



Bellevue Planning Commission

March 24, 2021

PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Study Session on a proposed Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA) for Sequence One of the Grand Connection Guidelines and Standards, creating a new section 20.25A.175 in the Land Use Code (LUC). File No. 20-114098-AD.

STAFF CONTACTS

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POLICY ISSUES

The proposed Grand Connection Sequence One Guidelines and Standards LUCA implements key elements of the vision illustrated in the Grand Connection Framework Plan and the 2018 Grand Connection Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA). This LUCA, and the overall Grand Connection Framework Plan and CPA, together referred to the Grand Connection Initiative, support improving livability, access, and placemaking along the Grand Connection route.

The City Council has identified the Grand Connection Initiative as a Council Priority. To further the vision, it will take advantage of private sector redevelopment along the route and City investment in new infrastructure, such as intersection improvements. This LUCA contains new guidelines and standards, referred to as the Grand Connection Sequence One Guidelines and Standards, in LUC 20.25A.175, and revises and replaces the existing Pedestrian Corridor and Major Public Open Space Design Guidelines. Sequence One addresses the area from the intersection of 100th Avenue NE and Main Street to the east end of the Transit Center (NE 6th Street and 110th Avenue NE).

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION

DIRECTION

INFORMATION ONLY

This is the second of two study sessions where staff will be presenting conformance amendments necessary to align Part 20.25A with the proposed LUC section 20.25A.175 and providing answers and follow-up responses to the questions and comments raised during the first study session. Following review and discussion, the Planning Commission will be asked to schedule a public hearing for April 28 on the proposed LUCA.

	Topic Areas
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Study Session 1 (March 10): LUCA Topic Areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic 1. General Requirements • Topic 2. Grand Connection Route, Room, and Major Public Open Space Locations • Topic 3. Grand Connection Guidelines and Standards • Topic 4. Room Specific Guidelines and Standards
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Study Session 2 (March 24): LUCA Topic Areas (cont.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conformance Amendments • Topic 5. Questions and Answers from Study Session 1

<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Public Hearing (April 28):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Public Hearing • Planning Commission Recommendation
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BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Background

The City adopted the Grand Connection CPA through Ordinance No. 6449 in 2018 (Attachment A). The CPA changed the Urban Design and the Arts Element, and policies and maps in the City’s Comprehensive Plan Downtown Subarea Plan regarding the Grand Connection. Specifically, the CPA included policies to improve connectivity, establish cohesive design strategies, and create a vibrant cultural corridor that offers enjoyable and memorable experiences.

The Grand Connection route is separated into two sequences. Sequence One addresses the area from the intersection of 100th Avenue NE and Main Street to the east end of the Transit Center (NE 6th Street and 110th Avenue NE). Sequence Two addresses the area east of NE 6th Street and 110th Avenue NE and the crossing of Interstate 405 to the Wilburton Area and the Eastrail. The Grand Connection route is provided as Attachment B.

At the March 10 Study Session, the Planning Commission was introduced to the proposed Grand Connection Sequence One Design Guidelines and Standards LUCA. This LUCA will revise and replace the existing Pedestrian Corridor and Major Public Open Space Design Guidelines and amend LUC 20.25A to create section 20.25A.175 Grand Connection and Major Public Open Spaces. The new section streamlines provisions related to the Grand Connection and is intended to be clearer and more user-friendly for reviewers, project teams, and the general public.

This LUCA will also include “conformance amendments” to Part 20.25A to effectively integrate the proposed LUC section 20.25A.175 and ensure consistency with the broader Downtown Code. A strike-draft of the proposed conformance amendments is included with the Grand Connection LUCA as Attachment C.

Proposed Conformance Amendments

The new section 20.25A.175 Grand Connection and Major Public Open Spaces creates omissions and incorrect references elsewhere in the Land Use Code, which necessitates general clean-ups for clarity and ease of administration. For instance, the implementation of "Grand Connection Rooms" and the extension of the Grand Connection route to Old Bellevue results in gaps in the existing Land Use Code definitions. The proposed conformance amendments create a new definition for "Grand Connection Rooms" and revise the Grand Connection definition to include the area between Bellevue Way and Old Bellevue.

Another example is regarding the building/sidewalk relationship designations in LUC 20.25A.170.B. These conformance amendments include a redesignation of 102nd Avenue NE, between Main Street and NE 1st Street, from a "B" right-of-way to an "A" right-of-way. This Downtown building/sidewalk relationship designation change aligns with the Grand Connection design guidelines and standards and is necessary to account for the Grand Connection route extending through Old Bellevue. Notably, these conformance amendments do not separately make any substantive changes to the LUC.

Topic 5. Questions and Answers from Study Session 1

At the March 10 study session, the Planning Commission had a good discussion about the Grand Connection and expressed enthusiasm for the proposed LUCA. Also, the Planning Commission raised comments and questions related to accessibility, cultural sensitivity, and sought clarification on City efforts to emphasize pedestrian comfort and safety, particularly at intersections. A summary of these comments and questions and staff's responses are provided below.

1. How can we emphasize accessibility beyond the minimum requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act?

Response: Staff appreciates this inquiry and has engaged with representatives from the Transportation Department and Diversity Advantage Team to discuss potential edits appropriate to the context of the LUC. The 2018 Grand Connection CPA provides direction for an accessible and intuitive multimodal connection designed for all users of the Grand Connection (S-DT-45). Thus, this LUCA includes an intent statement for universal access that is applicable to the entire Grand Connection Sequence One route.

However, based on comments from the Planning Commission and subsequent internal discussion, staff recommends adding "universal design" to the intent statement along with "universal access," to bolster the focus beyond only access-related approaches such as a clear path of travel. Additionally, staff recommends amending one of the four predominant goals for the Grand Connection Sequence One Guidelines and Standards to "facilitate both universal access and design by integrating intuitive features within each Room to promote equitable use and safe and accessible opportunities for people to move, explore, gather, and relax." A proposal must meet specific decision criteria in the LUC, which includes the requirement to address all applicable design guidelines in a manner which fulfills their purpose and intent. The anticipated outcome of including this revised intent statement and goal is for projects to emphasize universal access and design in all aspects of a proposal.

2. How can we ensure that people living in neighborhoods outside of the Downtown have access to the Grand Connection?

Response: People access Downtown in a variety of ways today. Many people are anticipated to visit the Grand Connection and its focal points, including the newly constructed Phase I Meydenbauer Bay Park and the nearly completed Downtown Park. Users of the Grand Connection may arrive at the Transit Central "room" by bus or light rail, while others may enjoy the Grand Connection during their workday, while shopping, or while visiting one of the many focal points Downtown has to offer.

Staff agrees that ensuring ease-of-access to the Grand Connection is essential, as the overall initiative reflects the community's values and council priorities. The Parks Department is also evaluating access, equity, and inclusion as updates are made to the 2016 Bellevue Parks and Open Space System Plan. Within the scope of this LUCA, the additions to the universal access and design language in the intent statement described above will elevate the necessity for access for all.

3. In what ways does this LUCA address the Grand Connection as a vibrant cultural corridor, and how can we promote cultural sensitivity in this planning initiative?

Response: The Urban Design and the Arts Element of the Comprehensive Plan was amended in 2018 to include Policy UD-20.1 “Support and encourage the development of the Grand Connection as a cultural corridor by designing and creating spaces for performance, installation, and temporary-based art and cultural installations.” A predominant goal for the Grand Connection Sequence One Guidelines and Standards LUCA is to “establish a vibrant cultural corridor that offers enjoyable and memorable experiences.” To achieve this goal, artistic elements are required corridor-wide with the stated intent of providing space for performances and encouraging installations and presentation of artistic elements that can be integrated or paired with embedded wayfinding. This LUCA also includes guidelines and standards to promote the use of artistic elements as a representation of the cultural contexts of Downtown Bellevue.

4. How does this LUCA support a safe and active people-focused route, particularly at street intersections?

Response: This LUCA builds upon the Pedestrian Corridor framework, which has a stated purpose of serving as a focus for pedestrian use. The Urban Design element of the Comprehensive Plan was amended to include Policy UD-69.1 “Encourage the development of the Grand Connection vision to create a unique, defining, and signature experience for people walking, riding a bicycle, or using other compatible mobility options, recognizing that the pedestrian experience and pedestrian safety take precedence over other modes.” This LUCA implements policy UD-69.1 through pedestrian-centered design guidelines and standards ranging from paving, landscaping, lighting, and intersections.

The Downtown Transportation Plan implements aspects of the Grand Connection Initiative through the designation of exceptional intersections along the Grand Connection at NE 6th Street and 110th Avenue NE, 108th Avenue NE, 106th Avenue NE, Bellevue Way NE, and in Old Bellevue at NE 1st and 102nd Avenue NE, and across Main Street and at 102nd Avenue NE, 101st Avenue SE, and 100th Avenue NE. Exceptional intersections incorporate a pedestrian scramble (a type of traffic signal movement that allows pedestrians to cross the intersection in every direction, including diagonally, when vehicular traffic is stopped), raised crossings, and freestanding wayfinding. Artistic crosswalk markings and special paving may also be provided to distinguish the crosswalk and provide a more interesting and pleasant environment for the pedestrian.

Public Outreach and Engagement

Extensive internal collaboration and public involvement informed development of the proposed LUCA. Staff is following a public engagement plan with three modes of outreach and engagement to ensure the public, stakeholders, and interested parties have access to up-to-date project information and the opportunity to provide comments.

1. Process IV Requirements. Process consistent with Chapter 20.35 LUC procedural requirements to provide opportunities for public comment, including:
 - Notice of Application of the proposed LUCA, SEPA notification; and
 - Public hearing on the proposed LUCA anticipated in April.
2. Engagement and Feedback. Dialogue and sourcing previously documented comments with various stakeholders, including:

- Sourcing and referencing previously documented comments from the Grand Connection Framework Plan process;
 - Informational briefings with City boards and commissions and civic and business organizations in Bellevue;
 - Focus groups with landscape architects, architects, and developers with property along the Grand Connection route; and
 - Consultation and testing of the draft LUCA content with design teams working on active projects along the Grand Connection.
3. Online Presence. City webpage to provide opportunities for the public to stay informed, including:
- Staff contacts; and
 - Public information regarding LUCA progression.

Anticipated Schedule

The anticipated timeline for processing this LUCA with the Planning Commission will occur between March and April, and with the City Council in May and June.

- Planning Commission Study Sessions: March 10 and 24
- Planning Commission Public Hearing and Recommendation: April 28 (tentative)
- City Council Study Session: May (tentative)
- City Council Action: June (tentative)

ATTACHMENT(S)

- A. Grand Connection Route
- B. Grand Connection CPA (Ordinance No. 6449)
- C. Proposed LUCA