

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Regular Meeting

March 15, 2021
6:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Robinson, Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis, and Councilmembers Barksdale, Lee, Robertson, Stokes, and Zahn

ABSENT: None.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m., with Mayor Robinson presiding.

2. Roll Call; Flag Salute

City Clerk Charmaine Arredondo called the roll. All Councilmembers were present and participating remotely.

(a) Proclamation

Mayor Robinson noted the increase in anti-AAPI (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders) hate crimes and bullying. She said the behavior cannot be tolerated anywhere, and certainly not in Bellevue.

Councilmember Zahn read the proclamation reaffirming the City's commitment to ensuring that Bellevue is a diverse and inclusive community free from hate, bias, and violence based on race, nationality, gender, disability, or religion. She urged all residents to unite in solidarity with our AAPI neighbors.

Councilmember Barksdale led the flag salute.

3. Approval of Agenda

→ Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis moved to approve the agenda, and Councilmember Robertson seconded the motion.

→ The motion carried by a vote of 7-0.

4. Oral Communications

- (a) Elaine Fouche noted that she works in the social services department of a psychiatric hospital, and she supports the proposal to train police officers regarding mental health responses. However, she suggested creating a mental health response team that includes mental health professionals. She said there are already professionals trained to respond to individuals in crisis. She suggested using existing resources in the community to streamline the City's mental health response. She noted that individuals in crisis who are taken to the hospital by law enforcement are concerned that they will have a criminal record based on the incident.
- (b) Christian Dorsett noted that he suffered a traumatic brain injury in February 2020. He expressed concern regarding the handling of certain incidents by law enforcement. He said the U.S. criminal code should be abolished. He expressed concern regarding specific members of the Bellevue Police Department and alleged that an officer committed perjury in his case.
- (c) Pearl Leung, representing Amazon, said Amazon is committed to working with the City in planning for growth. She expressed support for the multifamily tax exemption (MFTE) program as a way to increase the supply of workforce housing. She suggested that the program's success should be tied to participation rates and the number of housing units that are generated. She said a primary barrier to developing affordable housing is the requirement for parking facilities. She said the MFTE program is a good tool for creating housing at the 80-percent area median income (AMI) level. She suggested that other approaches are better suited to developing lower-income housing.
- (d) Chris Johnson, Bellevue Chamber of Commerce, thanked the Council and staff for including businesses and the Chamber in its outreach regarding the MFTE program. He noted that 30,000 jobs are coming to Bellevue and housing is urgently needed. He urged the Council to target the MFTE program toward creating housing units for households earning 80-percent AMI. He expressed support for allowing developers to layer MFTE provisions with the City's regular incentive system. He suggested that parking facilities should not be required for affordable housing in urban land use districts.
- (e) Abigail DeWeese, a land use attorney, said she was speaking on behalf of the NAIOP Commercial Real Estate Development Association. She expressed support for the MFTE program as a tool for generating hundreds of middle-income housing units. She said the organization has been working with the City and the business community to address housing needs and the interests of developers. She suggested that the MFTE program should be focused on households earning 80-percent AMI instead of the current 50-percent to 70-percent AMI. She noted that parking requirements are a barrier to the creation of affordable housing.

5. Reports of Community Councils, Boards, and Commissions: None.

6. Report of the City Manager

(a) Police Department Community Crisis Assistance Team Update

City Manager Brad Miyake introduced staff's update regarding the police department's response to emergency calls involving persons in crisis who are suffering from mental health issues.

Police Chief Steve Mylett introduced Wendell Shirley, the new Assistant Police Chief.

Chief Mylett said the purpose of the Community Crisis Assistance Team (CCAT) is to better serve those in the community who are suffering from a mental health crisis and/or substance abuse issues. He said staff has evaluated similar programs across the country and has adopted certain aspects of those programs. He noted that he and Fire Chief Jay Hagen have had a number of conversations about integrating the CCAT program with the Fire Department's Citizen Advocates for Referral and Education Services (CARES) program. Chief Mylett said they hope to launch a pilot program over the next few months, and staff will provide an update at that time.

7. Council Business and New Initiatives: None.

8. Consent Calendar

→ Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis moved to approve the Consent Calendar, and Councilmember Stokes seconded the motion.

→ The motion to approve the Consent Calendar carried by a vote of 7-0, and the following items were approved:

(a) Council Minutes of February 22, 2021 Regular Meeting

(b) Motion to award Bid No. 21004, SR520 Bicycle Corridor Safety Improvements (CIP Plan Nos. PW-R-199, PW-W/B-56, PW-R-46) to NPM Construction Co. as the lowest responsible and responsive bidder in the amount of \$353,844.50, plus all applicable taxes. This project is partially funded by the Neighborhood Safety, Connectivity and Congestion Levy.

(c) Motion to award Bid No. 21008 for Commercial Water Meter Replacement 2020 to Fury Site Works, as the lowest responsive and responsible bidder, in an amount not to exceed \$110,511.44 plus all applicable taxes (CIP Plan No. W-98).

(d) Motion to approve payment of claims and payroll for the period February 1, 2021 - February 28, 2021.

(e) Ordinance No. 6570: 1) authorizing execution of a grant agreement (and supplements if necessary) with the Washington State Department of

Transportation (WSDOT) to accept up to \$1,455,600 in federal Surface Transportation Program funding to support the design of the 120th Avenue NE (Stage 4) - NE 16th Street to Northup Way Project; 2) amending the 2021-2022 General Capital Investment Program (CIP) Fund to increase the appropriation by \$1,455,600; and, 3) amending the 2021-2027 CIP Plan to increase the budget for 120th Avenue NE Stage 4, NE 16th Street to Northup Way (CIP Plan No. PW-R-186) by \$1,455,600.

- (f) Ordinance No. 6571: 1) authorizing execution of a grant agreement (and supplements if necessary) with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to accept up to \$1,282,600 in federal Surface Transportation Program funding to support the design of the Eastrail to NE Spring Boulevard Trail Link Project; 2) amending the 2021-2022 General Capital Investment Program (CIP) Fund to increase the appropriation by \$1,282,600; and, 3) amending the 2021-2027 CIP Plan to increase the budget for the Eastrail Project (CIP Plan No. G-103) by \$1,282,600.

9. Public Hearing: None.

10. Study Session

- (a) Multifamily Tax Exemption (MFTE) Program Update

City Manager Miyake introduced discussion regarding the update to the City's multifamily tax exemption (MFTE) program. He said staff will return in April with a recommendation in response to the direction and feedback provided by the Council.

Mac Cummins, Director of the Community Development Department, said the MFTE program is one of several tools for the City to address affordable housing needs. He said staff suggests focusing the program on the creation of workforce housing and allowing the layering of the MFTE provisions with other land use incentives. Additional policy issues to be discussed include the geographic expansion of the existing program, creation of family-sized units, affordability levels, life of project affordability, and parking costs.

Elizabeth de Regt, Senior Planner, said the MFTE program provides a 12-year residential tax exemption in exchange for offering 20 percent of the units at the 50-percent to 70-percent AMI level. Affordable units less than 300 square feet must be offered at the 45-percent AMI level, and all developments must provide two-bedroom or larger units for 15 percent of the units. The program currently overlaps with other incentive programs.

Ms. de Regt recalled that the Council approved initiating a review of the MFTE program in October. Based on feedback from community stakeholders, staff has developed and analyzed a number of scenarios to understand the financial and utilization impacts of each scenario. Ms. de Regt noted that state law requires a public hearing related to identifying the geographic target areas of the MFTE program. The past utilization of the program has been 15-20 percent. Since

October, two projects totaling approximately 100 affordable units have been approved under the MFTE program and developers' interest in the program is increasing.

Ms. de Regt said that stakeholder outreach included developers working on projects in Bellevue as well as the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce and the Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA). She said staff developed a detailed financial model in collaboration with the Chamber which calculates MFTE feasibility based on the project type and potential program changes. The feasibility index (FI) compares the cost of providing affordability and the benefit of the tax exemption, and takes into consideration various risk factors (e.g., property taxes, affordable rents, and market rents).

Ms. de Regt described the policy issues to be considered as the City updates its MFTE program. She presented a map depicting the existing residential target areas (RTAs), multifamily districts outside of the RTAs, and office (limited multifamily) zoning outside of the RTAs. Most multifamily zoning has access to transit, and staff recommends expanding the MFTE program to all current multifamily zoned areas.

Ms. de Regt requested Council feedback regarding the issue of geographic expansion.

Councilmember Zahn expressed support for expanding the MFTE program to all multifamily districts.

Councilmember Robertson expressed her support as well, noting that she has been an advocate for expanding the program for a number of years.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis and Councilmembers Barksdale, Lee, and Stokes expressed their support for expanding the program.

Mayor Robinson noted her support and suggested moving to the next issue of family-sized units.

Ms. de Regt said the current MFTE program requires that 15 percent of the units have two or more bedrooms. Staff recommends retaining the existing requirement and adding an alternate pathway based on either providing a higher number of affordable units or units with deeper affordability to lower AMI households.

Responding to Mayor Robinson, Ms. de Regt said that downtown housing developments currently have 15-20 percent of units with two or more bedrooms. Ms. Robinson recalled that the original intention of the requirement was to create housing for families. She expressed support for continuing the requirement.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis expressed support for retaining the existing requirement and for adding an alternate pathway based on providing more units or deeper affordability. He noted comments during earlier oral communications in support of targeting the MFTE program at the 80-percent AMI level. Responding to Mr. Nieuwenhuis, Ms. de Regt said that MFTE programs vary across jurisdictions, including in terms of how other incentives are combined with the MFTE program.

Councilmember Stokes expressed support for staff's recommendation.

Councilmember Lee expressed support for continuing the requirement for two-bedroom or larger units. He suggested that the proposed alternate pathway should be based on data and identified needs.

Councilmember Barksdale expressed support for staff's recommendation.

Councilmember Robertson expressed support for staff's recommendation. She noted that allowing the alternate pathway will enable the development of more studio and one-bedroom units or units at a deeper affordability levels. She encouraged flexibility for developers in how they use the requirement.

Councilmember Zahn said she supports staff's recommendation. She asked whether the code could address the inclusion of ADA features in units that could potentially be occupied by senior adults. Mr. Cummins said staff will return with a range of options to discuss, including a scenario that would require certain ADA features.

Moving on, Ms. de Regt described the issues related to affordability levels versus the quantity of affordable units. The City's current MFTE program targets households between 50-percent AMI and 70-percent AMI. She said that most of the 51-80 percent AMI units in Bellevue house lower-income families. She noted the lack of programs targeting 60-percent AMI to 80-percent AMI households. Ms. de Regt commented on the balance of affordability and quantity, noting staff's recommendation for a balance of the two versus maximizing affordability or maximizing the quantity of units. The City's existing MFTE program clearly targets deeper affordability over maximizing the number of units.

Councilmember Barksdale noted the need for units at the 60-percent to 80-percent AMI levels. He suggested targeting the balance between affordability levels and the number of housing units to optimize the benefit and utilization of the MFTE program. Ms. de Regt confirmed that his suggestion is consistent with staff's recommended balance of affordability and quantity.

Councilmember Lee expressed support for maximizing the number of units at the 80-percent AMI level.

Councilmember Stokes expressed support for staff's recommendation to balance affordability and the number of units.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis said he leans toward maximizing the number of units at 80-percent AMI, as suggested by Councilmember Lee. He would like to see the development of deeper affordability units. However, he feels it will ultimately be dictated by the market. He said this is a unique time in Bellevue's growth and there is a significant need for workforce housing.

Mayor Robinson said she views the MFTE program as one of many tools for creating housing, and she appreciates that the program can be layered with other existing incentives. She expressed

support for staff's recommendation, noting her interest in providing deeper affordability to the extent that is possible. Mayor Robinson said it can be difficult to achieve 80-percent AMI levels with other tools.

Councilmember Zahn concurred with the Mayor's interest in achieving deeper affordability below the 80-percent AMI level. She noted that the MFTE program is one tool, and House Bill 1590 revenues will provide additional opportunities for housing choices. She expressed support for ensuring that the MFTE program aligns with the feasibility index needed for developers.

Councilmember Robertson noted that the City is considering an update to the MFTE program because the current program, targeted at providing housing for households ranging from 50-percent AMI to 70-percent AMI, is underutilized. Responding to Ms. Robertson, Ms. de Regt displayed a table on slide 22 comparing the AMI level, feasibility index, and land use incentive overlap for five scenarios. Scenario 1A reflects the maximum utilization of the program and highest feasibility index at the 70-percent to 80-percent AMI level. Ms. Robertson expressed support for targeting the MFTE program to provide housing at the 80-percent AMI level, and for using other tools to provide housing for lower-income levels. She noted that much of the housing for lower-income levels is provided by nonprofit organizations.

Responding to Mayor Robinson, Mr. Cummins said that one question for consideration is whether the affordability level of the MFTE program should be increased if the program is expanded to all multifamily districts. Staff recommends that the MFTE program should be used to focus on creating workforce housing serving 80-percent AMI households. Mr. Cummins said the Land Use Code incentive system requires 80-percent AMI units to receive certain bonuses as well.

Moving on, Ms. de Regt described the following options regarding the layering of the MFTE program provisions with existing land use incentives: 1) retain existing layering, 2) remove ability to layer programs, or 3) allow the layering of programs, with deeper affordability required for overlapping units. Staff recommends option 3. Ms. de Regt provided additional comment regarding the comparison of scenarios on slide 22, noted earlier by Councilmember Robertson. The existing MFTE program is not feasible for developers unless it is layered with other land use incentives.

Ms. de Regt provided additional details on each of the scenarios, with and without the layering of MFTE requirements and land use incentives. Under Scenario 2, after the MFTE tax exemption period ends, the requirement for the deeper affordability units ends but a portion of the 80-percent AMI units would remain based on the non-MFTE land use incentives. Scenario 2, as recommended by staff, focuses on MFTE housing for 80-percent AMI households and allowing an overlap with land use incentives to create 50-percent AMI units.

Mr. Cummins asked whether the Council supports updating the MFTE program to focus on 80-percent AMI households only. He said the next question is whether to allow some type of layering with other land use incentives.

Mayor Robinson expressed support for staff's recommendation. However, she believes it will work only if there are clear guidelines and expectations for developers. Mr. Cummins noted that staff is working with A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH), the implementing agency, to determine how the City can clearly outline its affordable housing strategies and programs for developers in the region. Mayor Robinson suggested it would be helpful to have an online tool for developers to analyze the options for using the MFTE program and/or other land use incentives.

Councilmember Robertson concurred about the importance of providing clear guidance for developers and the public. She expressed support for layering MFTE requirements with land use incentives. She said she would like to see specific examples that involve layering land use incentives but decoupling them from the MFTE requirements. She expressed concern about slowing down the development of housing. Ms. Robertson said she would like to focus on updating the MFTE program using 80-percent AMI affordability and continuing to allow stacking with land use incentives.

Councilmember Stokes expressed support for focusing on 80-percent AMI affordability through the MFTE program and for allowing the layering of other land use incentives.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis asked whether there is information available regarding households earning 50-percent AMI or 60-percent AMI who are living in a 70-percent AMI unit. Mike Stanger, representing A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH), said it is very common for there to be people living in 80-percent AMI units when their household income falls below 70-percent AMI.

Mr. Nieuwenhuis concurred with Councilmember Robertson's suggestion to keep it simple, to maximize the number of affordable units at 80-percent AMI, and to continue to allow layering with other land use incentives.

Responding to Mayor Robinson, Mr. Cummins said the current MFTE program focuses on 50-percent to 70-percent AMI households and is intended to drive deeper affordability than what is achieved through other land use incentives. Bonuses include those related to density and floor-area ratio (FAR).

Councilmember Zahn said it would be helpful to have examples with a specific number of units. She expressed support for continuing to layer the MFTE program with other incentives. She noted that usage of the MFTE program represented 15-20 percent of projects more than a year ago. However, with two new projects, the utilization increases to 40-50 percent of projects.

Ms. de Regt noted that all of the options increase the AMI levels and make the program more feasible for developers. She acknowledged that more developers are learning about the program and expressing an interest. She said that staff's recommendation (Scenario 2) will increase the use of the program and generate many affordable units.

Ms. Zahn said that focusing on 80-percent AMI for the MFTE program simplifies and streamlines the process. She expressed support for Scenario 2 and continuing to allow the

layering of other incentives. She thanked staff for all of their work with the developer community.

Councilmember Lee said there are many tools available to address different AMI households. He expressed support for continuing to allow the layering of incentives and for monitoring which tools generate the highest number or deepest affordability units. He asked about staff's outreach to businesses and developers. He expressed support for Councilmember Robertson's suggestion for moving forward with the MFTE program focused on 80-percent AMI households and the continued layering with other land use incentives.

Mr. Cummins said the City reached out to businesses and developers to determine the financial return needed to make it feasible to develop affordable housing units. He said City staff worked with community stakeholders to determine the feasibility index for each scenario that was analyzed.

Emil King, Assistant Director, Community Development, said staff met monthly with the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce's Planning, Land Use, Sustainability, and Housing (PLUSH) Committee since October. Staff also worked with members of the development community and the Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA). He said staff determined that Scenario 2 will greatly increase the utilization of the MFTE program.

Ms. de Regt noted that the minimum feasibility index for Scenarios 1A, 1B, and 2 are similar to each other. She said that developers indicated that a feasibility index above 20 will trigger utilization of the MFTE program.

Councilmember Barksdale said it makes sense to listen to the recommendations from developers in terms of choosing a scenario. He thanked staff for their analysis of a number of options. He expressed support for continuing to offer the flexibility to use the MFTE program and/or other land use incentives.

Councilmember Robertson said it would be helpful to have specific examples under the different scenarios in terms of what will happen if the City allows layering without the deeper affordability. She noted that, in some areas of Bellevue, it is not feasible to build a multifamily development without using a land use incentive. Ms. Robertson described examples she developed to illustrate the scenarios. She emphasized the need for more workforce housing and encouraged facilitating the use of the MFTE program and other incentives to achieve deeper affordability. Ms. Robertson requested that staff develop actual scenarios of developments if they use the MFTE program only, incentives only, or a combination of the two.

Mayor Robinson concurred that it would be helpful to review specific examples to demonstrate the scenarios. She said it is important to have a range of affordability in housing types for first-time homebuyers, families, and older adults who are downsizing. She suggested that if housing becomes available at the 50-percent AMI level and people are able to shift to a less expensive unit that they can better afford, more units will become available for higher-earning households (80-percent AMI).

Councilmember Stokes said the Council's policy role is to maximize the availability of affordable housing. He said the City has been innovative in approaching housing needs and in working with the community. He expressed support for staff's recommendation (Scenario 2).

Councilmember Lee said that housing is needed for 25,000 to 30,000 workers who are coming to Bellevue. He said it is important to provide a variety of housing. He would like to increase the utilization of the MFTE program and land use incentives. He said the City has a number of tools to address different income levels. He said it is important to avoid unnecessary mistakes and to understand how all of the tools work together.

Responding to Mayor Robinson, Mr. Cummins said the existing MFTE program is not being used as much as the City had hoped. He said that raising the AMI level to 80 percent will have a substantive positive impact on the utilization of the program.

Councilmember Zahn said the MFTE program is not new to Bellevue, and the City is learning as time goes on. She said staff has done an exceptional job of gathering data, conducting public outreach, creating scenarios, and working with the development community to analyze those scenarios. She encouraged moving forward with staff's recommendation (Scenario 2), which will generate the production of 80-percent AMI units and 50-percent AMI units.

Ms. Zahn concurred with Councilmember Robertson that examples would be helpful. However, she believes that Scenario 2 is the right balance of optimizing the number of units and a balance of affordability.

Mayor Robinson noted that all Councilmembers support a baseline of 80-percent AMI. She said that four Councilmembers prefer Scenario 2, and three Councilmembers prefer Scenario 1B. She noted the Council's interest in discussing some specific examples. She said there is Council support for requiring a number of family sized units while extending the MFTE program to one-bedroom and studio apartment developments.

Moving on, Ms. de Regt said the current MFTE program provides a 12-year tax exemption in exchange for 20 percent of the units to remain affordable over 12 years. She noted that staff identified a potential option to create an alternative 8-year tax exemption for developers in exchange for approximately 8% of the units to remain affordable over the life of the project. She said staff recommends waiting to discuss this issue because proposed state legislation could influence the Council's decision. Mayor Robinson confirmed the Council's interest in learning more about the 8-year tax exemption option.

Ms. de Regt introduced the issue of parking and the cost impacts for housing projects. She said the Land Use Code defines the required quantity of parking for a project. She noted that covering the cost of a parking space for each tenant of an affordable unit costs the building owner an additional \$150 or so per month. Ms. de Regt said staff recommends an alternative approach due to decreasing Land Use Code parking ratios. She said that three-quarters of employees in Bellevue earning less than \$50,000 drive to work, and 91 percent of the households on the ARCH list who are looking for housing in Bellevue need parking with their housing. She said the question is who is paying for the parking.

Ms. de Regt said the City's current approach is to require one parking space per affordable housing unit. She said staff is interested in achieving a more even distribution of parking capacity for affordable and market-rate units.

Ms. de Regt requested Council feedback about whether parking should be partially incorporated into the total rent for affordable units. Staff recommends that parking be partially covered for tenants of affordable units. However, less parking could be covered for affordable unit tenants in areas with frequent transit service. Ms. de Regt said this is consistent with the planned shift in ARCH's approach to affordable housing. She said that separating parking and rental costs burdens tenants and is inconsistent with ARCH's model.

Ms. de Regt requested Council direction about whether to pursue a general parking approach. If so, staff will return with specific recommendations to consider during the next study session discussion.

Mr. Cummins said he believes there is some confusion in the community about parking requirements. He said the City has approved multiple MFTE development projects with less than one parking space per unit required. He noted the increasing use of transit. He said the question to consider is whether and under what circumstances the City would allow the owners of affordable housing units to not provide access to parking. He said the City removed the parking requirement entirely for a recent downtown project located next to the light rail and bus transit station.

Councilmember Robertson reiterated that her goal is to achieve more missing middle housing for the projected influx of 25,000 to 30,000 new workers. She said it would be helpful to analyze data from multifamily housing in Seattle, which has relatively high density and high numbers of tech workers, to study the utilization of parking facilities. Ms. Robertson said she believes that parking should not be included in the housing cost. She noted the Council's longtime environmental and mobility goals that support encouraging transit use. She said that parking requirements discourage developers from providing affordable units, and she prefers decoupling rent from parking costs.

Councilmember Zahn stated her understanding that approximately 90 percent of the workers in Bellevue live elsewhere, and the City is interested in improving the worker-housing balance to decrease traffic congestion and longer commutes. She noted that while individual car usage currently remains high, the reliance on cars will decrease as transit services expand. She suggested that parking facilities could be repurposed in the future if the demand for parking decreases.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis said he appreciated staff's extensive outreach. However, he said the City has heard from the development community for years that parking requirements negatively impact the feasibility of certain projects. He asked whether the MFTE program will be utilized if parking facilities are required.

Mayor Robinson asked staff to follow up on Councilmember Zahn's and Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis' comments and questions.

Councilmember Stokes said he looks forward to a more in-depth discussion about the parking issue during the next study session on this topic.

Councilmember Lee noted the goal of fewer cars and enhanced transportation technologies for the future.

Councilmember Barksdale expressed an interest in developers' views about covering or partially covering parking for tenants in affordable housing units. He asked whether there is an opportunity to explore whether building owners could pay for transit passes for tenants instead of providing parking facilities.

Councilmember Lee encouraged the City to continue to work with developers to receive feedback on the effectiveness and feasibility of housing and incentive programs. He said it would be helpful to have more ideas from staff about how to address parking requirements.

Mayor Robinson said she is aware of affordable housing units in Redmond near transit services in which every tenant is provided a transit pass. She would like to explore that alternative. She encouraged looking at overall parking demand instead of separating parking requirements for market-rate versus affordable units. She suggested following the state requirements. She noted that a developer may also provide their own parking study to determine the anticipated demand.

Ms. Robinson suggested making it easier to allow no parking facilities in one-bedroom and studio developments in transit-oriented development (TOD) areas, especially in the downtown. She said that frequent transit service can reduce the need for cars, which reduces living costs. She would like to have more affordable units and more housing choices across all areas of Bellevue. She expressed support for Councilmember Barksdale's suggestion to explore whether requiring transit cards could be a viable option to parking requirements.

Mr. Cummins said staff will be back in April for further discussion.

At 8:53 p.m., Mayor Robinson declared a short break. The meeting resumed at approximately 9:00 p.m.

(b) Bellevue Botanical Garden Society Update

City Manager Miyake introduced the update from the Bellevue Botanical Garden Society.

Nancy Kartes, Garden Manager, Bellevue Botanical Garden, noted a list of 10 organizations that partner with the garden. She said staff and the partners worked together to determine how to continue to safely serve the community during the pandemic. She said a limited number of horticulture volunteers were able to return to the garden last summer.

Cleo Raulerson, Co-President of the Bellevue Botanical Garden Society Board of Directors, said she has been involved with the garden for the past seven years. She said the garden has met the challenges of the pandemic and has proven that with innovation, creativity, and technology, the society can exceed its goals and continue to serve the community. She thanked the City's Information Technology (IT) Department for their support of the garden's technology needs.

Ms. Raulerson said the garden started offering adult education programs through online webinars and has reached a larger audience than would be possible with in-person classes. The society offered 36 webinars serving 3,600 people between April 2020 and January 31, 2021. Ms. Raulerson said the society has provided learning resources for educators and parents and online virtual field trips. The garden is reaching out to underserved populations and groups that normally cannot come to the garden. She said live events are held weekly on Facebook. The Garden d'Lights event in December was temporarily replaced with online videos of past events.

Ms. Raulerson said the society's membership is growing, which is a testament to the value and importance of the botanical garden and its programming. She said the society gained 435 new members over the past 10 years. Many members express their appreciation for the garden's ongoing programs during the pandemic. The society raised \$165,000 during its end-of-year fundraising efforts. She said the society is working with City staff to update the garden's plant collection software and database. She noted that virtual programming has expanded the garden's outreach locally and beyond.

Ms. Raulerson said the garden will celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2022. She thanked the Council for its ongoing support.

Mayor Robinson noted that she is a big fan of the botanical garden and it is always a relevant feature of Bellevue. She asked how the pandemic has affected the garden's hosting of national programs and conferences. Ms. Raulerson said the virtual lectures and programs have worked well with participants from across the country. She said the society feels that the garden's national exposure has increased with the pandemic. However, the garden still focuses on its local experts, speakers, and partners.

Councilmember Barksdale thanked Ms. Kartes and Ms. Raulerson for the presentation and expressed appreciation for access to the garden during the pandemic. Responding to Mr. Barksdale, Ms. Kartes expressed an interest in working with the master gardeners demonstration garden. She noted that they grow edible plants, and there is a high level of community interest in edibles. Ms. Raulerson said that a number of the botanical garden's volunteers are also master gardeners who are involved with the demonstration garden. Ms. Kartes said the garden is discussing the potential development of a visiting horticulturalist program with organizations across the country.

Councilmember Zahn said the Bellevue Urban Garden is across the street from the master gardeners demonstration garden. She encouraged the Bellevue Botanical Garden Society to reach out to them for potential partnerships. She said she has enjoyed the tea ceremonies in the garden in the past. Ms. Zahn asked whether the society has sponsored Tai Chi classes to enjoy the calmness of the garden. Ms. Kartes said that individuals practice Tai Chi on their own in the

garden. However, there have not been any organized classes in the past. She said the garden has been asked to consider yoga classes as well. She noted that the garden features wellness walks and forest bathing experiences. Responding to Councilmember Zahn, Ms. Kartes confirmed that the garden provides programs for youths.

Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis thanked the guests for the update and noted that the garden is a community jewel. Responding to Mr. Nieuwenhuis, Ms. Raulerson said the garden society is considering how it might be able to produce Garden d’Lights this year using timed ticketing as well as following any pandemic-related restrictions that might still be in place. She said the volunteers are eager to resume the event. Ms. Kartes noted that Ms. Raulerson has been the Co-Chair for the Garden d’Lights event for a number of years.

Councilmember Stokes concurred with the suggestion to partner with the Bellevue Urban Garden to provide educational programs. He thanked staff for operating the garden and café during the pandemic. He noted that the Eastrail will enhance access to the garden in the future. He thanked everyone for their hard work.

Councilmember Lee said the botanical garden is a community treasure. Responding to Mr. Lee, Ms. Kartes said that one of the things the garden lost during the pandemic is the visitor sign-in book. Without that, the garden has not been able to track where people are coming from. Prior to the pandemic, the garden has had visitors from more than 50 countries. In further response, Ms. Raulerson said the garden hopes to coordinate activities with Wilburton Elementary School when students return to class. Councilmember Lee thanked all of the garden’s volunteers for their hard work.

(c) North East King County Regional Public Safety Communications Agency
(NORCOM) Emergency Dispatch Service Update

City Manager Miyake introduced the update regarding the North East King County Regional Public Safety Communications Agency (NORCOM) emergency dispatch service.

Bill Hamilton, Executive Director, NORCOM, noted his 32-year career in law enforcement until he retired in 2018. He joined NORCOM in May 2019. He said NORCOM’s regional standardized service provides enhanced interoperability between police and fire functions as well as cost savings for the agencies that are served. NORCOM was established by an interlocal agreement (ILA) in 2007, and the dispatch service became active in July 2009. The NORCOM ILA is managed by a Governing Board comprised of one representative from each agency or municipality. Mr. Hamilton noted that Deputy City Manager Nathan McCommon serves on the Governing Board.

Mr. Hamilton said that most of NORCOM’s revenue comes from the participating user agencies. Additional revenues are generated through the 911 excise tax and grant funding. In 2020, approximately 43 percent of all NORCOM police and fire calls were within Bellevue’s city limits. NORCOM serves six police agencies and 14 fire agencies. The fire service area is quite large, extending from Shoreline/Bothell to Skykomish and Snoqualmie Pass. Mr. Hamilton said that NORCOM serves 700,000 people across 620 square miles. The agency has 54 employees

who all are trained to function as both call takers and as dispatchers. Mr. Hamilton highlighted the specialized training required for both positions. Continuing education includes: 1) de-escalation training, 2) quarterly drills, 3) implicit bias awareness training, 4) outside agency drills, 5) emergency simulation training, and 6) emergency medical services (EMS) training.

Mr. Hamilton acknowledged the challenges associated with continuing NORCOM's operations during the pandemic, especially given that the communications team cannot work from home. He said they have responded admirably and the community is in good hands. NORCOM agencies coordinated alerts to first responders regarding confirmed COVID patient locations and developed messaging in anticipation of questions from the public.

Looking to the future, Mr. Hamilton said a project is underway to integrate the two computer-aided dispatch systems originally created separately for police and fire agencies. He thanked the City for its excellent partnership and continued support of NORCOM's operations, which is housed in Bellevue City Hall.

Mayor Robinson thanked Mr. Hamilton for the update and for his positive comments regarding Deputy City Manager McCommon and City staff.

Councilmember Barksdale thanked Mr. Hamilton for the presentation. He expressed his appreciation for the call takers and dispatchers in the 911 center. He asked whether NORCOM works with mental health professionals in handling calls. Mr. Barksdale asked whether NORCOM employees have received COVID vaccinations.

Mr. Hamilton said there is a great deal of proposed and/or pending legislation to address behavioral and mental health at this time. He said NORCOM is exploring options, including pursuing a navigator service grant and studying the crisis intervention team model. He said NORCOM does not have a mental health professional on its regular staff team. Mr. Hamilton acknowledged that public safety agencies are beginning to integrate mental health professionals into their operations. He said the Bellevue Fire Department's CARES (Citizen Advocates for Referral and Education Services) program does a good job of responding to individuals in crisis who need referrals to services. Mr. Hamilton said that the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe provided vaccines for all of NORCOM's employees.

Councilmember Zahn expressed appreciation for NORCOM staff for their effectiveness in a challenging job. She expressed support for providing mental health resources to assist with screening the 911 calls. She commended NORCOM for the extensive training provided to staff.

Responding to Ms. Zahn, Mr. Hamilton noted that there is a peer support program and a mental health professional to assist staff dealing with traumatic calls. In further response, Mr. Hamilton said NORCOM involves interpreters if there are language barriers in processing the call. He concurred that NORCOM employees could benefit from multicultural training as it relates to their jobs. He said he would follow up with more information regarding their use of scenario training.

Councilmember Lee congratulated Mr. Hamilton on the success of the NORCOM partnership. Mr. Lee said the City of Bellevue is a leader in a number of regional efforts, including NORCOM and ARCH (A Regional Coalition for Housing). He thanked Mr. Hamilton for the presentation and for NORCOM's creative and innovative approach. Mr. Lee expressed support for the effort to integrate the police and fire CAD systems. He said he appreciates the extensive training of personnel and the sensitivity to diversity.

Councilmember Stokes said he attended the NORCOM meetings when he was the mayor, and he enjoyed getting to know the people involved in the organization. He thanked Deputy City Manager McCommon for representing the City of Bellevue on the NORCOM Governing Board.

Mayor Robinson thanked Mr. Hamilton for the information and discussion.

11. Land Use: None.
12. Other Ordinances, Resolutions, and Motions: None.
13. Unfinished Business: None.
14. New Business: None.
15. Executive Session: None.
16. Adjournment

At 9:53 p.m., Mayor Robinson declared the meeting adjourned.

Charmaine Arredondo, CMC
City Clerk

/kaw