

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

July 12, 2023
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Ferris, Vice Chair Bhargava, Commissioners Brown, Cálad, Goepple, Khanloo, Malakoutian

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Emil King, Janet Shull, Justin Panganiban, Department of Community Development; Matt McFarland, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present

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 Ferris who presided.

2. ROLL CALL
(6:30 p.m.)

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Cálad, who arrived at 6:31 p.m.

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

A motion to amend the agenda to add Election of Officers, and to approve the amended agenda, was made by Commissioner Malakoutian. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brown and the motion carried unanimously.

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None
(6:31 p.m.)

5. STAFF REPORTS
(6:31 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Comprehensive Planning Manager Thara Johnson took a few minutes to review the

Commission's schedule of upcoming meeting dates and agenda items.

6. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

A. Oral Communications

(6:35 p.m.)

Alex Tsimerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners dirty Nazi garbage rats and democrat mafiosi. Russian is the number one enemy of the United States and is very dangerous. The democrat mafia for the last 25 years has never promoted or supported a Russian guy to work for the government. It is confusing that the democratic mafia is now supporting someone from Iran. Iran is also an enemy of the United States and is also an enemy of the Jews. Iran with Russia has advertised for many years that their first atomic bomb will go to Israel and the second to America. It is confusing that the democrat mafiosi will not promote one enemy but will promote another enemy. Iran is a top enemy and that will not change. Iran is best friends with Russia against America. No one seems to remember 9-11. The Commissioners are super smart idiots and absolute cretins for not understanding what is going on.

Satin Landi, a Wilburton resident, spoke representing Wilburton residents who found the process of the Wilburton Vision Implementation, combined with the Comprehensive Plan update, to be confusing. When the Wilburton Vision Implementation process started it was understood that the Wilburton neighborhoods closest to transit would be protected from becoming part of the increasing development and that there would be gradual degrees in housing density leading to single family residential. The opposite, however, has been presented. Since then the housing-to-jobs ratio has doubled from single family residential to ADUs, detached ADUs, duplexes, triplexes, apartments and townhomes. It has all happened very quickly. Now on the table is maximum density under Alternative 3, compounded by the mandated affordable housing bill recently passed. With the aggressive growth timeline and overall decreased oversight, the cumulative effects on critical area ecosystems will be irreversible, damaging the Kelsey Creek watershed in Wilburton. Planning to increase the tree canopy as the primary mitigation method for reducing carbon emissions and increasing housing densities in all neighborhoods is not a substitute for an entire ecosystem that has existed for over a hundred years. Increased runoff will result and there will be increased flooding, for which the city will have to foot the bill. More time is needed to review the cumulative impacts on the ecological system and the neighborhoods. Critical areas should be studied in conjunction with the Department of Ecology and the state Fish and Wildlife department. The analysis should measure the cumulative impacts from the loss of tree canopies on stream temperatures, and the toxic waste runoff from increasing traffic and parked cars and private property development draining into surrounding streams and creeks. Increasing FAR and building heights will result in a loss of sunlight and privacy, and will reduce quality of life. A data-driven approach should be used.

Craig Speisel spoke on behalf of many residents of Lochlaven in opposition to the staff's preferred alternative for the northwest quadrant, including a new classification of R-Medium and R-High throughout Lochlaven. Over the past several months the planning department has advanced many issues. The sheer volume of their proposals has been overwhelming making it challenging for everyone to digest and understand the impacts. The aggressive timeline has prevented meaningful and sincere public engagement, and has limited the ability of the Commission to make a thoughtful, data-driven recommendation to the Council. The community is still working to digest the potential impacts. Allowing buildings up to six stories will compound the impacts, forever changing the character of the neighborhoods. The expansive scope of the EIS, including existing single family homes, is fundamentally flawed. The preferred

alternative is in direct conflict with the principles and the assurances made by past Commission members and the Council over the past decade. The wedding cake concept model championed and embraced by the city made it possible for substantial investments in residential properties outside the Downtown core. If the preferred alternative is approved, the city will abandon its agreements and trust with the community. The preferred alternative should not be approved. It directly conflicts with the Northwest Bellevue Comprehensive Plan approved less than two years ago. It eliminates the mandated buffer separating Downtown Bellevue and Lochlaven. It does not consider the loss of privacy for nearby properties. It does not consider the shadow impacts from nearby properties, nor the impacts on the tree canopy. It does not consider the impacts of traffic, pedestrian safety, parking or curb management. It does not consider the impacts on city utilities and infrastructure, including police or fire services. It also lacks an economic impact assessment of homeowner property values. The Commission should assert its right to send the EIS back to the planning department, to require a data-driven analysis, and to establish a new realistic schedule to allow all stakeholders adequate time to study the proposals. Increasing density at all costs should not be the answer.

Neal Mulnick, owner of Ford Auto Nation site, noted being excited about the progress made by staff and the Commission on the Wilburton update. The proposed amendments will help achieve the goal of a vibrant multimodal Wilburton. Concern was voiced, however, in regard to policy UD-5 that addresses noise and air quality standards around high-volume roadways through building and site development standards, and the city adopting stringent building and site development standards to address the concerns. Stringent standards only serve to stifle development and they do not make sense when other mitigation is available. Technical solutions tend to evolve at a rapid pace and often outpace codes. Developers understand the concerns that are of high importance to residents or office tenants and they will account for them in their buildings. If the city does not want to remove UD-5 from consideration, the language should at least be revised to incorporate flexibility in the form of encouraging new development to minimize exposure by employing mitigating design and development standards.

Barb Braun disagreed with the previous speaker. Robust urban design standards are the key to ensuring wonderful and beautiful neighborhoods that are consistent in Wilburton. It was noted that additional suggestions had been submitted via email earlier in the day. With regard to the zoning map, it was noted that the staff-recommended modified Alternative 3 goes beyond the original Alternative 3, which allowed for 95,000 additional housing units, or 2.7 times the amount predicted to be needed. There seems to be a push to go beyond 95,000 by allowing highrises in all density centers under the guise of flexibility. If allowed, the result will be a mishmash of incongruous building types and urban towers scattered around Bellevue's residential neighborhoods. That would be in opposition to the city's values and would rapidly degrade neighborhood character without necessarily resulting in affordability. Bellevue should not add density for density's sake, rather it should only add the appropriate densities in centers that will allow for affordability and transit access while maintaining neighborhood character. Too much zoning flexibility will not achieve that goal. The proposed zoning map shows unneeded density in several centers that will do more to ruin character and community than it will to improve affordability. For example, the MU-H-1 should be changed to MU-M. Sixteen stories is too high; ten is sufficient. In Kelsey Creek, Newcastle, Eastgate, Lakemont and the shopping center on 145th Place SE should have MU-L rather than MU-M because ten stories in those areas is too high. The assertion that mandates do not pencil out for housing affordability should be challenged. Mandates have effectively been implemented in other cities such as Portland and plenty of developers are participating. If most new housing needs to be affordable, absent mandates Bellevue residents should not be asked to suffer the impacts of the high-density modified Alternative 3. Density development is occurring across King County and the

Commissioners and staff should tour the sites.

Nicole Meyers said Bellevue has grown by leaps and bounds over the last decade. Between 2010 and 2020, the census numbers show an increase of about 25 percent. At that rate, it would take more than 40 years to reach the 95,000 housing units that is being proposed for 2044 plan. Maybe the plan is actually for 2066. Bellevue should have big dreams and very high standards. All buildings in the 2040s and 2060s will likely be built with complete net zero standards. Terms like involuntary displacement are being thrown around for some residential neighborhoods. The meeting minutes for June 21 suggest there are no sensitive needs or single family homes near where a height increase from 16 to 25 stories, but that ignores the existing townhomes in the area. The share of travel modes should be changed and the ratio of housing to residential development should be controlled to solve congestion and affordability problems. As Bellevue grows, it should do so at a graceful rate that will deliver on promises made. There should be high standards set to meet all climate goals.

John Darvish expressed deep concern for the north end of the Wilburton area at the tip of 116th Avenue NE and Bel-Red Road. The area is designed for BR-MO-H-2, medical development. However, the entire area should be designated BR-MU-H-2. The whole area between Main Street and Bel-Red Road should be MU. The proposed designation will not inspire any new medical office buildings. It has not inspired a single new medical building since the 1980s. As envisioned by the staff, multiple large medical office buildings of 400,000 square feet plus are needed to address the needs of the medical community. One such building was built 13 years ago on the Overlake Hospital campus, and it is still not fully leased. There is still a lot of land in Overlake on which medical office buildings can be built. Ninety percent of medical practices need between 1000 and 20,000 square feet. Filling up a 400,000 square foot building with a number of small tenants is extremely difficult, speculative and risky. In a mixed use development, medical office needs can be addressed as they arise. Highly prescriptive zoning has not worked in the past and the same mistake should not be made going forward. The last rezone of BelRed created multiple medical office zones and neighborhoods, and the intensity was relevant to the proximity to the hospital, yet still nothing has happened. The new designation offers more than two million square feet of medical office space and it should be stated whether or not there has been any study conducted to support that number.

Betsi Hummer reminded the Commissioners that they have the option of slowing things down. While that would need to be done through the liaison to the Council and with Council direction, it should be done. After the last Commission meeting, it was clear that there was confusion among the Commissioners. Only one Commissioner noted having read the thousand-page report.

B. Written Communications
(6:58 p.m.)

Thara Johnson noted having received a fair number of written communications and including them in the Commission packet. The 12 written comments were all related to the Wilburton Vision Implementation and the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update. Since publication of the packet, an additional 24 or so letters were received.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(7:00 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION
(7:00 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Educational Series, Vol. II, Pt 1: Planning Commission Roles and Responsibilities and Reviewing Comprehensive Plan Amendments

Assistant City Attorney Matt McFarland stressed that the Commissioners serve as fact finders and as citizen advisors to the City Council. The Commission is not a substitute for the Council. The purpose of the Commission is to apply the decision criteria in the Land Use Code and to make recommendations to the Council for consideration. Bellevue operates as an Optional Municipal Code city, which is in Chapter 35A of the RCW, which lays out a way for cities to plan via an adopted planning agency. Such planning agencies can be a person, a body, a committee, a commission, a board, a department or combination of any of those entities. Bellevue has a Planning Commission, created by the City Council, and a city department which together make up the planning agency within the city. The Bellevue City Council's first act, Ordinance 1, was to creation the Planning Commission.

The scope and responsibilities of the Planning Commission are outlined in city code in Chapter 3.64. The code outlines both what the Commission is expected to do and what it cannot do. The Commission is charged with making recommendations for changes and updates to the Comprehensive Plan and amendments to the citywide regulations that exist in the Land Use Code. Because the Commission is created through state and city statutory authority, it is bound by the procedures established by statute. The Commission is not an elected legislative body, rather it is a citizen advisory body that fulfills the administrative planning function in the city. The Commission serves at the pleasure of the City Council. It is the responsibility of the City Council to adopt policies and regulations, and that responsibility cannot be delegated to the Commission or city staff. In its work, the Commission cannot deviate from the Process IV legislative land use process or the set out in the Land Use Code. The same is true for the decision criteria, even if there is frustration or a belief that the decision criteria is outdated or not effective for the issue at hand. Neither the Commission nor the staff can alter the decision criteria or the process. While the Commission can think outside the box, it must color inside the lines.

Staff from the Department of Community Development and the Department of Development Services appear regularly before the Commission, and those persons are well known to the Commission. It is important to keep in mind that the directors of those two departments, and not the Commission, are charged with supervising the staff and directing the administrative operations. It is very clear in Chapter 3.64 that the Commission does not have any authority to direct department operations. One example is in the area of public outreach. The Commission can ask what public outreach has been done, but the Commission is not charged with directing the staff to conduct specific public outreach. Another illustrative example involves data. The Commission is free to ask staff what data they have on a subject matter, but is not charged with directing staff to go in search of specific data.

Continuing, Matt McFarland said Chapter 20.35 of the Land Use Code contains Process IV, the City Council's legislative action land use process under which the role of the Planning Commission falls. Part 20.30I of the Land Use Code is the chapter on Comprehensive Plan amendments. Part 20.30J covers Land Use Code amendments. The Commission's bylaws are specific to the operations of the Commission. The Commission is also subject to Chapter 3.92, the ethics applicable to the City Council and all boards and commissions.

The GMA (GMA) will be a throughline in each training session to help explain how the work done in Bellevue is affected by state mandates. The GMA is the comprehensive planning framework in the state of Washington establishing planning, land use and environmental

protection requirements for all counties and cities in the state. It directs planning jurisdictions to adopt internally consistent Comprehensive Plan amendments. Comprehensive Plans are implemented through locally adopted development regulations, and one critical mandate in the GMA is that all development regulations must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. The concepts, while simple to talk about, are often more difficult to apply in practice.

Comprehensive Plans contain certain elements such as the Transportation Element, Land Use Element, Housing Element, Utilities Element, a Capital Facilities Plan and others. In addition, cities and counties are to consider various goals set forth in statutes involving things like urban growth, housing and economic development. One thing the Commission has heard a lot about is the jobs and housing targets ratified by the Council from the Council. They are part of the top-down GMA planning structure. Counties and cities in the state are required to review and update their Comprehensive Plans every ten years.

Thara Johnson said the Comprehensive Plan is the foundational document for the city, setting the vision for how the city will evolve. It also represents the community's vision. At the start of the periodic update process a lot of time is spent talking and working with the community on what the vision should be. The statutory requirements that flow from the GMA are included in the Comprehensive Plan. The goals and policies in the plan set the framework for implementation; they set the stage and provide guidance for things like the Land Use Code and all of the city's functional plans. It also provides the foundation on which the staff and City Council make decisions, and provides the framework for all capital investments. The Comprehensive Plan must be reviewed and updated every ten years coinciding with the census.

There are certain elements, such as the Land Use Element, the Transportation Element, and the Housing Element, that must be included under the GMA. Other elements, such as the Human Services Element and Historic Preservation, are optional. Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan is broken into two volumes and the current update work is focused on Volume 1 in which all of the various elements are housed. The subarea plans for each area of the city are housed in Volume 2.

Thara Johnson said the LUC clearly sets out the process for Comprehensive Plan amendments, including the decision criteria. State law allows the city to update the Comprehensive Plan, outside of the periodic update, only one time per year. The annual amendment process allows for the submission of applications to amend the Comprehensive Plan, and those changes can either in regard to policies or the land use map. In addition, the city can initiate amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. Great Neighborhoods is one such example where the Council provided direction to update the subarea plans. The Council can initiate Comprehensive Plan amendments at any time of the year, while property owners and others have a specific time for submitting applications.

The Comprehensive Plan amendment process is divided into two smaller processes. The initial component, threshold review, involves evaluating whether the proposal fits into the larger work program and can be adequately addressed through staffing resources, and whether or not all of the threshold review criteria are met. The Commission holds a public hearing at that stage and provides a recommendation to the City Council. That is what creates the annual work program relative to amending the Comprehensive Plan. Once the Council and the Commission have established the annual work program, evaluation of each proposed amendment to determine if the final review criteria in LUC 20.30I.150 are met.

Matt McFarland said the significantly changed conditions decision criteria is typically the most challenging, but there is a reason it is in the mix. In general, Comprehensive Plan amendments

and changes to the Comprehensive Plan future land use map are preconditions to later zoning decisions and land use districts. The recently processed C-1 LUCA is a good example. During the C-1 Phase I LUCA process, the Commission heard a lot of feedback along the lines that while the density bonus should be welcomed, it was not going to be fully meaningful. The problem staff ran into was that the C-1 Phase I development regulations were aimed at giving the maximum allowed without a Comprehensive Plan amendment. Based on what happened at the Commission level, the Council then initiated C-1 Phase II which included both a Comprehensive Plan amendment and a Land Use Code amendment. The Comprehensive Plan amendment and changes to the future land use map were needed before getting to the rezone and land use zoning regulations.

The public often complains about how cumbersome it is to first obtain a privately initiated Comprehensive Plan amendment for their property and then later seek a rezone. A rezone must establish that conditions have changed since the original underlying zoning adoption, except in situations where a rezone is implementing the Comprehensive Plan, in which case changed conditions are not required. What the code has done with respect to Comprehensive Plan amendments is to bake in the significantly changed conditions criteria as part of the Comprehensive Plan amendment process. When the Commission looks at the criteria and makes the decision, it essentially clears the deck for the later rezone, which supports the Comprehensive Plan amendment.

The actual definition of significantly changed conditions is found in 20.50.046 of the Land Use Code. The definition is unique and it says the only purpose of the definition is for the Comprehensive Plan amendment process. The important part of the definition for the Commission to keep in mind is that the changed conditions should be of a magnitude so that the Comprehensive Plan can function wholistically.

During the C-1 Phase II LUCA, Councilmember Robertson asked if the C-1 super bonus offered to otherwise modest density residential areas could later lead to privately initiated Comprehensive Plan amendments and rezones based on significantly changed conditions. The answer is it depends. The C-1 bonus for a specific property in and of itself probably will not satisfy the criteria. However, over time should other changes happen to the surrounding area, a wholistic view could lead the Commission to conclude that there have been significantly changed conditions.

Commissioner Cálad asked where the boundary line is for the Commission in being told what outreach has been done and being able to ask staff to do more outreach, or in asking for more or clearer data. Matt McFarland clarified that the Council does not direct staff operations either. It is certainly not uncommon to hear complaints from the public about the inadequacy of outreach efforts, and it is certainly okay for the Commission to ask about the outreach steps taken. However, the Commission needs to be mindful of the fine line between asking questions and voicing opinions about the outreach and directing staff to do more. Making the point at a meeting will put the issue on the record, but belaboring the issue delays moving ahead with the Commission's work it has on its plate. Where the Commission feels it needs more or different information in order to process a decision, it is okay to say so, and the Commission should rest assured that staff will take the matter through the proper channels. The staff recommendations presented to the Commission are based on the work done as directed by their higher ups. That is not to say there are no additional and more creative ways to reach out to the public for input. It is admittedly challenging for the Commission to serve at the pleasure of the Council in an administrative function without crossing over into representing the people being heard from, which is a legislative function.

Commissioner Goepple asked what will happen to the different subarea plans after the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update process. Thara Johnson said there will be some changes made to the subarea plans to ensure consistency with Volume I of the Comprehensive Plan, especially in relation to density increases and the HB-1110 implications. The Great Neighborhoods effort was halted to facilitate the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update process, but the work will recommence once the Comprehensive Plan update is completed.

Commissioner Malakoutian commented in years past the Commission has not had good examples to review in terms of determining significantly changed conditions. The C-1 is an excellent example that benefits not only the Commission but the public. There have also in the past been decisions made about significantly changed conditions that involved gray areas and where therefore confusing. It would benefit the public to have those various examples, particularly those that were subjective.

Chair Ferris said one such example involved a privately initiated Comprehensive Plan amendment involving Lake Bellevue, which the Commission passed on because it was known the Wilburton study was coming up.

Matt McFarland said the annual amendment process is baked into the code and is also a legal requirement specifically so that the Commission and the city can look at the cumulative effects of all changes together.

Commissioner Brown suggested it is within the purview of the Commission to determine what is and is not a significantly changed condition. Matt McFarland stressed that the final decision will always rest with the Council. The Commission's recommendations should be within the context of the plan as a whole as well as the surrounding properties. The Commission is uniquely suited to make those considerations.

Vice Chair Bhargava agreed that in the end the Commission's decisions effectively come down to making a judgment call, and in that vein significantly changed conditions are within the purview of the Commission to decide. The Commission's conclusions, however, are only recommendations to the Council.

****BREAK****
(7:57 p.m.)

B. Comprehensive Plan Amendments for the Wilburton Vision Implementation
(8:04 p.m.)

Strategic Planning Manager Janet Shull briefly reviewed with the Commission the project timeline and process in relation to the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update process and the Environmental Impact Statement. The Council will be provided with an update on July 17 regarding the recommended preferred alternative and will be addressing the issues in a couple of subsequent meetings. The process is on track to meet the timeline established in 2022. The work is currently focused on policy analysis and future land use evaluations, as well as making draft policy refinements, all based on input received from the city's boards and commissions, community engagement, and the EIS analysis. The full draft of the CPA will be before the Commission in the fall leading to a public hearing and a recommendation to the Council.

Senior Planner Justin Panganiban reminded the Commissioners that upon launching the

Wilburton Vision Implementation work in April 2022, direction was given to use the 2018 Citizen Advisory Committee vision as the baseline. A preliminary TOD vision was shared with the Commission in March as part of the Wilburton/NE 8th Street subarea plan update. The vision will inform the goals and policies for the area. The vision for an urban, trail- and transit-oriented mixed use community seeks to contribute to health, diversity and equity; is centered around light rail, Eastrail and the Grand Connection gateways; has a fine-grained network of multimodal connections, vibrant street-level amenities; varied building forms and active open spaces; and utilizes sustainable development and land use patterns to support the natural and built environments.

Community engagement to date has involved mailing information sheets to nearly 900 residences and businesses; a virtual information session attended by some 50 persons; engagement with 30 youth around planning for Wilburton; and updates to the city's boards and commissions.

The direction received from the Commission in March 2022 included the need for flexibility in the framing of policies and land uses; evaluating the tradeoffs when prioritizing policy guidance; emphasizing multimodal accessibility and safety; and balancing between development and open space goals. In May 2023, the Commission's direction relative to open space and natural systems policies included ensuring the right incentives to achieve the vision; considering wildlife corridors as part of the connectivity network; considering wayfinding that is sensitive to and celebratory of cultural diversity; and viewing Eastrail and Lake Bellevue as community assets.

The draft policies have also been shared with the Parks & Community Services Board and the Transportation Commission. The input from those bodies largely echoed the input received from the Commission in May. A recommendation to Planning Commission will be sought from the Transportation Commission on July 13 regarding the draft transportation policies.

Justin Panganiban said the three key policy moves relative to economic development, arts and culture, transportation and urban design were cultivating an active vibrant identity; fostering a unique mix of businesses; and providing multimodal connections to and through Wilburton. A number of tools will be utilized to implement the vision, including Land Use Code amendments and regulations focused on land uses, site organization, density and dimensional standards, design standards and guidelines, landscaping and trees and incentives. At the same time, the policies will be aimed at supporting a number of key city actions, collaborative partnerships, capital improvements, interagency coordination and financing mechanisms.

Relative to the key policy move of cultivating an active and vibrant identity, Justin Panganiban said the focus is on creating a pedestrian destination that welcomes diverse communities, with buildings, streets and open spaces all playing a role in creating an identity for the area. The draft policies are housed in a couple of different areas, including arts and culture and urban design. They support a number of key vision elements, including the recognition and celebration of diverse communities; identifying different ways to activate buildings, streets and open spaces; promoting a high-quality pedestrian environment; and enhancing placemaking opportunities along Eastrail and the Grand Connection. A number of the policies can be implemented through the Land Use Code, and through city initiatives, public-private partnerships, and interagency coordination.

Commissioner Khanloo pointed out that the city has not always put forth efforts to save the tree canopy, clearing off old trees and replanting after development. The focus has not been on growing the town around what is already there by way of trees. The better approach would be to

preserve trees and landscape around them. Walking around Lake Washington, the temperatures are far more pleasant than just a few blocks inland where all the trees have been removed and everything is cement. Justin Panganiban said one of the great opportunities for Wilburton is the vision for the district to be sustainable. That is related to a number of key goals, including increasing the tree canopy. Commissioner Khanloo agreed with the need for more trees, but not at the expense of first cutting down all existing trees and then replanting.

Janet Shull clarified that specific actions relative to the tree canopy are more the realm of the Land Use Code. Thara Johnson added that amendments to the city's tree code are in the works and will be coming before the Commission soon.

Commissioner Goepple referred to Policy UD-3 which calls for integrating unique and easily understandable wayfinding into streetscapes and public spaces to enhance neighborhood identity. The question asked was what wayfinding is and how it enhances neighborhood identity. Justin Panganiban said wayfinding is infrastructure that helps people navigate through communities. It involves physical signage, including digital signage. It is an element that is tied to both urban design and transportation. Wayfinding is very much a part of the Grand Connection work, and there likely will be wayfinding tied to Eastrail.

Commissioner Malakoutian asked if there is a significant difference between activating buildings, streets and open spaces and placemaking. Justin Panganiban said open spaces can activate and provide activation to streets, and buildings can activate by having a diversity of different store fronts and treatments that create an interesting pedestrian experience, all of which is very much a part of placemaking. Janet Shull added that placemaking can be thought of as setting the stage for the things that can activate a place.

Commissioner Brown voiced appreciation for the comments made about Wilburton as being the newest transit-, pedestrian- and bicycle-oriented community. The Grand Connection and Eastrail meet in the community and that offers a unique opportunity to move the city forward in terms of how people are moved around. Those who bike along Eastrail will eventually have to get off and navigate through the streets to their homes and places of work, and they should be able to do so safely. Bellevue should take clues from the cities that have figured out how to do that.

Vice Chair Bhargava asked what the identity of the Wilburton area will be. Janet Shull said that largely is yet to be determined as it emerges, and that is something that needs to be reflected in the policies.

Vice Chair Bhargava agreed with the need to focus on safety, not just for bike lanes but in the larger sense in terms of eyes on the street. Adding policy language around public safety would be a good idea. Staff were also encouraged to pay special condition to edge conditions where high-density building masses bump up against open spaces and the like.

Chair Ferris pointed out that the pictures used in the presentation showed perfect weather with people walking and biking. The reality is that in January it pours rain and it is very cold. The question asked was how to take that into consideration in creating spaces. Additionally, buildings, streets and open spaces can be designed to be great places to host events that bring people in, so from a policy perspective there should be some recognition of that.

Justin Panganiban said the second key policy move involves fostering a unique mix of businesses. It was stressed that there is already some level of economic diversity existing in Wilburton in the form of hotels, restaurants and retail that bring the people to the area. The draft

policies need to accommodate the needs of existing as well as future businesses. That will come down to having the right spaces in the right locations. There will be several special opportunity areas in Wilburton associated with Eastrail, the Grand Connection and the light rail station area and they should be emphasized as important places for small businesses to thrive. The policies should include an emphasis on the creation of third places as spaces that connect and build community. The list of potential implementation tools will include the permitted uses tables; density and dimensional standards, the design standards and guidelines, and city programs and initiatives.

Commissioner Cálad commented having heard concerns from two different residents about the city's efforts to protect small businesses in the past. Their specific concerns related to limits placed on the types of businesses able to be established at certain properties. The policies should be written in a way to allow property and building owners to be able to establish the businesses they want.

Commissioner Brown noted being fascinated by how to create opportunities for third places to arise. One approach might be for the city to dictate where to locate the cool places to hang out. Another would be to encourage property and building owners to place furniture and the like in places and ways that encourage hanging out. Justin Panganiban said there will definitely be issues to work through in the Land Use Code in support of third places, but at the same time there will need to be policy support for things that fall outside the code, such as programmatic opportunities. There will need to be enough guidance in the policies to make third places a priority. Commissioner Brown stressed the need both for outside venues that are welcoming in July and sheltered or inside venues that are welcoming in January.

Commissioner Khanloo said there are two types of people associated with Wilburton. The first type involves people moving in and out of the community via transit, and the second type involves those who want to build community. It will be important to think about both in drafting policy language.

Commissioner Goepple said encouraging third places will be absolutely essential. Part of the tradeoff for additional density should be benefits and amenities in the neighborhoods, and third places are among the most important. Policy ED-2, which calls for increasing access to affordable space for smaller-scale retailers and emphasizing trail-oriented retail along the Eastrail and Grand Connection, is brilliant and will be very important going forward. There is going to be a lot of redevelopment in the Wilburton area and it would not be good to see a preponderance of big box retailers that can afford the higher rents. If that is the outcome, Wilburton will be just like everywhere else in the world.

Vice Chair Bhargava said accommodating the needs of existing and future businesses, and providing opportunities for small businesses to thrive, is a given. While important, it brings nothing new to the table. What will be needed is a policy framework that will actually create the intended outcomes. Janet Shull agreed the policies should be more inspiring. Justin Panganiban agreed with the need to see the policies as a suite that support one another. Having an overarching goal can serve to leverage unique opportunities.

Chair Ferris voiced agreement with the statement made during public comments about the need to allow for more uses in the medical office area. It is not known if there will be a sufficient number of tenants to make the district successful, but it is known that there will potentially be other small businesses that could thrive there. The area should be more flexible in terms of what can go in there.

Commissioner Khanloo asked how small business owners can be given hope by having a call to provide opportunities for small businesses to thrive. Justin Panganiban explained that policies offer a guiding framework for implementation. One thing that can support someone in starting a small business is how Land Use Code amendments are looked at in terms of retail sizes and types of uses. Policies are intended to be aspirational and supportive of bodies of work that will come afterwards. Janet Shull added that many of the details will be addressed with more clarity when it comes to developing implementation tools.

A motion to extend the meeting to 9:30 p.m. was made by Commissioner Malakoutian. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brown and the motion carried unanimously.

Justin Panganiban pointed out that the 2018 CAC vision projected a certain amount of housing, medical, office and hotel uses. That baseline was used to inform the DEIS and the preferred alternative. Janet Shull said that work is still ongoing and staff will be coming back for more discussions about the growth strategies.

Commissioner Brown commented that accommodating the needs of existing businesses and future businesses should not necessarily be covered in a single policy. There can be tradeoffs between accommodating existing businesses and creating opportunities for new businesses, and that should be made explicit. Sometimes it takes existing businesses moving or going out of business in order to make room for new businesses. That can be both sad and scary for the community and ways to minimize the disruptions should be addressed.

With respect to the final key policy move relative to multimodal connections to and through Wilburton, Justin Panganiban noted that transportation policy guidance will be sought from the Transportation Commission. The direction they provide will be brought before the Planning Commission. To date the focus has been on identifying connections and improvements needed to support all modes of travel; supporting and expanding active transportation uses, including walking and biking; and supporting different access needs for future development, Eastrail and Grand Connection users. The potential implementation tools include street and pedestrian circulation standards; on-site circulation; block size and length; landscaping; the transportation code; capital investments; and interagency coordination.

Vice Chair Bhargava asked why active modes of transportation were emphasized rather than simply multimodal transportation. Justin Panganiban said active transportation in the form of walking and biking involve the most vulnerable users of the transportation system. In order to create a transportation system for all modes, it will be important to emphasize walking and biking.

Chair Ferris said it is easy to see from the policy support that Wilburton is going to be a magical place, but suggested it should be stressed that Wilburton will be a key resource for the whole city. The Grand Connection and Eastrail will both be incredible amenities, but thought should also be given to the grandmother living in south Bellevue who might want to use either facility but do not know how to get there. Such facilities should be accessible to everyone in the city. Janet Shull pointed out that doing the Wilburton work in the context of the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update offers opportunities that could lead to a number of implementation measures at the study level and beyond.

Justin Panganiban briefly discussed the next steps that will include discussing key policy moves around future land uses on July 26.

9. OTHER BUSINESS
(9:09 p.m.)

A. Remote Participation Approval

A motion to approve remote participation by Chair Ferris and Commissioner Malakoutian for the July 26 meeting was made by Commissioner Brown. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cálad and the motion carried unanimously.

Vice Chair Bhargava noted not being able to participate at all on July 26.

Given that both Chair Ferris and Vice Chair Bhargava would be absent on July 26, there was consensus that Commissioner Goeppel would serve as chair for the meeting.

B. Election of Officers

Commissioner Brown nominated Vice Chair Bhargava to serve as Chair

Absent additional nominations, Commissioner Brown moved approval by acclamation and it carried unanimously.

Chair Ferris nominated Commissioner Goeppel to serve as Vice Chair.

Absent additional nominations, Commissioner Brown moved approval by acclamation and it carried unanimously.

Commissioner Ferris handed the gavel to Chair Bhargava.

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
(9:12 p.m.)

A. Minutes of June 21, 2023

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

11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS
(9:13 p.m.)

Nicole Meyers voiced excitement about what is unfolding for Wilburton and suggested the area should become a center for young people. Many of the young people who work in Bellevue choose not to live in Bellevue because the city is not cool enough. If a youth village were to be created in Wilburton and BelRed, there could be subsidized micro-housing on top of a large performance and art space with a late-night diner on one end and a coffee shop on the other end of the second floor. There could be a large number of micro-apartments for high school graduates under 23 years old and college graduates under 25 years old, with five to ten percent of the units reserved for artist residencies. It would take only three or four buildings to achieve that vision. The units should not be income restricted. Bellevue is a great place for raising families, but the opportunity exists to create a youth-oriented center close to bike paths and transit.

Heidi Dean agreed with the previous speaker and noted that it echoes what is heard from many young people. Young people are choosing to live in Seattle because it is much more exciting. There used to be more youth-oriented businesses in Bellevue. Over the last two decades Bellevue has become very vanilla. The concept outlined would keep young people from being lost to Seattle. There need to be great third places in Bellevue.

Lee Sargent, 16246 NE 24th Street, commented that the Commission's work is to represent the public. The Council must make the final decision, but the Commission asks the questions. The current work before the Commission is very confusing. There are mounds of papers that must be reviewed and digested. Sometimes the data gets turned into graphs, and that is helpful. When the Commission makes decisions, it should be clear why those decisions were made. Knowing why is important.

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(9:21 p.m.)

13. ADJOURNMENT
(9:21 p.m.)

Chair Bhargava took a moment to thank Commissioner Ferris for the leadership and guidance provided the Commission as Chair over the past year.

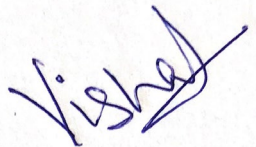
A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brown and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Bhargava adjourned the meeting at 9:21 p.m.



Thara Johnson
Staff to the Planning Commission

09/14/2023
Date



Vishal Bhargava
Chair of the Planning Commission

09/14/2023
Date