. 6903

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A