

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES

January 8, 2025
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Goepple, Vice Chair Cálad, Commissioners Bhargava, Ferris, Lu

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Khanloo, Villaveces

STAFF PRESENT: Kate Nesse, Thara Johnson, Jennifer Ewing, Justus Stewart, Department of Community Development; Matt McFarland, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Deputy Mayor Malakoutian

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER
(6:30 p.m.)

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Goepple who presided.

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

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Khanloo and Villaveces.

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

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

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

Deputy Mayor Malakoutian welcomed the Commissioners to a new year and noted that at the Council meeting on January 7 Chair Goepple presented the Land Use Code amendment regarding the conversion of certain commercial and office spaces to residential. The Council approved the recommendation. All of the Councilmembers appreciate the hard work of the Commission.

5. STAFF REPORTS

Bellevue Planning Commission
January 8, 2025

(6:33 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

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

6. WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Chair Goepple took a moment to note that under Ordinance 6752, the topics about which the public may speak during a meeting are limited to subject matters related to the city of Bellevue government and within the powers and duties of the Planning Commission. Additional information about the new rules of decorum governing conduct of the public during meetings can be found in Ordinance 6752.

A. Written Communications

(6:34 p.m.)

Dr. Kate Nesse Kate noted that seven emails were received since the packet was published. They primarily focused on the Environmental Stewardship Plan. Six urged the Commission to ask the staff to develop a pedestrian network completeness goal, and one dealt with advanced air mobility facilities planning for the city.

B. Oral Communications

(6:35 p.m.)

Chris Randels spoke on behalf of Complete Streets Bellevue, the organization that represents people walking, biking, rolling and taking transit around the city. The organization is excited for the kickoff of the planning effort around the new Environmental Stewardship Plan and appreciates the city leaders and staff who have recognized the climate change challenges, placed an emphasis on sustainability, and stressed the need for Bellevue to meet its transportation-related climate goals through more robust pedestrian, bicycle, and transit infrastructure. The importance of having concrete benchmarks in the plan for completing Bellevue's sidewalk and bike networks was emphasized.

David Ketchum introduced the concept of advanced air mobility. As a consultant with expertise in heliports and hospital air transport, the speaker described emerging electric and hybrid-electric aircraft technology that likely will be mainstreamed in the next five years. The Commission was encouraged to learn more about advanced air mobility and to consider future planning for potential community integration of the technology.

Alex Tsimerman employed highly offensive language by calling the Commissioners dirty damn Nazi gestapo fascist cockroaches, mobsters and bandits before expressing grievances related to the Bellevue Police Commissioners, asserting that the public is not permitted to attend their meetings. The statements made included disparaging and inflammatory remarks about Mayor Robinson stopping the speaker from talking about the issue before the Council. The police department has prosecuted the speaker five times and in the last few years issued 18 tickets

totaling almost \$3000. The issue is of importance to the whole city. The Mayor is an idiot acting as a Fuhrer.

Chair Goepple asked the record to reflect that the statements made by Alex Tsimmerman were in violation of Ordinance 6752. The ordinance limits public comments to subject matters within the Planning Commission's purview related to City of Bellevue government. Police matters are outside the Planning Commission's authority.

Lee Sargent Mr. Sargent noted having lived in Bellevue for over 46 years and having attended Planning Commission meetings over the last two and a half years. The volunteer efforts of the Commission, along with the abilities of the Commissioners and the inquiries that have been made, are to be praised. The Commission was thanked for its dedication and thoroughness.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(6:50 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION

A. Continuous Improvement Planning Commission Survey
(6:50 p.m.)

Planning Director Thara Johnson thanked the Commission for allowing staff to discuss ways to incorporate the feedback from the recent survey. There was a high response rate which helps staff understand how to best support Commissioner in its work.

Thara Johnson said key findings from the survey included praise for the manner in which Commission members work together, demonstrate mutual respect, work diligently, and engage in helpful exchanges owing to their diverse backgrounds. There were also suggestions offered for improving the deliberations. They included embracing Robert's Rules of Order more effectively, focusing on the most critical questions, avoiding repetitive points, and by having opportunities for informal gatherings outside of Commission meetings. Also suggested was focusing on areas where the Commission can have more of an impact.

On the question of how staff can better support the Commission, the feedback included comments related to a desire for more follow-through on questions posed by Commissioners during discussions. Short written responses could be included as an attachment in the meeting packets, something the staff have lately made a concerted effort to do.

The Commission's schedule in 2024 was especially busy, leading to long meetings, an issue that was commented on in the survey results. The plan going forward is to moderate that pace as much as possible.

The Commissioner voiced the need to do a better job of clarifying the Commission's scope of work, both for the Commissioners and the public, so that everyone understands the Commission's roles and responsibilities and how these differ from the authority of the City Council. One suggestion made was to identify at the outset of each meeting or study session what the Commissioners are expected to address. That clarity could prevent straying from Council-approved scopes or from narrowly defined state mandates. The staff should also remind the Commission that certain items, especially those driven by mandates, might require a

narrower focus to satisfy compliance within specific timeframes.

Thara Johnson said the staff are happy to arrange on request additional training sessions, including on Robert's Rules of Order.

Commissioner Ferris took a moment to thank the staff for the fantastic job they do. There is a need for clarity for both the Commission and the public in regard to the Commission's realm in terms of what is in the Commission's purview and what is not. That may take the form of a reminder at the beginning of each study session and/or a helpful guide for the benefit of the public.

Commissioner Lu said staff's written responses in the packets to specific questions are very helpful, especially where there is a week or two lapse in discussing the topics. There is indeed a need for clarity in regard to what the Commission can and cannot do.

Commissioner Bhargava reiterated admiration for the work performed by staff and stressed how helpful it is when staff brings subject matter expertise to the table. The Commission is composed of volunteers with diverse backgrounds who do not necessarily have a planning focus, thus the contributions from knowledgeable staff, combined with the Commissioners' broad perspectives, promote thoughtful and robust recommendations and strengthens the Commission's final output.

Vice Chair Calad addressed the need for efficiently using time in expressing support for or disapproval of ideas.

Chair Goepple also voiced appreciation for the work and contributions of the staff. The discussions have been useful and fruitful in terms of coming to good solutions and recommendations. In terms of meeting conduct and keeping discussions going, the approach of having the Commissioners address their three most important issues in the first round has been helpful; that allows each Commissioner the opportunity to prioritize their thoughts and voice them. For meetings that have a full agenda, it is good to be up front in regard to how much time will be spent on each topic, particularly where state mandates are involved. There are at times opportunities to go beyond the mandates and the Commission should not be precluded from doing so, provided the Commission keeps in mind that compliance is the first priority.

Commissioner Bhargava said additional training opportunities or a review of parliamentary procedure would be useful. More important, however, is clarifying the scope of each discussion and the Commission's specific objectives and limits, which could be outlined in the agenda packet. Having the objectives would guide the Commission's discussions and help prevent prolonged consideration of issues outside the Commission's purview.

B. Sustainable Bellevue Environmental Stewardship Plan Update (2026-2030)

Sustainability Program Manager Justus Stewart explained that the current five-year Environmental Stewardship Plan runs through the end of 2025. Once updated, the new plan will include be for 2026-2030 and will include goals and targets for 2030 and 2050, including community-wide goals and goals around municipal operations. All of the strategies and actions within the plan are contained within the five focus areas of climate change, energy, mobility and land use, materials management and waste, and natural systems.

The Council launched the update process in October. Phase 1 is under way and the focus is on revisiting the existing goals and targets to see if they should be changed, or if any new goals or

targets are needed. In Phase Two the focus will be on the strategies and actions, the discrete steps the staff will implement to achieve the goals and targets. The work of drafting the plan itself will occur in Phase 3, and adoption of the plan is tentatively expected in the fourth quarter of 2025.

Regarding outreach, Justus Stewart said in addition to the broad engagement staff typically conducts for a planning process, there will be some targeted outreach in partnership with two community-based organizations, East Side for All and Little Masters Club, both of which are well-known and respected within their communities. They will help extend staff's reach so that community members who may not have participated significantly in the previous process will be more involved in the update. Staff will also be reconnecting with the Sustainability Leaders Group, which was very active in the last plan update process.

Greenhouse gases emissions is a big-picture item encompassing many actions in the plan. The community-wide emissions trend is on a downward trend, which is good. However, the city is not on track to meet the 2030 reduction goal, which is a 50 percent reduction from a 2011 baseline. There was a drop in emissions during the pandemic, but emissions have since slowly risen again. Nevertheless, compared to 2011, the city has achieved an eight percent reduction in emissions during a period of 25 percent population growth. That adds up to a 25 percent per capita emissions reduction in greenhouse gases emissions [correction: it adds up to a 26 percent per capita emissions reduction]. While that is progress in the right direction, more ambitious actions will be needed to meet the 2030 targets and chart a pathway toward the 2050 targets.

Justus Stewart said the current plan has 78 actions, and significant progress has been made on many of them. Some actions are complete or integrated into ongoing programs. Nineteen of the actions have started but need further work. The remaining ten are scheduled for the 2025 work plan, although some shifting and refining may be needed in order to incorporate them into the plan update.

Several of the successes were accomplished in 2024, an especially busy year for the staff, though some occurred in 2023 as well.

Focusing specifically on mobility and land use progress to date, Justus Stewart said all of the metrics in the focus area are trending in the right direction and are considered to be on track, except for the per capita vehicle miles traveled reduction for which some figures have begun to creep up again after significant drops during the pandemic, similar to what was observed with greenhouse gas emissions. The metrics are measured annually when data is available, but examining longer-term trends can sometimes provide more valuable insights than single-year comparisons.

The Phase 1 work is under way and is focused on revisiting the goals and targets to determine if any should be changed. The staff have identified some areas where tweaks are needed. Other areas remain under consideration pending further analysis, especially for those related to jobs and housing within one-quarter mile of frequent transit. The transit metrics serve as a proxy for broader urban form considerations. Staff are consulting with the city's chief demographer and are reviewing the Comprehensive Plan policies and projections to see if adjustments are necessary.

Justus Stewart said there are three strategies and corresponding actions for the mobility and land use section. They will be the focus of Phase Two during which staff will revise or potentially create new strategies informed by the Phase One input.

The results of the Climate Vulnerability Assessment were presented in the fall of 2023. It is clear that climate impacts are already present and that they are projected to worsen. The previous plan had a climate section but did not have a dedicated climate resilience strategy or actions for adaptation and preparedness. The plan update will include such a section.

One potential strategy staff have explored is the concept of resilience hubs. The hubs promote community-wide resilience through a combination of space, infrastructure, equipment, and supplies to protect community members during extreme weather events such as heat and smoke emergencies. They can also serve as spaces accessible year-round for events and activities, transitioning into emergency mode 24/7 when needed. El Centro de la Raza in Seattle has been a leader in exploring the concept regionally. Some existing spaces in Bellevue might be converted into resilience hubs, or consideration could be given to constructing new community spaces for the purpose.

Justus Stewart said Phase 1 will conclude by the end of the month with finalizing goals and targets. Phase Two will begin in February. Staff anticipate returning to the Planning Commission in the second quarter, late March or April, as the Commission's calendar allows. Staff will also be engaging other city boards and commissions. Outreach to the community will continue through January, including a town hall next week.

Justus Stewart clarified for Commissioner Lu that the primary focus of the mobility and land use goals section is on the land use goals, which really center on the quarter-mile radius. Commissioner Lu said it is fine to use a proxy goal of the quarter mile given that it represents having services and other amenities, or some level of livability, within that area. However, it is worthwhile to track at a slightly more detailed level in terms of providing sufficient services to everyone within that quarter-mile radius. Developers may be incentivized to build there, but the city must also draw in the right businesses or the right organizations. It is difficult for the Commission to create a policy that guarantees something will absolutely happen. Therefore, the city we should also monitor whether it is providing sufficient human services and resilience in those areas as a subcategory of the goals.

Commissioner Bhargava asked for an explanation of the percentages relative to the goal updates. Justus Stewart said the percentages have different meanings depending on the metric. Using the metric of jobs within a quarter mile of a frequent transit stop, it was noted that the 75 percent figure relates to the target number of all jobs located within a quarter mile of a frequent transit stop. For the metric of housing within a quarter mile of a frequent transit stop, the 50 percent figure relates the target for all housing. Based on that, Commissioner Bhargava stated that the quarter mile is a good proxy, and said goals are very aggressive. Consideration should also be given to a half-mile radius and a one-mile radius to see things are trending in the right direction. Using the proxy for vehicle miles traveled and trip reduction strategies for greenhouse gases, it may be easier to see if things are trending in the right way. Otherwise, it is a very aggressive, difficult goal to achieve. According to the data, the greenhouse gases metric is trending in a concerning direction.

Commissioner Ferris commented that the presentation was a bit confusing in some areas in terms of the charts shared with the Commission.

Commissioner Ferris agreed with the comment made about expanding beyond the quarter mile radius. It is easy to think about the radius goals when the focus is on the Downtown, but the vast majority of the city's residents live in suburban neighborhoods where many live without any transit options at all. The question asked was if the goal is intended to include transit coverage

throughout the city. If that is the case, there is a great deal of work to be done in suburban areas, so that they are better served. Justus Stewart said there are two components involved. One is extending transit to more places, including existing King County Metro RapidRide lines and other bus services, plus things like on-demand transit and micro-transit options. The hope is that new developments will bring transit to additional neighborhoods. The other piece is that, because the measurement is a percentage, the more jobs and housing that are built near transit the higher the proportion of them that will be within a quarter mile radius.

With regard to the resilience hubs, Commissioner Ferris asked if there is anything from a land use policy point that will enable them to happen. Justus Stewart said the question will require a little more investigation as to whether or not there are things in the code that could serve as barriers or prohibitions against the creation of a resilience hub.

Commissioner Ferris added that when the city experienced the bomb cyclone event, certain parts of the city lost power. The Downtown fared well, but not the outskirts. In planning resilience hubs, there should be a strategy for distributing resilience hubs across the city. In many outlying areas, it might be challenging to construct hubs given the existing land use code. Jennifer Ewing agreed while pointing out that the expectation is not that new facilities will be created in every case. There may be existing community centers that can serve the purpose of a resilience hub if they had backup power and other amenities.

Vice Chair Cálad asked about the metric related to registered electric vehicles. Ms. Ewing explained that the goal is to have 100 percent of the vehicles driven by Bellevue residents by electric. Vice Chair Cálad voiced support for the goal but suggested it and some of the other goals are quite aggressive. The city should avoid setting itself up for failure. There is a city policy that aims for zero fatalities on the streets, but with a growing, dynamic city, zero fatalities will be nearly impossible to guarantee. Calling for all vehicles to be electric also raises the issue of providing the necessary infrastructure, something that the city may not be able to guarantee.

Vice Chair Cálad asked what percentage of new housing coming online is being built within a quarter mile of frequent transit. Justus Stewart allowed that at the moment there is not a lot of housing being built. Much of the projected growth, however will occur in growth areas near frequent transit. The aim is to have new units built within the quarter mile or half mile radius distance. The numbers come from the Comprehensive Plan growth targets, which the city expects to materialize. Vice Chair Cálad suggested some reconsideration should be given to how the numbers will be communicated.

Chair Goeppeler referred to the strategies and actions matrix and asked about the M.1.4 growth corridor parking review, which was labeled as not having started. Parking is an ongoing topic and it would be helpful if the Commission had more data on parking and what additional parking is needed. Justus Stewart said a corridor parking review has been on the table for a while. However, there is interest within the city in seeing what the numbers will be after the Sound Transit line opens across I-90 to determine if there will be positive impacts on parking. There is a concern that spending time and resources on conducting a parking review could result in obsolete numbers as soon as the line opens.

With regard to EV readiness EV infrastructure, Justus Stewart agreed that charging stations are sometimes difficult to find. The city is doing a lot of work on EV infrastructure at both the municipal and community levels. An EV roadmap was completed in 2023 and its implementation will be going forward in 2025. The issue has proven to be challenging because the uptake of electric vehicles in Bellevue is so high, making it hard to keep up with the demand.

Justus Stewart added that pedestrian and bike infrastructure is something around which there have been discussions with the internal subject matter experts, with various groups, and among staff since starting the plan update process. Consideration has been given to adding a goal and a target at the high level around pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, or rolling it into some of the other high-level goals and targets, such as vehicle miles traveled, but with tracking at the more discrete level of strategies and actions.

Commissioner Lu agreed with the comments made by Commissioner Ferris regarding the resilience hubs. Conducting an inventory of unused spaces would also be helpful for driving the discussion.

Commissioner Lu asked how the uncontrollable portions of the goals will be accounted for given that there is a lot of reliance on things like rapid transit being built out. The city could be setting itself up for goals that are only partially controllable by the actions the city can take. Justus Stewart reminded the Commissioners that the five-year plan will have rolling updates. When it comes to city planning processes and things like capital investments, five years is nothing more than a blink. Given the timeline, the city will have the ability to make adjustments as things move forward, such as where state law or other things change. A lot of regional trends actually push the city in a positive direction. The city's focus will need to remain on the things it can influence, including lobbying the legislature in Olympia.

Commissioner Lu agreed with Chair Goepple's point on the pedestrian and bicycle networks as a goal. If the quarter mile proxy is going to be used, then pedestrian networks within those quarter miles are going to be really important for meeting the goals. The differentiation of urban versus suburban areas will also be important to focus on to avoid building out pedestrian networks that lead to nowhere.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Lu, Justus Stewart said everything has held steady except for transportation and mobility, both of which are heading in the wrong direction. Look at just a three-year rolling scenario, things are not on track really for anything. The Commission may want to scenario plan a little bit around that moving forward. The three-year rolling is always going to look really bad.

Jennifer Ewing said coming out of Covid the expectation has been that things would creep back up. The year 2023 was really the first full year of people returning to offices and that the like. The next few years will be interesting to what to see where things trend. Arguably 2025 is the first year that will see a lot more of that.

Commissioner Lu pointed out that saying things are not currently on track and that leaves room for making improvements.

Commissioner Bhargava stressed the point that not all actions are going to have the same impact. Which actions are started and how many of them there are matters, but the focus should be on those actions that will have the maximum potential to really reverse the greenhouse gas emissions trends.

Commissioner Ferris allowed that EV infrastructure is really, critically important, but from a land use and building code perspective, there has been a push toward calling for putting infrastructure into new buildings so that they are all pre-wired. The approach adds a huge amount of cost, all without knowing what technology will be in place five or ten years down the road.

Such requirements should be given careful consideration. There is a clear need to building more housing, and steps should be taken to make sure it is not too expensive.

Commissioner Ferris agreed with the public comment made in regard to M.2.4 and the need to put goals into the plan; the city will not achieve the outcomes unless there are specific goals in place.

Vice Chair Cálad referred to Strategy M.3, which calls for converting or replacing vehicles and equipment to electric and other carbon-low fuels and said if the aim is to achieve one hundred percent of electric vehicles, it is confusing to also focus on other low-carbon fuels. Also expressed was an interest in the comment made by a member of the public about advanced air mobility. Places need to be found for landing options outside of regular airports given how fast technology is changing.

Chair Goepple allowed that in some cases Bellevue has come up with novel approaches for dealing with issues in a cost-effective manner. The BellHop solution is a great example. A recent article in the *Seattle Times* compared the Bellevue approach with the much more expensive infrastructure that was developed and delayed in Seattle. Those kinds of solutions should be pursued to practically give people options to single-occupant trips.

Turning to sustainability priorities, Commissioner Lu commented that the past couple of weeks and months have shown that the city is going to be subject to a number of different climate issues in the form of wildfire, extreme heat, drought, smoke, precipitation, flooding and wind. There needs to be a response plan for each the categories. What the City did during the bomb cyclone was great in terms of having City Hall open and functioning as a pseudo shelters. There should be a different response for each type of impact and as such there should be a plan in place to avoid last-minute scrambling.

Commissioner Bhargava stressed the need for the hubs to be situated in a way that will allow the city to have the least disruption. They should be located outside of flood plains and where they are accessible to the maximum number of residents in an emergency.

Commissioner Bhargava voiced not being uncomfortable with setting goals that are very aggressive. They are tied to aspirational visions the city wants to achieve. Environmental stewardship in general should have big bold goals.

On the topic of sustainability priorities, Chair Goepple said the Comprehensive Plan policies that have been updated reflect well the priorities that are important. Adaptation strategies are really important. Advocating for increased grid reliability is very important. At the state level not enough is being done to ensure having the infrastructure needed to support the electrical needs. The heat dome a couple of years ago came very close to triggering blackouts which would have impacted both people and the economy. Bigger margins are needed. There is also a need to prioritize stormwater facilities to handle extreme events.

Vice Chair Cálad voiced a desire to better understand the estimations of population growth and how it plays into everything that has been discussed. Justus Stewart commented that although the city tracks total greenhouse gas emissions, both net emissions and per capita emissions, it is done while taking population growth into account. The targets are set in regard to overall reductions, not just on a per capita target. In planning out what strategies are needed and what the impact of those strategies will be, consideration is given to the impacts of population and job growth, and the upward pressure that has on increasing emissions.

Commissioner Bhargava asked why per capita goals are not set. Justus Stewart explained that in setting targets steps are taken to maintain an alignment with the King County targets, the statewide targets, and even national and international targets which are expressed in total emission levels. They are science-based. Expressing the targets in that way allows the city to set them, then track and report on them in alignment with the way that it is being done across various other levels.

Commissioner Lu asked if the electrical vehicle plan is aligned with what the state has set as the cutoff for gasoline vehicles. Jennifer Ewing said there is a state law that will require all new vehicles sold in Washington after 2035 to be electric. Attention has been given to some of the state projections around how the vehicle fleet is going to turn over, and then some projections were made for Bellevue in the EV Roadmap. The focus is on anticipating that the market plus the state laws will drive vehicle electrification very quickly. Bellevue is already seeing something like 25 percent or higher of new car sales are electric.

Commissioner Lu stressed the importance of the electric grid resilience goals. Washington State just finished its appropriation cycle and there is quite a bit of funding out there for electrical resilience. The city should seek to capture some state-level funding for that, especially since the Climate Commitment Act is in effect.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None
(8:12 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
(8:12 p.m.)

- A. November 13, 2024
- B. December 11, 2024

A motion to approve both sets of minutes was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bhargava and the motion carried without dissent. Vice Chair Cálad abstained from voting.

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(8:15 p.m.)

12. ADJOURNMENT
(8:15 p.m.)

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

Chair Goepple adjourned the meeting at 8:15 p.m.