

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES

April 8, 2026
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Khanloo, Commissioners Goepple, Nilchian, Villaveces

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Commissioner Ferris

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Vice Chair Lu, Commissioner Kennedy

STAFF PRESENT: Kate Nesse, Community Development Department; Nick Whipple, Kirsten Mandt, Development Services Department; Matt McFarland, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Bhargava

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
(6:30 p.m.)

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Vice Chair Lu and Commissioner Kennedy.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
(6:31 p.m.)

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Goepple. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Nilchian.

A motion to amend the motion to remove agenda item 8b was made by Chair Khanloo. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ferris.

The motion as amended carried unanimously.

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None
(6:32 p.m.)

5. STAFF REPORTS
(6:32 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Senior Planner 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 (6:33 p.m.)

A. Written Communications (6:33 p.m.)

Dr. Kate Nesse noted having forwarded to the Commissioners three comments received following publication of the packet.

B. Oral Communications (6:33 p.m.)

Chair Khanloo reviewed the procedural rules, including the three-minute time limit per speaker, the total 30-minute allotment for oral communication, and the requirement under Ordinance 6752 that comments relate to matters within the Planning Commission's authority.

Aeli Furtado, project design manager for Tesla, expressed support for a proposed amendment to LUC 20.20.900 C.1.b.2 related to development activity definitions. There is a pending project to install an eight-stall electric vehicle charging station at Eastgate Plaza. The project involves the conversion of three parking stalls to accommodate the charging equipment. No buildings will be expanded, no trees will be removed, and no impervious surface will be added. The current code requires compliance with the extensive tree density requirements for the entire site. Because the site has a historical tree deficit, the current code requires planting more than 30 trees or paying a fee in-lieu of over \$40,000. That represents a substantial financial burden, amounting to a significant portion of the project's construction budget, thereby creating a barrier to deployment of the charging infrastructure. The proposed amendment will better align regulatory requirements with the limited scope of such projects, preserve the intent of tree retention policies, and support the city's long-term electric vehicle infrastructure goals. Appreciation was expressed to city staff for their responsiveness in regard to the issue. The Commission was asked to recommend approval of the proposed amendment.

Roopa Satagopan, youth program leadership coordinator for the non-profit organization Indian American Community Services. The program is rooted in the community and provides culturally responsive mental health and wellness support to more than 225 Bellevue-based youth members, and 450 other youths across the Eastside. The speaker emphasized the importance of providing stigma-free support services, leadership development, and training in mental health first aid for hundreds of youth participants annually. The measurable program outcomes includes extensive hours of direct mental health support and individualized consultations. The services address the growing mental health needs among young people who are navigating cultural expectations. The speaker requested continued municipal support to expand the program's capacity and impact within the community.

Jessie Clawson spoke on behalf of the Bellevue Club and addressed a proposed targeted amendment to the omnibus code amendment to allow a residential fee in-lieu in the East Main subarea. The Bellevue Club has proposed a mixed use project that includes a residential tower above structured parking as well as expanded club space. The request does not represent a shift in city policy. All other subareas with inclusionary housing requirements already provide such options; East Main is the only exception. At the time the East Main code was adopted, residential development at the Bellevue Club was not anticipated and thus did not advocate for the option. The fee in-lieu in East Main is \$30/square foot, which is almost double the non-residential fee in the rest of the city. No change is proposed to that fee, rather the proposal is to extend the same fee to residential development, thereby aligning the sub-area with citywide policy. The fee-in-lieu mechanism enable municipalities to fund deeply affordable housing projects more effectively. Recent funding allocations were cited as evidence of the program's success.

Alex Tsimerman identified as a long-time resident and frequent political candidate and proceeded to deliver remarks expressing strong dissatisfaction with prior interactions with city authorities and restrictions placed on public participation. The testimony included allegations regarding limitations on free speech, criticism of meeting procedures, and objections related to the citizenship status of the city's mayor.

Councilmember Bhargava joined the meeting during the Oral Communications.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(6:49 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION
(6:49 p.m.)

Assistant Director Nick Whipple explained that the 2026 omnibus amendment represents a new procedural approach for the city. Historically, code updates have focused primarily on technical corrections such as typographical errors or outdated cross-references. The omnibus process was designed to provide a more comprehensive mechanism for maintaining and updating the municipal code on a regular basis by combining multiple amendments into a single package. The method allows the city to respond more efficiently to recurring requests for code clarifications or revisions rather than waiting for large-scale updates to specific code sections.

Code and Policy Senior Planner Kirsten Mandt outlined the overall structure of the proposed amendments, which were organized into three principal categories: routine cleanup items, revisions necessary to comply with state legislation, and limited policy-related adjustments intended to improve code clarity and functionality. The cleanup items include correcting drafting errors; clarifying the intent of certain provisions; consolidating permit processes into a single, more accessible section of the code; and reviewing vesting language to ensure consistency with current legal practice. The changes were described as administrative in nature but important for improving transparency and usability of the regulatory framework.

Several of the amendments are required to align local regulations with recently enacted state laws. The updates address multiple legislative changes, some of which carry compliance deadlines in the near term. Among the examples listed were reforms related to land division

processes, including distinctions between two-lot short plats, lot splits, and unit lot subdivisions. The revisions are primarily procedural adjustments designed to streamline administrative processes and provide additional options for certain housing developments, such as townhome projects seeking fee-simple ownership arrangements.

Kirsten Mandt said additional state law compliance measures include changes related to child care facilities and building materials. The proposed amendments broaden the definition of child care centers to include preschools and nursery schools not formally associated with traditional school institutions and thereby supporting increased availability of child care services. Another amendment aims to remove certain building cladding requirements from the local code when proposed materials already meet the applicable building code standards, reflecting new state-level restrictions on local design mandates.

Kirsten Mandt said the amendments are intended to avoid controversy while supporting existing planning objectives. One such proposal involves evaluating whether single-family residential uses should continue to be permitted within high-density residential and mixed-use zones. It was noted that the purpose of the review was to ensure that zoning regulations remain consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's intended land use designations and capacity targets. Another involves a trigger in the current tree code under which any change to parking or circulation areas triggers the tree code. The more appropriate metric is a minimum threshold for changes to impervious surfaces.

The proposed amendments also seek to move a number of permit processes into the citywide permit section, including the master development plan; departures; administrative design review; binding site plans; process mergers; and extended vesting. Associated with that is the removal of the Comprehensive Plan consistency requirement where it is not legally required.

In terms of the engagement approach, Kirsten Mandt allowed that it was fairly minimal for the project because little was needed in terms of policy direction. There was a lot of consulting and reviewing with internal staff on the cleanup components to make sure the intent of the feedback received from the development community was understood. The engagement process includes presenting to and consulting with the Planning Commission and the City Council.

With regard to the timeline, things are currently at the code refinement stage. The hope is to move to a public hearing in May ahead of Council action in July.

Direction from the Commission was sought to determine whether the proposed omnibus amendments should proceed to a formal public hearing for further consideration.

Commissioner Ferris asked staff for input regarding the proposed amendment related to the East Main subarea that had been referenced during the public comment period. Kirsten Mandt allowed that the item had not been included in the initial scope of the omnibus amendment because the City Council had previously made a deliberate policy decision not to address topics that might require robust policy discussion. Nick Whipple added that at the time the East Main code was adopted in 2021, the Council was focused on setting a fee in-lieu for commercial and had not discussed the residential side. That sentiment has shifted toward any opportunity to support affordable housing. Staff are open to incorporating the proposal should the Commission express support for doing so. Commissioner Ferris expressed support for the change, noting that it could facilitate additional housing development while generating fee-in-lieu revenue to support other affordable housing projects.

Commissioner Goepple agreed with Commissioner Ferris and then noted generally being supportive of the proposal to restrict single-family residential uses in areas where the focus is on promoting density. Clarification was sought regarding the breadth of the proposed change and whether it will apply citywide. Kirsten Mandt explained that the restriction would be limited to areas designated for higher-density residential development or mixed-use growth where the city's planning objectives emphasize increased housing capacity. Nick Whipple added that the preliminary analysis suggests the change will pose a minimal risk of creating nonconforming properties and will support the city's broader growth targets. Commissioner Goepple expressed general support for the approach.

Commissioner Nilchian agreed with the notion of including the East Main topic and then requested additional context regarding the rationale for granting partial credit for property line trees. Nick Whipple explained that the existing code is silent on the issue. The current practice has evolved from an administrative interpretation intended to avoid granting full credit for trees outside a property owner's control. However, staff recognizes that providing no credit at all discourages preservation and could require excessive replanting to meet the retention standards. The proposed half-credit approach is therefore a balanced solution that recognizes the presence of the trees while accounting for shared ownership and responsibility.

Commissioner Villaveces also concurred with the comments regarding the single family and fee in-lieu and then turned attention to the treatment of trees within the development regulations. In practical terms, the physical influence of a tree extends beyond the location of its trunk given that the canopy and root systems often reach well into neighboring properties. Developers are frequently required to protect the critical root zones of trees located on adjacent parcels, which can restrict the buildable area on their own property. Given that the constraints directly affect development potential, Commissioner Villaveces argued that applicants should receive credit for protecting such trees, even when a tree is not located on the developer's property. It was also suggested that allowing credit for trees whose root zones encroach onto a property would provide a more equitable outcome. Staff was encouraged to consider additional examples illustrating the issue. Kirsten Mandt acknowledged the concern but outlined several regulatory challenges associated with granting credit for trees entirely located on neighboring properties.

Nick Whipple added that while applicants are often required to hire arborists in seeking to protect root zones, the city cannot guarantee the long-term preservation of a tree that remains under the control of another property owner. If credit were to be granted based on such trees, the subsequent removal of the tree by the neighbor could leave the original project out of compliance with the tree retention requirements. That could add administrative difficulty associated with tracking how credits may have been calculated and maintaining compliance if conditions change after project approval. While the situation is not unique to tree regulations, and while development decisions by neighboring property owners can affect adjacent sites in many ways, the limitations of any regulatory solutions should encourage continued collaboration between neighboring property owners. Commissioner Villaveces acknowledged the complexities but reiterated an interest in providing additional real-world examples for further consideration.

Chair Khanloo sought clarification regarding the rationale for awarding one-half credit for property line trees rather than full credit. Nick Whipple explained that the half-credit approach is intended to balance the shared responsibility and to avoid the risk of double counting the same tree by adjacent property owners. Because both neighbors could potentially claim credit for the same tree, assigning partial credit is viewed as a practical compromise that recognizes the presence and value of the tree while maintaining fairness and regulatory consistency. Under the existing code, property owners are not always required to retain such trees at all, and therefore

even partial credit represents an improvement by providing an incentive for preservation.

Chair Khanloo asked if the same logic would apply to trees located along public rights-of-way rather than between private properties. Nick Whipple clarified that the half-credit provision would apply regardless of ownership on the opposite side of the property line, including cases involving street trees. The purpose of the amendment is to acknowledge the presence of trees that currently provide no retention credit, and to encourage voluntary preservation, even in situations where retention is not strictly required by regulation. Chair Khanloo reflected on past development projects in which multiple trees were removed and asked if stronger incentives might have resulted in greater retention. Nick Whipple reiterated that the current proposal is designed to create at least some incentive where none previously existed.

Commissioner Ferris referenced a letter submitted by a member of the public earlier in the day and requested that staff review the suggestions contained in the letter to determine if it is aligned with the intent of the proposed code changes. Kirsten Mandt said there are different sets of regulations that apply to tree retention for critical areas and their buffers. Vegetation within critical areas is subject to significantly stricter retention standards, typically allowing for removal only in cases involving hazards or disease, and often requiring that the remaining debris be retained to support habitat functions. The proposed amendments will apply only to areas outside of critical areas and their buffers.

Commissioner Ferris also requested an explanation of the term “extended vested language.” Nick Whipple clarified that vesting refers to the period during which an approved development application remains governed by the regulations in effect at the time of approval. Under the current system, applicants typically receive three years of vesting and may request extensions if additional time is needed before submitting building permits. The proposed amendment is intended to simplify and make more understandable the procedures for extending vesting periods without altering underlying policy.

Commissioner Nilchian raised a policy-related inquiry concerning the proposed inclusion of a residential fee-in-lieu option in the East Main subarea, observing that there appeared to be a general consensus among the Commissioners in support of the proposal. The question asked was whether maintaining the same fee amount as the existing non-residential fee would be appropriate, or whether adjustments should be considered. Nick Whipple explained that retaining the existing fee structure will be the simplest and most practical approach. The fee in the East Main area functions as an incentive-based mechanism and applies only to the incremental development beyond base height allowances rather than to the entire building. Forthcoming state transit oriented development requirements will necessitate a broader review of the East Main regulations by 2029. As a result, adopting the proposed change could serve as an interim measure to support a pending development project while allowing for a more comprehensive policy evaluation in the future.

Commissioner Villaveces expressed support for the interim approach before returning to the earlier discussion regarding tree credit policies. Using an illustrative analogy concerning fruit from a neighboring tree, Commissioner Villaveces emphasized the perceived fairness of recognizing the impacts from adjacent vegetation.

Chair Khanloo asked about the geographic scope of the East Main area and if additional property owners might be affected by the proposed amendment. Nick Whipple explained that the East Main district encompasses approximately ninety acres and said only a small number of parcels, primarily three parcels under two ownership groups, are realistically positioned for

redevelopment under the applicable zoning provisions. One additional parcel is unlikely to redevelop due to physical constraints associated with an existing stream, and therefore the potential impacts of the proposed amendment are considered limited and low risk.

A motion to schedule a public hearing was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Goepple.

A motion to amend the motion to include the extension of the fee-in-lieu to residential development in East Main was made by Commissioner Villaveces. The motion to amend was seconded by Commissioner Ferris and the motion carried unanimously.

The main motion as amended carried unanimously.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None
(7:26 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None
(7:26 p.m.)

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(7:26 p.m.)

12. ADJOURNMENT
(7:26 p.m.)

Before adjourning, Commissioner Villaveces pointed out that Dr. Kate Nesse had been handed a paper by Alex Tsimerman that included some strong language. The paper could be considered harassment or bullying and someone should look into it.

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

Chair Khanloo adjourned the meeting at 7:26 p.m.