

CITY OF BELLEVUE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

June 2, 2025
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Singh, Commissioners Hays, Phan, Rashid

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Gonzalez, Vice Chair White

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Ruth Blaw, Saada Hilts, Gysel Galaviz, Department of Parks & Community Services; Patrick Babbitt, Department of Environmental Stewardship

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present

POLICE LIAISON: Not Present

GUEST SPEAKERS: Axton Burton, Pride Across the Bridge; Angelica Gonzalez Graham, Eastside for All; Ken Shulman, Lambert House LGBTQ Youth Center

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER and ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 6:07 p.m. by Chair Singh who presided.

At the roll of the call, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners and White.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

May 5, 2025

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

3. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Chair Singh took a moment to note that in compliance with Washington state campaign laws regarding the use of public facilities during elections, RCW 42.17A.55, no speaker may support or oppose a ballot measure, or support or oppose a candidate for an election, including one's own campaign.

Alex Tsimmerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners dirty Nazi Gestapo pigs and referenced having appeared before the Council numerous times and also having been trespassed a number of times before going on to accuse Mayor Robinson of manipulating speaking opportunities to favor a personal election campaign, citing meetings where only ten speakers were allowed despite greater attendance. The restrictions violate ethical standards and constitutional rights, and a reference was made to the city's rules as uniquely suppressive compared to other jurisdictions. The speakers escalated into verbal attacks against the Commission and city officials, characterizing them as unthinking and controlled by government authority.

4. COMMUNICATION FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None
5. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS – None

Commissioner Phan reported having attended several events, including a basic needs meeting where it was stated that federal funding cuts have caused significant service reductions for local nonprofit organizations. Renewal Food Bank emphasized a need for baby formula baby food and diapers. KidVantage shared having had to scale back the amount of product distributed to other organizations, worsening resource shortages among dependent groups.

Commissioner Phan also noted having attended the “Rites of Passage” event for Black and Brown student graduates. Although historically funded at \$10,000 by the Bellevue School District, the event only received \$2,000 this year despite serving 170 students. The event was held at the Bellevue YMCA and was hosted by community organizations. Concerns were voiced about the future sustainability of the organization.

Commissioner Phan further reported on the Youth Link community leadership awards at City Hall and shared a positive impression of local youth efforts.

Lastly, Commissioner Phan commented on having attended a Wisdom Series event hosted by Eastside Pathways, which included viewing and discussing the documentary *Disclosure*, which focused on the media portrayal of transgender individuals.

Commissioner Hayes shared having attended the Council meeting at which the Land Use Code Amendment for the Wilburton and Meydenbauer neighborhoods. The session was educational, especially in regard to the impacts of zoning decisions on different communities.

Chair Singh described attending a Bellevue Chamber of Commerce event involving local nonprofit organizations. Many groups are experiencing financial difficulty and are struggling with community outreach. A specific concern was raised regarding the capacity of the Eastside Neighborhood Network to reach out effectively.

Human Services Manager Ruth Blaw said the Commissioner appreciation event was attended by Chair Singh and Commissioners Hays and White. Feedback regarding the event and how it could be improved was requested

Chair Singh said it was a good event. There is a need to connect better with other city boards and commission. The event was successful and a good opportunity for making connections.

Commissioner Hays agreed and said it would have been good to be allowed to bring a plus one. Ruth Blaw added that Commissioner White had made the same suggestion.

Ruth Blaw also noted that the survey for the upcoming Human Services Needs Update had concluded. The consultant hired to compile the data and draft the report is expecting to have the report ready in the fall. The Commissioners were advised that the Commission's workload is on a trajectory to increase. June and July will be the last months with only a single Commission meeting; the twice-monthly meeting frequency will begin again in September. There are no Commission meetings in August.

Ruth Blaw reported that interviews for the vacant Commission seat had concluded and an appointment decision is expected soon. The new Commissioner is likely to be on board by the next meeting.

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza informed the Commissioners that June is Pride Month. The Commissioners were invited to attend two events: a Pride Month proclamation reading by the City Council scheduled for the June 3, and "Pride on the Plaza," a city-sponsored celebration in collaboration with Pride Across the Bridge, to be held at City Hall on June 4 from noon to 2:00 p.m.

Toni Esparza said the Council is also set to issue a proclamation recognizing Men's Health Month, which is intended to promote awareness and encourage health screenings among men. A partner agency is expected to accept the proclamation during the session.

6. NEW BUSINESS

A. LGBTQIA2S+ Panel Presentation

Human Services Planner Christy Stangland explained that LGBTQIA2S+ Pride Month is a monthlong celebration that occurs in June in which recognizes and honors the history, contributions, and continued advocacy of the queer community. It is a time of celebration, reflection and advocacy. The panelists were invited to outline the work of their organizations and to identify ongoing needs, and highlight service gaps.

Christy Stangland introduced Axton Burton, Executive Director of Pride Across the Bridge, a grassroots organization established in 2023 that creates vital programming for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in East King County. Under the leadership of Axton Burton, the organization has hosted hundreds of events aimed at supporting queer youth, queer and trans people of color (QTPOC), rainbow elders, trans and non-binary individuals, and queer creatives. Axton Burton also serves on the community advisory group for Plymouth House's new Redmond site, and actively engages in city and the county advocating for equity, visibility and direct support for the marginalized queer population with work that bridges isolation and empowers local leadership

with a focus on liberation through community connection and accountability to the needs voiced by the queer community.

Axton Burton challenged the notion that East King County residents benefit from proximity to Seattle, pointing out that the supposed closeness does not translate into meaningful access to essential services. Many queer individuals remain isolated from healthcare, affirming spaces, educational resources, and civic representation. Pride Across the Bridge operates on three foundational pillars: connective spaces, local resources, and advocacy opportunities. With regard to connective spaces, the organization creates safe and adaptive environments for community members to connect, which includes varied events ranging from casual potlucks and gaming nights to large symbolic actions such as “Queer the Sky,” an annual skydiving or ballooning event inspired by collective emotional release and resilience. Special attention is given to individuals who return to the Eastside after college and find limited community infrastructure, particularly trans and non-binary individuals who are often forced to move back in with family due to high living costs.

Axton Burton emphasized the importance of Beyond Binary Connections, a specific program designed for trans and non-binary residents. The space supports individuals through collective presence and mutual trust. Other gatherings include those that foster a sense of belonging for queer youth, rainbow elders, and QTPOC individuals, structured not prescriptively, but responsively to their stated needs.

The second pillar, local resources, was exemplified by the “Big Book of All Things Queer,” a growing resource guide that provides vetted, affirming providers and services. The guide emerged in response to persistent student inquiries at Cedar Crest High School regarding how to access inclusive healthcare. Eliminating the guesswork associated with seeking support can prevent physical, emotional, and financial harm.

The third pillar focuses on local advocacy opportunities. Many queer Eastsiders must travel to Seattle to find inclusive support systems. The lack of local infrastructure has allowed Eastside governments to rely on Seattle's services rather than invest locally. Pride Across the Bridge works to shift the dynamic by pushing city governments beyond symbolic gestures. One successful initiative involved the city of Redmond, where the organization facilitated community-designed “asphalt art” rather than imposing a standard pride flag. The art was developed through meaningful community consultation, reflecting diverse voices and identities. Rainbow ribbon weaving projects were cited as accessible, sensory-friendly, and empowering artistic outlets for those who may otherwise feel excluded from community events. The projects allow participants to claim authorship and visibility within their neighborhoods.

Axton Burton detailed significant service gaps in the Eastside region, the foremost being a lack of sustainable funding. Pride Across the Bridge hosted 247 events in the previous year, all free of charge and primarily staffed by volunteers. The organization operates with minimal financial support, making consistent programming and organizational growth difficult. The team does not host events for the sake of appearances, but because the efforts provide enduring value to the community. Another gap is access to competent and affirming medical care, particularly for trans and non-binary individuals. There are repeated testimonies from youth who were forced to

educate healthcare providers about gender identity during appointments, only to leave without receiving appropriate care. One specific anecdote shared was in regard to a youth who sought treatment for an ingrown toenail but was required to explain gender concepts to the physician. The experience illustrates the compounding emotional and financial burden that queer individuals endure in clinical settings.

Axton Burton raised the deeply personal and painful reality of high suicide rates among queer youth and shared a story of a young person who died by suicide in Duval, following which the person's family donated unused stockpiled estrogen as a gift to another trans youth in need. The story serves as a sobering reminder of both the urgent need for affordable, accessible gender-affirming care and the consequences of systemic neglect.

Pride Across the Bridge provides not just programming, but a pathway toward liberation through trust, adaptability, and direct accountability to community-voiced needs. Axton Burton called for increased investment and structural support so that East King County's queer residents no longer remain just a "bridge away" from the resources they deserve.

Commissioner Hayes asked the panel to elaborate on what specific infrastructure exists in Seattle that is lacking on the Eastside, particularly in support of the queer community. Angelica Graham struggled to articulate a detailed comparison due to the experience of living in Seattle and working on the Eastside, but highlighted that the difference is often felt rather than consciously analyzed.

Ken Shulman, Executive Director of Lambert House, explained that Seattle hosts a dedicated LGBTQ youth community center for individuals aged 10 to 22. The center offers a broad array of specialized programming, including support for homeless queer youth and those whose parents are actively supportive. The facility has been publicly funded by the city of Seattle since 1991. Bellevue lacks any equivalent resource or center. While a physical building might not be essential for Bellevue, there is a clear and significant gap in programming and services tailored to LGBTQ youth. Youth services require specialized expertise, which is absent on the Eastside.

Toni Esparza added that Seattle offers queer-designated housing options to protect residents from potential discrimination or harassment in general housing markets. Such housing does not exist on the Eastside. Additionally, medical providers explicitly known to be welcoming and affirming of queer patients are more readily available in Seattle. While some Eastside behavioral health providers serve the queer population, there are no queer-specific agencies in the area. The "Big Book of All Things Queer," compiled by Axton Burton, is one of the few regional tools that help people find affirming services on the Eastside. Previous panels and resource events on the Eastside have often required reaching out to Seattle-based agencies, including Lambert House and other organizations serving queer older adults and individuals living with HIV. The consistent reliance on Seattle-based support further underscores the scarcity of Eastside infrastructure.

Angelica Graham stated that the queer culture is more fully integrated into public and professional life in Seattle, where diversity of identity is visibly acknowledged and respected in everyday spaces. In contrast, the Eastside remains predominantly heteronormative, requiring

constant reminders that not everyone conforms to traditional norms of gender and family structure. There is a lack of services specifically supporting queer individuals of color, particularly Black and Brown queer people. Seattle has more inclusive legal aid, social spaces, and cultural respect for intersectional identities. On the Eastside, such resources are either minimal or absent. Many queer residents on the Eastside do not drive, making the need for local services all the more critical, given the difficulty of commuting to Seattle.

Toni Esparza introduced Ken Shulman, Executive Director of Lambert House, who has led the organization since 2003 and who previously served on the Seattle LGBTQ Commission from 1994 to 2000, co-chairing for two years and successfully advocating for 12 funding allocations and three civil rights ordinances for the LGBTQ+ community.

Ken Shulman explained the fundamental need for LGBTQ youth centers, citing significantly higher rates of suicide, depression, and substance abuse among LGBTQ youth. The issues are attributed to a range of factors, with family rejection and peer hostility at school being most prominent. Fear of parental reaction prevents youth from coming out, which in turn breeds isolation and family conflict. In some cases, even when one parent is accepting, disagreement within the household can generate further distress for the child. Financial repercussions are also common, with some youth fearing they may lose access to college funds if their grandparents or extended family become aware of their sexual or gender identity. LGBTQ youth have disproportionately high rates of addiction because they turn to alcohol and drugs to cope with the stress of not being able to be open to their families.

The youth face damaging experiences at school as well, including verbal harassment, physical abuse, and being targeted for perceived or confirmed queerness, are concerns that are magnified for transgender youth and cisgender boys, who are more frequently subject to physical violence. Before the federal government stopped collecting and publishing data, there was a documented rise in hate crimes, particularly during the first Trump administration, targeting people of color, Jews, and LGBTQ individuals. The rhetoric and actions being taken by the current Trump administration and anti-LGBTQ legislators around the country result in everyday citizens and residents feeling free to express their hatred and bigotry in the form of violence. Over the past four years, more than 500 anti-LGBTQ bills have been introduced across the United States, with 60 to 80 passing each year. While none of the six anti-LGBTQ bills introduced in the Washington State Legislature last year passed, one was introduced by a legislator from Northeast King County. The presence of such legislation, even if not enacted, creates a hostile political climate for LGBTQ youth as they come of age.

Ken Shulman reported that 54 percent of the youth at Lambert House identify as transgender. Though not all experience clinical gender dysphoria, the label itself reflects their self-identification. The youth are highly conscious of the legislative and social backlash directed at their community, which adds to the psychological burdens they face. By way of example, Ken Shulman told the story of a supportive mother who called to report that a 13-year-old lesbian and student leader daughter was suicidal. A psychiatrist concluded that there was nothing clinically wrong with the child's mental health and that the problem was isolation. The mother asked whether Lambert House had other 13-year-old lesbians, believing that even a single friendship could save her daughter's life. This story illustrated that even high-performing, supported queer

youth often face severe emotional isolation.

Ken Shulman also described the plight of youth who are rejected by their families and become homeless for no other reason than their sexual orientation or gender identity. The youth are often otherwise healthy, capable, and emotionally stable, but who are ejected from their homes due to parental prejudice. LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the homeless population, not because of poverty, addiction, or mental illness, but specifically due to familial rejection.

Public and community support, inclusive policy, and dedicated infrastructure are essential to reducing the risks and improving outcomes for queer youth. Lambert House plays a key role in the transformation by educating youth on how to communicate with their parents about sexual orientation and gender identity. The organization provides guidance on when and how to come out, what language to use, and where to find reading materials and support groups for both youth and their families. They also assist in helping youth identify the safest ways to approach disclosure.

In 2024, Lambert House served 766 unique LGBTQ youth, who accessed the organization's services approximately 15,000 times. The slate of services include specialized case management for homeless youth who have been kicked out of their homes. The organization maintains categorized, ranked lists of emergency and long-term shelter programs based on staff competence in LGBTQ inclusion and safety. Youth are only referred to programs with a proven track record of protecting them from harassment. The crisis management practices employed by Lambert House include after-hours phone support for youth in urgent situations, such as being expelled from home in winter weather, and coordinating with other agencies to arrange immediate shelter transport, and ensuring that medical staff are briefed to provide sensitive, affirming care to transgender youth.

Ken Shulman said at the other end of the support spectrum Lambert House engages with youth whose parents are actively involved and supportive. The youth are often dropped off at the center by their families, and in some cases, parents also volunteer at the organization. Lambert House empowers such youth through leadership opportunities. Youth-led teams organize large-scale events, such as dances and outdoor festivals, that host 100 to 200 attendees. The events provide significant personal and communal affirmation, especially for youth who may not otherwise know other LGBTQ individuals. The chance to visibly and tangibly connect with a broader queer community has been described by participants as transformative and life-saving.

Unlike racial minorities in almost all cases, LGBTQ youth often do not share their identity with their families or communities. They are frequently the only queer individual in their immediate environment, which deepens their sense of isolation. The youth typically grow up without culturally-embedded knowledge of how to live as a queer person, and without mentorship or community support structures. Lambert House fills the void. The organization offers 40 unique programs and services.

Chair Singh asked if the organization provides educational support for parents. Ken Shulman confirmed that Lambert House has developed a 10-week evening curriculum designed for parents. However, the organization currently lacks the funding needed to deliver the program.

While there is a high level of parental interest and an existing staff competency to lead such sessions, the financial resources are absent. Lambert House receives consistent funding from the city of Seattle, but has never previously solicited support from the city of Bellevue.

Commissioner Hays inquired about the geographic scope of the organization's services. Ken Shulman explained that the headquarters of Lambert House is located in Seattle, but it maintains a small number of satellite programs in rural parts of King County through a limited contract with King County's Best Starts for Kids initiative. The grant specifically excludes jurisdictions with populations over 30,000, which disqualifies Bellevue, Redmond, and Kirkland. The grant, which is set to expire on July 31, funds monthly youth groups in communities such as Kenmore, North Bend, Auburn, Federal Way, Renton, and Skyway. Some groups operate in collaboration with King County Library System branches.

Commissioner Hays asked if the housing-related services offered by Lambert House are available outside Seattle. Ken Shulman answered that emergency case management for homeless LGBTQ youth sometimes occurs remotely by phone, depending on the youth's location. However, most housing-related support services, including access to the organization's clothing bank and physical resources, is based in Seattle. Most of the programming conducted outside Seattle is focused on social support rather than on social services. The prevention of homelessness is partly achieved through peer guidance and connection. Youth in the social settings learn when it is safe or unsafe to come out, and how to time such disclosures appropriately within their family context.

When asked by Commissioner Hays whether any other organizations in King County are solely dedicated to serving LGBTQ youth, Ken Shulman confirmed that Lambert House is the only such agency. While other groups do valuable work that includes some youth engagement, none have missions exclusively focused on LGBTQ youth.

Toni Esparza introduced Angelica Graham, a healing justice organizer whose work centers on the collective liberation of Black, Brown, and TQPOC communities. In that role, the focus is on blending cultural celebration, advocacy, and community-based care, including leadership in anti-discrimination efforts and support systems for communities impacted by hate and systemic harm.

Angelica Graham with Eastside for All, a social and racial justice advocacy organization that centers its mission on the needs of Black and Brown residents on the Eastside, shared being personally queer, BIPOC and non-binary, and remarked on leading a queer BIPOC group that meets monthly in collaboration with Pride Across the Bridge to provide a vital space for identity-affirming connection, creative expression, and healing. While Eastside for All does not provide many direct services, it does run a hate and bias program. Through the program, individuals can report hate crimes or bias-related incidents. In that way there has been a lot of work in support of the queer community who come forward to report incidents. The role has provided for a deeper visibility into the heightened frequency of public homophobia, racism, and transphobia, which has included vandalism, online abuse, and threats against queer-centered events. Due to safety concerns, it has on occasion been necessary to sharing event invitations privately via encrypted platforms rather than publicly.

Angelica Graham emphasized the importance of creating safe communal spaces for queer BIPOC individuals. The monthly QTPOC gatherings include healing circles, belonging circles, and creative projects. Creativity is a core strength and vital survival mechanism of the queer BIPOC community. Programs or policies that support creative expression and interpersonal trust are crucial, but obstacles and barriers to creative connection can be especially harmful because they sever individuals from their “superpowers.”

Angelica Graham identified as a gap the significant lack of space and visibility for queer BIPOC residents in civic decision-making processes. The QTPOC group often functions as a reality-check space where members share unfiltered experiences of marginalization. The conversations have revealed major resource gaps, including an absence of other dedicated queer BIPOC spaces on the Eastside. The QTPOC group meets only monthly but there is an urgent need for more regular and accessible communal gatherings.

Angelica Graham discussed mental health disparities at length, citing financial barriers, limited availability of culturally competent providers, and gaps in insurance coverage as major issues. Many community members have no insurance or only state insurance, further limiting access to support. The resulting mental strain undermines community engagement and weakens the feelings of individuals in regard to safety and belonging.

With regard to the need for leadership development opportunities specifically tailored to queer and BIPOC individuals, Angelica Graham recounted having applied for a grant to support such programming and noted how the process helped identify unmet needs, particularly in developing leaders for healing-centered community work. Many queer BIPOC individuals are stuck in jobs that are mentally harmful or hostile due to homophobia, leading to disengagement and burnout.

There is a need for training initiatives and support systems to help individuals transition into leadership roles rooted in social justice and community care. Angelica Graham proposed the establishment of a third space, a community space where queer and BIPOC residents can gather informally without judgment. Such a space should be either explicitly rooted in queer values or at minimum inclusive of them. Events centered on music, food, art, and cultural traditions would help foster emotional safety, especially for neurodivergent or shy individuals who may find mainstream gatherings alienating or unsafe.

Angelica Graham also advocated for public education about the history of the QTPOC community’s role in civil rights movements. The current social climate often distorts or erases the vital contributions of queer and BIPOC individuals. Increasing awareness of the history could foster empathy and solidarity. The queer community continues to carry out essential advocacy behind the scenes, even when mainstream narratives do not reflect their presence or labor. Local government representatives and allies need to demonstrate visible solidarity. Silence in the face of homophobia, racism, or transphobia communicates complicity. Clear public messaging is needed from city officials that affirms support for the LGBTQ community, especially when legislative or social harms occur at the state or national level. Building trust between civic leaders and community organizers is essential for effective collaboration.

Angelica Graham emphasized the importance of accountability and response systems for hate

incidents. In the role of supporting victims of hate crimes, it is often unclear who to contact or what procedures are in place for seeking justice. There is a need for both clear policies and the identification of accessible points of contact within municipal systems.

Angelica Graham raised the issue of crisis response and argued that traditional policing models are unsafe and often retraumatizing for queer and BIPOC residents. Although some crisis responses involve behavioral health teams, they are frequently accompanied by law enforcement, which many in the queer BIPOC community view as a threat rather than a safeguard. Clarity is needed around protocols, and there is a need to develop non-police crisis intervention options that are trusted and community-based. There is a lack of institutional accountability to racial equity. Silence from public officials in moments of injustice is harmful. They need to take explicit, visible stances against acts of hate and discrimination. Civic leaders should clarify their values and articulate their support for LGBTQ individuals when policies or social rhetoric pose existential threats to the communities. There is a need to increase support for QTPOC participation in civic processes. Many individuals are eager to engage but are constrained by financial and time burdens. Offering stipends or other forms of material support would help ensure that community members can participate in city council meetings, planning sessions, and public forums without sacrificing their basic needs.

Angelica Graham reaffirmed the belief that healing and justice are interconnected. A “healing justice organizer” is one who seeks to cultivate belonging, repair harm, and transform relationships at both the personal and collective level. True social change requires personal transformation and education on the part of allies, particularly those with social privilege. Only by confronting homophobia, racism, and transphobia within one’s own networks can systemic change begin. City leaders should be urged to co-create programs and resources with community members, rather than designing them in isolation. The approach ensures that efforts are grounded in the lived experiences of those most affected.

Commissioner Hayes asked how recent political hostility and fear within the queer community have affected engagement, particularly regarding safety-related isolation. Angelica Graham acknowledged that attendance at the monthly QTPOC group has decreased at times, often due to feelings of isolation among the group members. Participants frequently express sentiments of loneliness and disconnection. However, with the addition of volunteers and increased outreach, attendance has recently began to rise again. Public visibility and vocal support from allies play a key role in reducing isolation as they help affirm safety and belonging in queer spaces.

Commissioner Phan allowed that the past couple of months have been difficult for the queer community and asked if individuals going into isolation for safety has impacted the work and outreach being done. Engagement with the QTPOC group has declined and that may be related to feelings of isolation. When folks come to the table they usually share feeling alone and without community. With more volunteers, there has been more outreach recently and the trend has spiked up, but feelings of isolation continue to be present.

Ken Shulman added that the current climate is chilling and fear-inducing. LGBTQ youth are hesitant to express themselves or engage in political discussion, though they are deeply concerned about the issues. Even the adult staff at Lambert House are afraid for their jobs and for

the organization's survival. For the upcoming Pride events, including an annual family brunch, attendance is expected to decline due to fear of violence. Several long-term volunteers have chosen to permanently leave the country due to increasing hostility in the United States. There is deep concern that the current political environment is the most threatening ever witnessed.

Axton Burton also noted that people are moving both into and out of Washington state, the result of which is lower engagement. Much has to do with concerns over safety. In a recent conversation with a 72-year-old trans woman who is cautiously exploring self-discovery, the woman indicated only feeling comfortable attending events held in private and secure venues. Pride Across the Bridge currently operates two programs for trans and nonbinary individuals: one held in a public Panera Bread location and another at the Redmond Library. Most participants prefer the privacy of the latter. There are barriers to finding venues that are both physically accessible and financially affordable. Despite having received a small grant from Redmond and Issaquah to print the resource guide “Big Book of All Things Queer”, the grant required an extensive 37-page application and detailed demographic data collection. The demand for participant data has negatively impacted the atmosphere in community spaces. Even anonymous QR code surveys created discomfort as they introduced a sense of surveillance and disrupted feelings of trust and safety. There are consistent concerns about safety and gratitude for the city partners who understand that and do not require working with the police if gatherings exceed an unspecified size threshold. The ambiguity forces organizers to take on additional emotional and logistical labor to navigate vague regulations. For many in the LGBTQ and BIPOC communities, police presence at events is a source of stress rather than protection.

Axton Burton shared a personal reflection on the unsustainable conditions faced by grassroots organizers. Given a low-income status despite being part of a household with two full-time jobs, a rent increase of 49 percent forced a move from Redmond. While once part of an affordable housing program, it is no longer possible to afford to live and work in the same city, bringing into question the ability of Pride Across the Bridge to continue doing its work in the future given the financial hardships and burnout. While the work is meaningful and personally tied to one's identity, it often consumes every part of life from early morning to late-night calls.

Ken Shulman reinforced the importance of financial support from cities like Bellevue. While Lambert House operates with a skilled volunteer base, basic operational needs such as accounting and policy development still require reliable funding. Sustained public funding for human services, especially during times of crisis, is one of the most powerful sources of hope for both organizations and the people served.

Christy Stangland thanked the panelists for their time, candor, and continued advocacy, and expressed appreciation for both the organizational work they do and the personal sacrifices they make to support the queer community.

B. 2026-2030 Sustainable Bellevue Environmental Stewardship Plan Update: Phase II

A motion to extend the meeting to 8:30 p.m. was made by Commissioner Hays. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Phan and the motion carried unanimously.

Patrick Babbitt, Climate and Energy Program Manager for the Environmental Stewardship Division, shared having worked in local sustainability offices for nearly a decade, including in New York City, and currently for the city of Bellevue with responsibilities focused on building electrification, climate resilience and decarbonization in addition to supporting the work to update the Sustainable Bellevue Environmental Stewardship Plan. The work has moved into Phase 2 and will continue until October, culminating in a finalized plan submission to the City Council in November.

Patrick Babbitt stressed that the presentation was for information and discussion purposes only and that no formal action or vote was being requested. The purpose of the presentation was to outline preliminary ideas in the form of goals, metrics, strategies, and draft actions, and to gather early feedback from the Human Services Commission. The proposals are still in a conceptual stage and have not yet been vetted by senior city management. The Commissioners were invited to offer feedback on the draft actions; suggestions on other community needs or priorities that may not yet be reflected in the plan; and ideas for how climate or sustainability considerations might be better integrated into the city's Human Services Needs Update and Strategic Plan. The Commissioners were encouraged to reflect on how sustainability intersects with essential human needs such as housing, transportation, safety, health, income, and access to services.

The current five-year sustainability plan was adopted in 2020 and is set to expire in December 2025. Planning for the new version began in October 2024 and the update process involves engagement with stakeholders, city staff, and the public. The goal is to determine a new set of strategies and investments to meet future sustainability objectives in line with an equity perspective, a human health perspective, and with a climate perspective. There are six primary focus areas of the plan: energy and buildings; mobility and land use, which is primarily transportation-related; materials and waste management; climate change and climate resilience; natural systems; and municipal operations. Each of the areas will be examined for both community-wide action and internal operational changes within city government.

Bellevue aims to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2030 and achieve a 95 percent reduction, which effectively is carbon neutrality, by 2050. The targets were adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan, which was finalized in late 2024 following its own public engagement process. In addition to emissions mitigation, the plan has an equal focus on resilience and adaptation. Given regional climate challenges such as wildfire smoke, extreme heat, heavy precipitation, and flooding, the city is working to ensure that residents can remain safe during extreme weather events regardless of their housing status or occupations.

Patrick Babbitt explained that during Phase 1 the team presented the plan's structure and goals to a range of stakeholders, including city boards and commissions, public participants, and staff experts. Almost 900 community members were engaged in the process during Phase 1 through various formats, including more than 250 Bellevue students; over 110 participated at in-person workshops or townhalls; more than 50 took part at pop-up tabling events; and 470 responded to a citywide survey on Engaging Bellevue which will remain active through Phase 3. A particular focus was placed on ensuring representational equity in the community participation.

The Phase 2 engagement kicked off in late April with EarthFest activities, staff workshops with

subject matter experts, and other ongoing engagement.

Several key insights emerged from the data collected in Phase 1. Although many Bellevue residents indicated not being previously familiar with the Sustainable Bellevue Plan, 83 percent of the survey respondents want to see climate action prioritized. Additionally, 68 percent supported such actions even if it requires substantial investment and effort from the city and the community. Another significant finding was that 81 percent of the respondents reported personally having experienced climate-related impacts, with the most common being exposure to wildfire smoke and episodes of extreme heat. The concerns underscore the public's perception that climate issues are no longer abstract but immediate and tangible.

Patrick Babbitt shared a conceptual graph illustrating projected greenhouse gas emissions in Bellevue through 2050. The graph showed that if the community maintains its current trajectory without intervention, emissions will continue to rise. Based on state and federal actions, roughly two-thirds of emission reductions are anticipated through broader state and federal government policies and technological developments. The remaining one-third, however, will require local leadership and community-driven action, particularly in light of changes at the federal level. Bellevue must therefore develop its own strategies to meet its share of climate responsibility.

To date, the city has achieved an 11 percent reduction in community-wide emissions. Though that is a start, it remains far from the 95 percent reduction target by 2050. The success of local climate efforts depends in part on continued federal support for programs such as energy efficiency block grants, tax incentives for building upgrades, and electric vehicle infrastructure. Recent and potential cuts to those resources and others present substantial risks to Bellevue's ability to act effectively.

Patrick Babbitt said three categories have been defined as criteria for high-impact actions: those initiatives that significantly reduce emissions by 2030; actions that create conditions for long-term emission reductions; and actions that meaningfully increase resilience to climate hazards such as wildfire smoke, extreme heat, and severe precipitation.

The draft actions and strategies are still being vetted internally. The first focus area is climate change and resilience to climate hazards. The intent is to make sure the community is safe and prepared for the risks; the same is true of the city's infrastructure. The draft actions include improving communication tools to inform residents about upcoming heatwaves, smoke events, and other hazards; expanding and developing "resilience hubs" in community spaces such as YMCA centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, and nonprofit service locations, and ensuring that the facilities can provide safe air and temperature-controlled environments during extreme weather; developing and implementing emergency preparedness and response training for both city staff and partner organizations; formulating a community-level wildfire protection plan to guide responses during emergency situations, including evacuations; installing low- or zero-emission backup power and energy storage systems in critical facilities, ensuring continuity of operations during power outages caused by weather events; and conducting retrofits or upgrades to major public and community facilities to make them resistant to wildfire smoke and ensure operational climate resilience.

The second focus area is energy and buildings, the primary strategy for which is to expand the Energy Smart Eastside program which assists homeowners in replacing natural gas or inefficient electric heating systems with energy-efficient heat pumps, including heat pump water heaters. The draft actions include: improving household comfort during extreme temperatures; increasing energy efficiency; and providing cost savings over time, particularly to low- and moderate-income residents.

Commissioner Phan asked whether the planning effort has considered individuals who cannot physically access resilience hubs, such as seniors or homebound persons. Patrick Babbitt confirmed that the topic has been discussed in ongoing coordination with King County and Washington State. The city aims to collaborate with emergency response partners such as hospitals and service providers. The data shows that most heat-related deaths and emergency room visits involve seniors, particularly those living alone. Bellevue intends to align with King County's wildfire and heat mitigation strategies while emphasizing neighbor-to-neighbor care and alternative forms of outreach for isolated individuals.

Commissioner Hays asked if thought has been given to residents who depend on electric wheelchairs or other powered medical equipment during outages. Patrick Babbitt confirmed that the issue is a core concern within the emergency preparedness planning. Medical device reliability during power loss is a known vulnerability, and the city is working to incorporate that into the resilience strategies.

Commissioner Hays also asked whether the city plans to educate residents on preparing for power outages, extreme heat, or smoke events. Patrick Babbitt said some work in that area has already been done, notably via a pilot outreach program that was conducted during the summer of 2024 which involved distributing 600 heat and smoke kits. The kits included box fans with HVAC filters, KN95 masks, sunscreen, water bottles, and other supplies designed to improve indoor air quality and provide personal protection. The outreach effort was particularly targeted toward individuals without air conditioning, including renters and unhoused residents, and included informational materials. The pilot enjoyed some success, but there is an acknowledged need for expanded public education.

Toni Esparza emphasized that climate resilience must address those most vulnerable to its impacts: seniors, individuals experiencing hunger or homelessness, and immigrants with limited English literacy. Bellevue should prioritize the trusted community partners to disseminate safety communications rather than relying solely on city channels. The approach can ensure more effective outreach to culturally and linguistically isolated populations. Resilience hubs may not reach the most affected groups if the spaces are limited to government or large nonprofit buildings. There should be an increased investment in supporting smaller, trusted organizations in securing permanent spaces that could function as resilience hubs during emergencies.

With regard to backup power and energy storage, Toni Esparza said several community organizations were affected by the previous winter's bomb cyclone by not having backup generators. Shelters, permanent supportive housing, affordable housing developments, and food banks should all be prioritized for power resilience upgrades. Because renters cannot make infrastructure changes themselves, the city must consider how to incentivize or require landlords

to participate in electrification and weatherization programs, and motivation strategies for private landlords should be incorporated into the plan.

Toni Esparza also proposed incorporating food security into the sustainability strategy by expanding opportunities for residents, especially renters, to grow their own food. Access to community gardens or shared growing spaces could build individual and neighborhood-level resilience.

Turning to the mobility and land use strategy, Patrick Babbitt outlined a series of potential actions to support sustainable transportation and reduce vehicle emissions. Three broad focus areas were identified: expanding access to sustainable commuting options and active transportation, which includes safer and more convenient infrastructure for walking, biking, scootering, and public transit use; advancing the transition to electric vehicles, including personal and commercial fleets; and increasing overall access to and integration with Bellevue's transit systems. Within those areas, the action concepts under consideration include launching a bike or scooter share program within the city, similar to Seattle's model; and exploring an e-bike incentive program, paired with safety training, to improve access to affordable, sustainable personal mobility options. Additional actions involve advancing the city's Electric Vehicle Roadmap, which was finalized in 2024 and which ushers in various strategies and investments the city might consider accelerating. Providing EV charging infrastructure in multi-family and commercial buildings can help to ensure renters and workers can feasibly adopt electric vehicles. To support the transition, a public EV education campaign is needed to inform residents about cost benefits, technological improvements, and to dispel misconceptions. Many of the newer EVs already offer hundreds of miles of range and price parity with gasoline vehicles.

The final two transportation actions related to broader transit system goals. Bellevue intends to continue advancing its existing Transit Master Plan, and plans to invest in first/last mile mobility solutions, a concept that addresses the gap between a person's home and their nearest transit stop, or between a transit stop and their final destination. Potential solutions may include micro-mobility options such as shared bikes, scooters, or short-distance shuttles.

Patrick Babbitt shared that there are certain internal and institutional actions under consideration. Bellevue intends to adopt a "One City" approach by embedding sustainability principles into all city departments and planning initiatives. That includes incorporating climate considerations across land use planning, parks, permitting, and other municipal functions.

Commissioner Phan expressed some skepticism regarding the proposed e-bike and scooter share program, noting that Bellevue had previously discontinued a similar initiative. Additionally, the BellHop program is limited in availability and inadequate for timely or practical transportation needs. There are clear challenges associated with relying on low-capacity mobility options for residents with time-sensitive obligations. Patrick Babbitt allowed not having a knowledge of the city's past history regarding e-bikes and scooters. While there has been some opposition, there is also some interest in the approach. Many cities successfully operate such systems, either through public management or with private sector partnerships. Implementation in Bellevue would require both City Council approval and stakeholder support. The technology continues to evolve and there are already newer low-profile electric vehicles with enhanced capability. Alternative

formats beyond traditional bikes may ultimately prove to be more successful. The city will also want to continue partnering with BellHop on first/last mile options and for getting around the Downtown and other growth centers.

Chair Singh voiced concerns about the safety of emerging electric two-wheeled vehicles, especially in school zones. The vehicles can actually be quite dangerous.

Commissioner Hays asked what Bellevue is doing to ensure future development aligns with green building and energy efficiency priorities, particularly in light of neighborhood rezoning and urban redevelopment. Patrick Babbitt responded that Bellevue already maintains some green building incentives and is revisiting its development policies to encourage low-carbon, highly efficient construction. Although the work is still underway, major changes may not yet be fully captured as formal actions in the climate plan. Neighborhoods like Wilburton are under review for land use and zoning changes and that may provide opportunities for greener building mandates. However, expanding the policies would require reliance on additional state and federal support, particularly given recent reductions in tax incentives and grants through the Inflation Reduction Act. A reference was made to the ongoing Solarize Bellevue campaign, which aims to promote residential solar adoption, although it was noted that the scale of initiative remains modest.

A motion to extend the meeting to 8:45 p.m. was made by Commissioner Phan. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Rashid and the motion carried unanimously.

Patrick Babbitt reiterated the ongoing efforts to expand Energy Smart Eastside by improving access to heat pumps, adding weatherization services, and introducing heat pump water heaters to reduce energy bills and improve household comfort, particularly for low- and moderate-income residents.

Toni Esparza shared that the collective Eastside cities did some surveying of agencies after some recent severe weather events to better understand their emergency preparedness. That information might be relevant in helping to better understand where the gaps are. The providers indicated that they generally feel as prepared as they can be under current conditions, but nearly all of them requested additional training and funding. The fact is available city funding for human services is already oversubscribed. Addressing emergency preparedness effectively may require a new, dedicated funding source rather than redirecting already stretched general human services funds. Such investment should be characterized as a high priority given that the service providers are often responsible for keeping vulnerable community members safe and alive during crises.

Ruth Blaw added that service providers also reported a clear link between emergency events and trauma, particularly among residents with prior experiences of hunger and homelessness.

Toni Esparza said several of the providers highlighted the intersection between severe emergency events and mental health. Power outages and extreme conditions can trigger panic and mental health crises, complicating ongoing service delivery.

Chair Singh stressed the need for updated data to guide the planning process. Previous planning relied on data from 2020 and 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may no longer reflect current conditions or progress made since.

Commissioner Phan asked if the planning team is working with Bellevue Fire CARES, the city's outreach and support program for vulnerable residents. Patrick Babbitt affirmed that Bellevue Fire CARES and the city's homelessness services team have been closely involved in the summer heat and smoke safety kit pilot. There are ongoing conversations with emergency management staff across all departments to ensure coordinated planning for future wildfire smoke events, extreme heat days, and other climate-related hazards. The goal is to adopt a "One City" approach, aligning planning, supplies, operations, and community partnerships across departments.

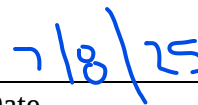
Commissioner Hays asked if the city would continue with public engagement throughout the planning process and Patrick Babbitt said the Phase 2 engagement work is already underway. It includes both pop-up tabling events and targeted workshops. The city will continue to host sustainability town halls and will use those as avenues to gather feedback and share updates. The efforts will support the development of a draft climate action plan, which will be reviewed again by the public prior to its submission to the City Council.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Singh adjourned the meeting at 8:40 p.m.



Ruth Blaw, Staff Liaison



Date