

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

February 22, 2023
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Commissioner Morisseau

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Malakoutian

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Emil King, Kate Nesse, Gwen Rousseau, Lori Hoffman, 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

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

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Goeppele. 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
(6:32 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.

Thara Johnson noted that meeting minutes showing staff edits and track changes have been shared with the Commission in line with direction provided by the Commission in years past. It would be more efficient not to have to do that and to just provide the minutes with the changes included. There was consensus to do that going forward.

6. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS (6:36 p.m.)

A. Oral Communications

Pamela Johnston voiced support for housing and walkable areas that fit the neighborhood scale, and for middle housing that is not only affordable but attainable. That is not, however, what the state legislature is voting on with HB-1110. The greatest fear of Daniel Porlick, who coined the term “middle housing,” has been realized. The missing middle has become a buzz term. The premise of the state bill is that homes with higher density are more affordable by design. That is in opposition to the middle housing research and design. The bills do not address the common points of failure in middle housing. The missing middle is a way to frame the housing conversation about fitting in, not standing out. Cities get excited about the diagram of types but fail in the actual implementation. The state is taking away the actual implementation being figured out on site at the local level. The regulations are not focused on attainability. They are not prohibiting designs that are out of scale and that stand out, like townhouse perpendicular to the street, or skinny full-size single family homes. They are not requiring the missing middle housing to fit into the historical process of the surrounding and built environment. That is why the city has a Comprehensive Plan and why it has neighborhood plans. They are ignoring the notion of what works on the lot. Defining the number of units is a disincentive for affordability. Designers should be allowed to determine the right number of units given the space. State representatives should hear comments about the missing middle.

Alex Tsimerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners dirty damn Nazi Gestapo democracy fascists, mobsters and psychopaths then related having addressed the Bellevue school board two months ago for only five seconds before being ushered out and banned for six months. A discriminatory complaint was filed but never answered. A request for records was also ignored. Having spoken before various bodies for many years, there have been no bans issued. Teachers are brainwashing children. They do not care about the constitution, freedom of speech, open public meetings or common sense. The Commission at its previous meeting talked about respect, but how can the Commission be respected when it never reacts to what is said and there is no investigation. The Human Services Commission and the City Council have both been asked to launch an investigation. Seattle has a human rights commission where complaints can be made, but Bellevue does not. Teachers are pure fascists and they brainwash children totally. Hitler saw teachers as a top priority.

Barbara Hughes noted having studied and trained to be a professionally qualified manager for tens of thousands of units of social housing, housing owned by cities and rented for low or no rents to people with low or no incomes. All are aware that Bellevue is an expensive city to live in. The idea of adding quality lower- and middle-income housing in walkable areas with excellent amenities is very good, provided they fit the character of the neighborhood. But there must also be consideration for parking. Some folks work several jobs, often in locations far away from their homes, and using public transport is not always

a viable option. Some provision for parking cars is going to continue to be important for people to retain the freedom to earn a living and to get to hospital and so on, otherwise the quality of life of those with lower incomes and who already have fewer options than others will be limited even further. Lower- and middle-income housing that is not only affordable but attainable is needed. There need to be design controls to densify existing neighborhoods. It may cost more to build to a quality design, but design controls are important and should not be left up to individual developers. Scale and place matter. Keeping roads safe also matters thus densifying where there are small one-lane roads is not recommended. Bellevue is not Seattle and it should be looking countywide and globally for examples of excellence that will beautify the city as it grows.

Phyllis White noted that a survey was recently distributed to nearly every single family house between NE 8th Street and Bel-Red Road. Ninety-five percent of the respondents valued the environment and their quality of life over building more density within their neighborhood. The neighborhood is not ultra wealthy. Developers should not be given a mandate to fill properties with density. That will affect the quality of life of the neighbors. The ADUs in other cities are often higher than the adjacent homes and they invade the privacy of those homes. Many from the neighborhood attended the housing deep dive. On one table Option Zero did not exist and was not even offered until the staff for the table was asked to. The Commission should reconsider setting a mandate.

Heidi Dean said Phyllis White and those who attended the deep dive were upset by the fact that the zero growth option was hidden under the table. The deep dive was no deeper than a mud puddle. The outreach being done is troubling, particularly the use of the Bellevue Essentials alumni list being presented as neighborhood leaders and stakeholders. It was surprising to see the zero option at 40,000 units instead of 30,000 units. All the talk is about going further with density in the light of the fact that the schools are closing for lack of students. Wilburton is not done yet, nor is BelRed, yet the focus is on shoving density into the neighborhoods, density that could go into other areas. Much of the outreach is not being driven by input from residents. It is extremely disturbing that the zero option box was hidden under the table during the deep dive. State HB 1110 does not actually address affordable housing. Increasing the intensity of what can be built on a lot also increases the land value, which increases its property taxes, which increases rents.

Jacque Quarre, a land use attorney, expressed looking forward to starting work on the Wilburton subarea plan.

B. Written Communications

Thara Johnson noted for the record that the Commission packets included copies of emails received relating to tree canopy, and an invitation for the Commissioners to attend a community meeting on February 21. In addition, there was an email with questions for staff regarding the micro apartments Land Use Code amendment.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(6:57 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION
(6:57 p.m.)

A. Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and Wilburton Vision Implementation

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Process and Briefing

Senior Planner Dr. Kate Nesse reminded the Commissioners that the Council launched the Comprehensive Plan periodic update on February 28, 2022. The Commission began its work on the process on March 9, 2022. Phase 1 was completed in the summer of 2022. On September 28, 2022, Phase 2a of the process was summarized, and the growth alternatives were presented. The growth alternatives were the ones included in the scoping notice for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The alternatives were modified based on the comments received.

The City of Bellevue has been designated as the lead agency for the SEPA process. Given that the city is both the lead agency and the applicant, there is a strict barrier in place between those who will be evaluating the EIS and those who are working on it. A SEPA determination of significance was issued on September 29, 2022, but the environmental checklist was skipped because all agreed that an EIS would be required. The EIS was scoped between September 30, 2022, and October 31, 2022. The scope was made available to the public and opened to public comment in the fall of the year. Three alternatives were presented for study in addition to a no action alternative. The option zero referred to during public comments is the no action alternative, which assumes that all policies will remain as they are without any changes at all. The analysis phase is currently underway. The draft EIS is slated to be released in April 2023, after which there will be a 45-day public comment period. The final EIS will be released after that. Public meetings for the DEIS are planned along with a public hearing in May.

Dr. Kate Nesse said the EIS is an analysis of the informed build out, which is predicated on the assumption that all redevelopable properties will redevelop at an assumed density, though not necessarily the maximum density. The EIS is intended to capture all possible future environmental impacts.

It was reiterated that action zero, or the no action alternative, assumed no changes to policy. In developing the urban growth capacity report, the capacity calculated was 27,000 units. For the no action alternative, that figure was rounded up to 30,000 units. For the EIS, the intent was to be even more generous in figuring whether or not a parcel is redevelopable, thus the ultimate increase in the capacity to 40,000 units, all with an eye on capturing all possible impacts.

Alternative 1 puts almost all of the growth in the mixed use centers, with Downtown, Wilburton and BelRed having the majority of the growth. In addition, additional capacity is shown in other mixed use centers, including Crossroads, Factoria and Eastgate, for a total of about 59,100 units. Alternative 2 shows a capacity of about 76,300 units by including with the mixed use centers opening the areas with good access to transit. It is true that bus routes and stops change over time, but the focus continues to be on the areas with the resources the address the additional capacity. Alternative 3 builds on the first two and adds capacity around the neighborhood centers, bringing the total capacity to about 94,500 units.

The city is planning for 35,000 housing units and 70,000 jobs, regardless of the option ultimately selected. The higher capacity will give more options for more types of housing. If under the no action alternative nearly all of the housing goes into the Downtown and BelRed, any future development will be limited to large apartment buildings. Most cities have more capacity than their jobs and housing targets.

Dr. Kate Nesse said the Commission's involvement will include being familiar with the DEIS and providing feedback on the alternatives, as well as on the preferred alternative to be studied in the final EIS. If additional analysis is needed, it will appear in the final EIS.

Commissioner Goeppele asked about the effect of the EIS alternative that gets chosen, specifically if the chosen alternative dictates the final outcome of the changes that will be made to the Comprehensive Plan, or if it in effect creates a sort of bounding limit. Dr. Kate Nesse explained that the preferred alternative does not bind the city to a particular course of action, other than to review the specific environmental impacts associated the preferred alternative. The anticipation is that the alternative for the final EIS will be fairly closely aligned with the city's growth strategy.

Assistant City Attorney Matt McFarland said the environmental review framework is intended to inform the decision given the analysis of the environmental impacts of all the alternatives. It does not dictate a substantive result. The recommending body is not obligated to choose the least consequential alternative.

Commissioner Goeppele asked what is meant by the reference to good access to transit in Alternative 2. Dr. Kate Nesse said the technical answer is a quarter mile radius around all bus stops that have service every 15 minutes or more frequently between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Staff are aware that bus stops may change. The analysis used data representing a hybrid of where the bus stops were and how frequent the service was before the pandemic, and what is expected based on information from King County. In the final analysis, in considering where density should be allowed, a more selective view may need to be taken.

Commissioner Morisseau commented that it makes sense to look at the impacts of the various options. Some of the work is being done in silos, and it is early in the process, making it hard to reach a conclusion. The possible traffic and transportation impacts of Alternative 3, for instance, cannot yet be calculated. A number of issues need to be looked at together as the process moves forward so the Commission can make an informed decision.

Commissioner Cálad agreed that it will be hard to see the big picture until all the pieces of the puzzle are presented. In addition to the question of density, there will need to be an understanding of the implications regarding traffic, sidewalks, safety for children in neighborhoods, and even neighborhood trees. Dr. Kate Nesse agreed those elements are important to the city and contribute to the character of Bellevue. The EIS will include mitigation measures. For transportation, those measures will be within the framework of the Mobility Implementation Plan, which looks at all types of mobility, including sidewalks and bicycles.

Vice Chair Bhargava found it interesting that data related to existing bus routes is to be used as a proxy for access to transit and developments. Bus routes can change far more rapidly than city infrastructure. Arterial streets usually remain arterial streets for much longer than bus routes. The analysis should take into account street hierarchies as well as urban forms. Infrastructure can be a good benchmark for qualifying decisions. Dr. Kate Nesse concurred.

Chair Ferris asked for a fuller explanation of what constitutes a neighborhood center and the kinds of businesses located in them. Dr. Kate Nesse said Yarrowwood in Bridle Trails,

Northtowne and Lake Hills Shopping Center are all neighborhood centers. They are not major shopping areas and they primarily have retail businesses.

Turning to the timeline for the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, Dr. Kate Nesse shared with the Commission a flowchart noting the process to be in the analysis phase of the EIS. Work on the policies that do not rely heavily on the growth strategy are also currently being worked on. Work on the Wilburton policies is under way as well. All policy updates for all of the Comprehensive Plan elements have been scoped, with the exception of the Shoreline Management Element given that it will progress on its own schedule. Initial language has been developed for some elements, and for a couple of elements staff have begun the work of updating the narrative sections. There are some Phase 2b engagement activities in progress, including a statistically valid survey and work on a dashboard. Two in-person housing forums are scheduled for March 18 and March 21, and a virtual forum is scheduled for March 23.

A number of community groups have been visited to date, specifically the Bridle Trails Community Club on January 25; the Bellevue School District Family Connection staff on January 31; the Mary's Place staff on February 2; Mary's Place guests, also on February 2; the Bellevue Collection Merchant Breakfast on February 9; the Bellevue Essentials Alumni Coffee on February 13. Meetings are also slated with the Bellevue College Open House on February 28; and with the GIX Open House on April 13.

Commissioner Morisseau asked what the turnout has been for the various community meetings, and if the attendees have provided feedback on the best ways to reach out to them. Commissioner Morisseau also asked where the link to register for the housing forums is posted. Dr. Kate Nesse said the link is posted on EngagingBellevue.com and on the city calendar. The link admittedly could be distributed more widely. With regard to the number of attendees at community meetings, there have been at least 20 people at each event; the Merchants Breakfast had upwards of 80 in attendance. Organizations and groups are being asked what works best for them in terms of what they want to hear about and how they want to engage in the process. Folks are being encouraged to make direct contact with the Planning Commission and the City Council. Staff are engaged with a group of organizations that cover several Eastside cities to talk about middle housing, all organized through ARCH. One topic on the table is how to help the organizations help the people they serve talk directly to the advisory bodies and decision makers for the various cities.

Commissioner Morisseau asked if the feedback received from the groups is being shared with all involved staff groups, and if the information will be relayed at future community meetings. Dr. Kate Nesse said information is being shared with other staff in an ad hoc way. There is a subject matter experts meeting coming up in March and they can be asked about ways to better share information with other departments.

Commissioner Brown commented that the pandemic had a huge impact on transit ridership, how and where people work, and where people live. The question asked was how all that data is generally being incorporated, and how the fact that there remains a lot of uncertainty is being addressed. Dr. Kate Nesse allowed that the full extent of the impacts of the pandemic are not yet known. It is always important to remember when writing policy to set direction in general ways without getting into specifics, leaving room for the unknown.

Commissioner Brown asked how much social media is being used as part of the outreach effort. Dr. Kate Nesse said social media is used. Most of the outreach is handled by the community engagement coordinator. Commissioner Brown pointed out that NextDoor has been shown to be a very effective way to get the community involved.

Vice Chair Bhargava asked for details about the statistically valid outreach survey. Dr. Kate Nesse said a firm was hired to conduct the survey, the same firm that does other surveys for the city and in which the city has confidence. The firm was directed to conduct a survey that is statistically valid across the entire city. The data can be broken down by race, age and gender. Vice Chair Bhargava asked if it also includes renter versus homeowner and income levels. Dr. Kate Nesse confirmed it does.

Vice Chair Bhargava asked if there any known gaps in outreach that the city is aware of, known segments that are not being covered. Dr. Kate Nesse allowed that surveys typically hear less from people who rent; that is a fact across the nation. The same is true of folks who do not speak English, non-white residents, and younger folks. A lot of the outreach for the survey was to folks in those groups. Instead of waiting for those groups to step forward, the city is reaching out to them by meeting with students at Bellevue College, and by working with organizations that represent renters.

Thara Johnson added that the city's cultural outreach assistants have been engaged in reaching to various groups. There is a meeting with a Latinx group scheduled for next week, and there have been tabling events at religious organizations and other groups. More can always be done, and it is in fact the intent of the city to do more as the process moves forward.

Vice Chair Bhargava what is being done to address selection bias among those being reached out to. Dr. Kate Nesse said meetings that are scheduled and advertised on the usual channels will generate comments from people the city often hears from. Those voices are important because they are clearly engaged and paying attention. At the same time, there is a desire to hear from folks who are traditionally less engaged, so almost all of the outreach effort goes into finding ways to make contact with and meet with those communities.

Chair Ferris stressed the need to gain input from those in lower income levels. It can likely be assumed that those on the lower income scale are less engaged in city politics. There is low-income housing in the city, so possibly engaging with residents of those facilities would be important.

B. BelRed Subarea Plan Update (7:38 p.m.)

Senior Planner Gwen Rousseau stated that the BelRed Look Forward will be happening at the same time as the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update. The BelRed subarea, at over 700 acres, is one of the largest subareas in the city's transit growth corridor. There are four light rail stations serving the area: Wilburton, 120th, 130th, and Overlake in Redmond. The vision for BelRed seeks a broad range of housing at various levels of affordability; a vibrant economy with a diverse mix of commercial uses; a distinctive and sustainable urban form and design; a comprehensive, connected parks and open space system; a model of environmental sustainability; and a complete, connected and well-balanced multi-modal transportation system that contributes to BelRed's sense of place and

sustainability.

Much has happened since the vision was adopted in 2009. The projection of 5000 housing units coming to the area by 2030 is on track, with more than 2100 built to date and some 2400 units in construction review. More than 2.2 million square feet of non-residential development has occurred. Four light rail stations will serve the area. The city has invested more than \$194 million in transportation improvements. A total of \$8.6 million has been collected via fees in lieu to be used for affordable housing, and \$8.5 million has been collected for parks and streams.

Prior to the BelRed plan in 2009 there were only 117 units of housing in the subarea. Some of the first new housing units in the subarea were constructed near the Overlake station, followed by housing in the Spring District and south of Bel-Red Road. Townhome developments have provided some diversity in terms of tenure, size and style. Housing for older adults has been developed along 116th Avenue NE. Development around the 130th station has been slow getting started, but a lot of new development activity is now taking place in that vicinity.

Housing diversity in the subarea includes about a hundred affordable units through the amenity incentive system. About \$8.6 million has been collected via fees in lieu, to be used for affordable housing. There are four multifamily tax exemption projects in the pipeline that will supply 269 units, and the 36-unit Ilahee Apartments development has been preserved; it serves families with incomes below 30 percent of area median income. Most housing units developed in the subarea, 94 percent, are rental units. About half of the rental units are one-bedroom, and about a quarter are two bedroom units. Ten percent are studio units, and about 13 percent are open one-bedroom units.

Gwen Rousseau said one of the largest developments planned for affordable housing is the transit oriented development site located south of the operations and maintenance facility. It will provide 553 units, about half of which will be market rate units and the other half affordable. Of the affordable units, ten percent will be permanently affordable and 13 percent will be affordable for 12 years under the multifamily tax exemption program. The project will also provide 435,000 square feet of office and 49,000 square feet of retail.

A number of auto dealerships chose to locate in the subarea, particularly along NE 8th Street and Northup Way. Other non-residential development has included Seattle Children's medical facility, the Global Innovation Exchange education facility, and office buildings. About one million square feet has been constructed and another million square feet is in the pipeline.

With regard to transportation investments, the city has committed to getting infrastructure in place. The list of Capital Investment Program projects include work on 120th, 124th, 130th, and NE Spring Boulevard totaling some \$194 million from a variety of different sources.

The plan for parks and open space focuses on streams and placemaking. There has been investment in the West Tributary properties that separate the two nodes following acquisition by the city. The Spring District has done an excellent job of programming events, including the farmers market during the summer months. There has also been a lot of artworks added to the area.

Gwen Rousseau noted that to date \$8.6 million has been collected via fees in lieu for affordable housing, and another \$8.5 million for parks and streams. Some of the affordable housing fees in lieu went toward preserving the Ilahee Apartments.

Looking forward, policy work is intended to reflect new information since 2009. The work will also seek to strengthen the implementation strategies, increase residential capacity, and reflect comments that would further the overall vision for the area. The key policy issues will focus on land use in terms of expanding the extent and capacity of nodal zoning, especially for residential development; housing, specifically incentivizing family size as well as affordable units; the arts through defining an arts district and incentivizing art space, and preventing displacement; clarifying the east to west ped/bike connections and expanding the overall transportation grid; the environment in terms of strengthening the restoration of streams and natural drainage areas; expanding the acquisition of parkland and providing access to trails and waterbodies; and contextualizing the amenity incentive system.

The Commissioners were shown a map of existing zoning. It was pointed out that the nodes around the stations are skewed to the left or to the right. One thing that will be considered under Alternative 1 will be how to expand those nodes out further. Many arts uses are located in the General Commercial zone, and because of the location of light rail, one proposal will be to expand the higher intensity zones further east, limiting General Commercial to just north of Northup Way. Alternative 2 proposes a slight adjustment to bring nodal zones further south. Alternative 3 expands the residential emphasis areas and increases capacity within nodes by increasing FAR and height. While Alternative 2 continues to hold the area around the 120th station to office/residential, in Alternative 3, the focus is on increasing areas with a residential emphasis. Alternative 3 also includes zones that allow for a mix of medical, office and residential on the east side of 116th Avenue NE and allows for higher intensity in a new CR zone.

Gwen Rousseau reminded the Commission that cost-burdened households come in all shapes and sizes. Less than five percent of naturally occurring affordable housing units have three or more bedrooms. Policy work will include looking at how to increase the variety of housing units to match the diversity of household types and sizes. The BelRed Look Forward will also focus on strengthening policies for stream restoration and use of natural drainage practices, as well as ways to create access to streams and more placemaking opportunities.

The draft Environmental Impact Statement will be released at the end of April and will be followed by a 45-day comment period. The preferred alternative will be drafted using the input received and will be analyzed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Once the FEIS is released, a draft updated plan will be reviewed and revised, and public comment will be heard during a public hearing. The Commission ultimately will provide a recommendation to the Council. The goal is for the Council to adopt the Comprehensive Plan update in May.

Commissioner Goeppe pointed out that many of the existing buildings in the BelRed subarea are older and they house small and unique shops. Largely the uses are there because the rents are reasonable. With upzones and redevelopment, some of those gems could be lost. Gwen Rousseau answered that it will take a number of different tools to prevent displacement. Near the top of the list will be making sure that no existing uses will become nonconforming, allowing them to remain and operate so long as they are viable.

One of the challenges will be figuring out the right incentives to encourage the provision of affordable spaces for things like the arts and artists. Fees in lieu may be one approach leading to the acquisition of affordable spaces for artists.

Thara Johnson added that a displacement analysis is being undertaken as part of the scope of work for the EIS. Each of the alternatives will be evaluated with that lens, and the findings will be presented to the Commission. Additionally, prior Comprehensive Plan amendments have addressed the issue of new development triggering the loss of existing businesses. One approach could be adding policies in support of business retention within the Economic Development Element.

Commissioner Morisseau voiced support for reviewing the ped/bike connections and extending the grid and suggested the more cohesive way of viewing the transportation system would be with a multimodal lens. With regard to incentives, Commissioner Morisseau pointed out that less than five percent of the total number of housing units built in the subarea can be classified as affordable housing. The question asked was how to get developers more interested in building more affordable housing, and how the incentive process could be made more effective and efficient. Responding to the comment about using a multimodal lens relative to the transportation system, Gwen Rousseau said the grid is considered to include all modes of travel. There is a tendency to avoid building roadways that cross streams, but at the same time there are valid reasons for providing some kind of connection across streams for pedestrians and bicycles. Clearly most of the transportation investments made have been focused on the roadways, but ped/bike facilities have been included and will be going forward. The grid system comes into play when development happens and is something the city requires of the developers.

With regard to affordable housing, Gwen Rousseau agreed that five percent is a fairly low figure. One of the contributing factors was the fact that one of the first developments to happen was the Spring District, which was primarily office, and which benefited from the catalyst development incentive. With so much of the development being office, little was captured in terms of affordable housing. As development ramps up in the 130th area, more fees in lieu are being generated for affordable housing.

Commissioner Brown commented on how shocking it was to learn how little housing there was in the BelRed subarea in 2009. There clearly has been an explosion of new residential communities and developments, all of which is desperately needed. Staff asked if anything was done that caused the new interest in developing residential in the community by way of policy, or if it came about primarily because of the coming of light rail. Gwen Rousseau said BelRed historically was an industrial area. During the dotcom bust, all areas of employment in Bellevue were growing; BelRed was the exception and there actually was a decline. It was known that light rail was coming and the city planners concluded industrial zoning was not the best use of the land. They got out ahead of the light rail in working to see the BelRed subarea rezoned, creating the land use allowances and incentives for residential.

Vice Chair Bhargava suggested including on the list of key policy issues the topic of sustainability for everything from building typology to energy efficiency, transportation strategies and environmental issues.

Chair Ferris pointed out that the production of affordable housing is nowhere close to what the city needs, so a continued emphasis in that area is needed. It is good that

attention has been brought to the need for family sized units. The incentives and policies in place clearly are not enough, and it can be assumed that the fee in lieu is not high enough to actually produce real income or incentivize developers to produce affordable units themselves. Absent a requirement to produce affordable housing, the city will not achieve its goals.

Commissioner Cálad commented that in order for BelRed to be a balanced neighborhood, there will need to be some businesses. BelRed is currently heavily dominated by tech companies that are emptying thousands of offices in the Downtown. Those spaces will need to be filled by other businesses, and that will take a while and will be challenging. Developing more business spaces in BelRed will also be challenging. Gwen Rousseau explained that Alternative 3 looks at switching some of the emphasis on office zoning in BelRed to an emphasis on residential in part to address that issue.

Chair Ferris commented that healthy communities have a mix of business and housing. The ideal is being able to live where one works.

Commissioner Morisseau asked if during the interactions with the BelRed community there have been thoughts, concerns or feedback that has not been addressed. Gwen Rousseau explained that most of the comments received on BelRed came during the scoping period for the EIS. Most of those comments have been addressed. There were comments that spoke to environmental regulations and making them easier on development. There were also comments on being more flexible in terms of the mix of uses, especially in the 130th node. The work ahead will not focus on changing the vision, rather it will focus on strengthening implementation of the existing vision. The comments not aligned with the existing vision will not be a part of the mix. Commissioner Morisseau stressed the need to stress that point in working with the community.

Commissioner Goeppele expressed the view that the process is in fact heading in the right direction, though there are a couple of elements that will require some emphasis, including the need for affordable housing and diverse types of housing. Preventing displacement will also need to be addressed.

****BREAK****

C. BelRed Arts District Update

Arts Community Manager Lorie Hoffman said the BelRed subarea plan calls for the creation of an arts and culture district. What actually exists in the subarea can be called a naturally occurring creative cluster. A creative cluster differs from an arts district in a couple of ways: the city does nothing to make a creative cluster happen, and it usually is a byproduct of inexpensive commercial rents. Artists are drawn to place where they can afford to take risks, such as where buildings are a little older. A common phrase in the arts is that new ideas need old buildings. The move to becoming an arts district will require more management and formality with boundaries, borders and logos.

In the early 2000s, well before the 2009 BelRed subarea plan, there were studies done about the creative arts in the district. The 2009 plan designated BelRed as an arts and culture district. There have been many more studies done since, which translates into the development of a BelRed Arts District being data driven.

BelRed is a community at a crossroads. There is a lot of development coming to the subarea, and that represents both a massive opportunity and a massive threat. The question is how to soft land the arts district so it can be part of the new development. There will need to be both preservation of currently occupied spaces, and new facilities to house creative endeavors. Not every creative organization needs subsidized rent, but many do.

There are at present over a hundred creative businesses, artists and arts and culture organizations located in BelRed. They are there because the rents are fairly cheap. There are recording studios, drum shops, piano stores, an embroidery shop, art collectives, a book bindery, a game press, and a number of dance studios, to name a few. While looking at the update to the BelRed subarea and the fees in lieu, there is a clear need to make sure current entities are not lost by the closing window of opportunity.

Lorie Hoffman noted that in 2022 a consultant was hired to take a look at all of the previously done studies, look at arts districts across the country, and comment on how to move the BelRed Arts District from philosophy to practice. The consultant produced a five-year implementation plan focused on four strategic areas: management, visibility, connection and creative space. Each area is consistent for arts districts nationwide for taking creative clusters and turning them into arts districts.

With regard to management, an arts district needs an organization that is external to the city. While the city should serve as a partner, it is better for day to day management of the arts district to be handled by a non-profit. To that end, a non-profit group is forming that is made up of a combination of individual artists, creative business owners, developers and major employers. The name chosen for the organization is BelRed Arts District Community Alliance. They are looking at programs around active placemaking, visualization and supporting creative businesses. The city will serve as a partner in much the same way it does with the Bellevue Downtown Association. The organization's tagline is "Daylighting Creativity!" A new logo has been designed and a website will be live by the end of the month. The group is working with a local law firm on all the incorporation paperwork.

The goal of visibility is to make the district recognizable. When one walks through BelRed currently, it does not feel or look like an arts district. Arts districts are expected to have murals and utility box wraps; there are some but the district's status is still in progress. The first utility box wrap program addressed 10 utility boxes in the BelRed area. There are public art projects associated with the light rail stops along Spring Boulevard, and a mural pilot program is set to be launched in the spring that will involve ten artists who have already been selected. The walls have been selected and most of the artworks have actually been designed. All of the chosen walls are on Spring Boulevard in the heart of the arts district. Many of the mural designs play on the theme of transportation.

Two major public art works will be coming to the district in the next year and a half. One will be sited at 130th and Spring Boulevard. It is an interactive work by artist Po Shu Wang and installation is anticipated for late 2023 or early 2024. The second will be sited at NE 12th Street and Spring Boulevard. The work is called "*Rooted*" and is by artist Jill Anholt who welcomed feedback from both the Japanese American community and the Snoqualmie Tribe. The final design will be approved by the Arts Commission and the City Council in 2023.

Connection is the third strategic area. To that end much time has been spent engaging

folks and letting them know what progress has been made relative to the arts district. Contacts to date include those in the arts community, regional partners, stakeholder corporations, developers, community leaders and of course the city's department of Culture and Economic Development.

Lorie Hoffman said creative space is a critical strategy. The arts district will not exist unless there are creative spaces. Public art, murals and utility box wraps can be sited around the area, but absent space in which the community can express their creativity and culture, there will be no arts district. Discussions are under way with the planning department on establishing borders and boundaries. The BelRed Look Forward process will be beneficial by strengthening the policy base. Advocating for creative spaces in new development is a major element and to that end developers are contacted. Beyond the carrot, however, the city will need to employ the stick via fees in lieu and incentives. Currently, there is no FAR incentive for public art spaces in the district, though there is a public art incentive.

The big thing that has been done relative to creative space has been talking with Artspace Consulting. Artspace is the leading developer of affordable artist housing in the nation. Their consulting branch was contracted to conduct an art market study, beginning with a feasibility study in 2017. The conclusion reached was that it is indeed feasible to think about a mixed use affordable artist housing and affordable artist housing commercial development.

In 2022 the organization conducted an arts market study, which moves beyond just what is feasible. The study included a creative space survey for artists, and a focus group with arts organizations and creative businesses. There were 437 responses, of which 92 percent indicated an interest in at least one type of affordable creative space. The highest identified need was for shared creative space. The respondents were a broadly diverse group of individuals representing more than 30 creative fields.

In its studies across the nation, Artspace routinely sees a desire for three-bedroom units to house the artist and their families. Artist affordable housing differs from the more typical affordable housing in that there are different needs, such as deep single stainless steel sinks, concrete instead of carpet, taller ceilings and windows, and more sound dampening between walls. Surprisingly, the BelRed study showed a strong desire for one-bedroom and studio units. The study recommendations called for a mix of affordable artist housing with a majority at or below 60 percent of area median income, and shared specialized creative spaces that could accommodate galleries, drawing studios, workshop spaces, rehearsal spaces, and artisanal light industrial spaces.

Lorie Hoffman said the next steps include encouraging creative, economic growth and cultural growth in the BelRed Arts District. The Arts Market study will be used to persuade developers to include creative spaces, and to inform the city's processes relative to city-owned properties. There will be a continued focus on activating public spaces in the district, and on bringing in signage and visuals to the district within the next year or two.

Commissioner Goeppele asked if there is an anticipation that an identifiable center will be identified for the BelRed Arts District along the lines of the Torpedo Factory Arts Center in Alexandria, Virginia, which is housed in a converted munitions factory. Perhaps there is a building in the district with ties to the history of the area that could be converted to

become a center. Lorie Hoffman said a great deal of thought has been given to using that approach. Such centers are often referred to as anchors, which are the places to go for the arts. The Torpedo Factory Arts Center is one of the best examples in the nation. The issue for BelRed is that there are not many historic buildings. Whether historic or not, an anchor is clearly needed. The Pacific Northwest Ballet facility is a sizable creative center. The Yuan Ru Art Center, a 5000-square-foot facility in BelRed, is somewhat tucked away but is an excellent facility. What is missing is a central gathering space, and it likely will have to be built. The Kelly parcel to the south of the 130th Station is owned by the city and it is being eyed as a possible location.

Commissioner Morisseau asked if the bigger vision for arts and culture in BelRed includes the notion of creating an iconic identity, and if consideration has been given to presenting the arts from a cultural perspective and representative of the various demographics in the area. Lorie Hoffman said thought has indeed been put into an iconic identifier, but the desire has been to let the community decide what that should be rather than the city. The non-profit that is being formed have had a lot of conversations around the triangle of arts, tech and the environment in BelRed. Lorie Hoffman also agreed that the diversity of the area is a critical component given that art and culture cannot be separated; art is the physical expression of culture. The notion of developing a cross cultural center has been discussed for some time and may actually be a part of the mix.

A motion to extend the meeting to 9:45 p.m. was made by Commissioner Brown. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cálad and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Brown thanked Lorie Hoffman for the presentation and for the commitment to bringing art and culture to the city.

Commissioner Cálad voiced support for the efforts to establish an arts district in BelRed. Art brings balance to life by bringing together families, entertainment, fun, relaxation and opportunities for small businesses. It is needed by society. There should be an outcome in the form of an installation or something that will make Bellevue recognizable. It should be recognized that Bellevue is a leading city in the state and the country and as such the city should think big.

Commissioner Brown left the meeting at 9:11 p.m.

Vice Chair Bhargava noted having visited the Torpedo Factory and the arts district at Laguna Beach in California. Both of those places attract huge numbers of people. There is a clear need to include the performing arts in the mix, possibly with something like an amphitheater. One thing worth exploring is digital art. There are a lot of installations in cities around the world that project onto building façades. Lorie Hoffman said it is called projection mapping and it involves hiring an artist to make a wire frame for the building, then another artist applies their artwork onto the framing. It does not work on buildings with glass façades, and it is a good thing that there are a lot of brick or concrete façades in BelRed. With light rail coming through, it would be wonderful to incorporate a changing and living light mural installation. What Bellevue needs is a giant events park with a large amphitheater, possibly between BelRed and the Spring District. Downtown Park is wonderful but it is overprescribed.

Chair Ferris voiced support for the vision for arts and culture in BelRed. It will have a very positive impact on the city. The financing part of developing affordable artist housing

must be worked out, but it can be done.

Commissioner Morisseau agreed with the comments made and added that having interactive art is a good idea. Staff was asked if consideration has been given to interacting with the heritage centers in the area. The Eastside Heritage Center has a lot of artifacts that are brought out occasionally for the community to interact with. Lorie Hoffman noted being a big fan of interactive art, something that is true for a lot of folks. The Eastside Heritage Center did something interesting in January when it partnered with the Old Main Merchants Association to create a night market. The same type of thing could be done in Bellevue with various groups.

Vice Chair Bhargava said one of the things that is attractive about the Laguna Beach arts district is its annual arts festival. It has become a calendar event. Something similar should be considered for BelRed.

9. REMOTE PARTICIPATION APPROVAL
(9:17 p.m.)

A motion to approve remote participation for Commissioner Morisseau was made by Commissioner Goeppele. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cálad and the motion carried unanimously.

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
(9:17 p.m.)

A. January 25, 2023

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

B. February 8, 2023

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

11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATION – None
(9:20 p.m.)

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(9:20 p.m.)

13. ADJOURNMENT
(9:20 p.m.)

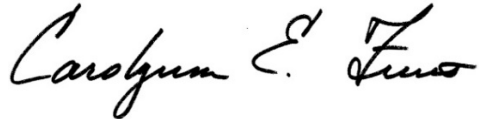
A motion to adjourn was made by Vice Chair Bhargava. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cálad and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Ferris adjourned the meeting at 9:20 p.m.



Thara Johnson
Staff to the Planning Commission

03/23/2023
Date



Carolynn Ferris
Chair of the Planning Commission

03/23/2023
Date