



Bellevue Planning Commission

June 11, 2025

PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Downtown Center Redesignation – Update the Downtown Subarea Plan

STAFF CONTACT(S)

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POLICY ISSUES

PSRC established the Regional Centers Framework in 2018 to guide regional growth. The Regional Centers are priority areas for federal transportation funding. Downtown Bellevue was originally designated a Regional Growth Center in 1995. In 2024, PSRC launched a Monitoring and Redesignation process for existing regional centers to ensure that the Regional Growth Centers continue to comply with PSRC's regional Vision, recently updated to Vision 2050 and assess the regional center's performance with accommodating growth. Also, Comprehensive Plan Policy LU-19 directs the city to, "Sustain Downtown's designation as a Regional Growth Center."

The redesignation of Downtown as a Regional Growth Center will allow Bellevue to continue to be eligible for federal transportation funding. Bellevue has submitted the application to retain the Regional Growth Center designation for Downtown based on this update.

The Downtown Subarea Plan is part of Volume 2 of the Comprehensive Plan. The update to the Downtown Subarea Plan will be included as one of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Amendments along with the Great Neighborhoods plan updates (to Crossroads and Newport).

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION

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DIRECTION

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INFORMATION ONLY

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Staff request the Planning Commission direct staff to hold a public hearing for the Downtown Subarea Plan Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA).

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

City Council launched the Downtown Subarea Plan update on January 14 to update the plan to meet the requirements for redesignation of the Downtown Regional Center by Puget Sound Regional Council. Planning Commission was introduced to the scope of the update at the May 28 meeting.

At the May 28 meeting, Planning Commissioners voiced support for maintaining the Regional Growth Center designation. There was a request for more engagement with the downtown community, particularly renters but stressed that it should be appropriate to the scope of the project. Staff is following up on possible connections or presentations but has not received additional feedback. In addition, there was a question about how we track work from home in accounting for jobs and

commuting dynamics. The official count of jobs is estimated each year by PSRC based on data from the Employment Security Department. The City continues to innovate in tracking employment and commuting dynamics in response to the changes in workplace dynamics due to the Pandemic.

To support the monitoring and redesignation process, Council directed the City to update the Downtown Subarea Plan to reflect the current state of Downtown Bellevue and detail the role of the growth center in contributing to the plan for growth in Bellevue in the Comprehensive Plan. The narrative of the Downtown Subarea Plan (Attachment A) and the policies of the plan (Attachment B) have both been updated. In addition to the details below, the update will include changes to maps and graphics to bring them up to current ADA standards, the use of more current photos, and the use of the latest layout format, consistent with the Comprehensive Plan (Volume 1).

1. Update the growth targets to align with the updated targets in the Comprehensive Plan.

All references to the growth targets have been updated to the 2044 growth targets. This includes the targets for Downtown that are listed in the Comprehensive Plan (Volume 1).

2. Describe the potential for growth in Downtown and how Bellevue is planning for that growth.

The description of the recent history has been updated to include completed projects. One of the key changes has been the growth in planning around the Grand Connection. At the last update a pedestrian corridor was a key concept for guiding growth in Downtown. It is now a unifying feature of Downtown with specific implementation opportunities in public and private spaces. The description of transportation planning was also updated to reflect the current method of meeting transportation needs through the performance targets for the multimodal transportation network in the Mobility Implementation Plan.

3. Update current measures of housing, population, and jobs in the plan specific to Downtown Bellevue.

The measures have been updated to the most recent data available. Additionally, the growth target numbers have been updated to reflect the new horizon year, 2044.

4. Describe activities to ensure equitable engagement in the plan update process.

A paragraph has been added to the section, “A Community’s Vision” that describes the engagement process for major updates to the Downtown Subarea Plan. This paragraph aligns with the updated policies in the Community Engagement element in the Comprehensive Plan (Volume 1).

5. Update or add maps describing current environmental and transportation infrastructure.

All the maps are being updated to include current transportation infrastructure, including active transportation infrastructure such as the Grand Connection. The maps are also being updated to meet current ADA standards. The maps will be included with the Public Hearing draft of the plan.

6. Add policies to mitigate residential and commercial displacement.

The following policies have been added or amended to address residential and commercial displacement. Residential and commercial displacement are primarily addressed at the citywide level and there are several policies in the Comprehensive Plan (Volume 1) to mitigate displacement. Two areas that are specific to Downtown are the access to affordable commercial space for small businesses and providing a housing that meets the needs of a variety of households. (All policies and proposed amendments are included in Attachment B).

| New No. | Old No. | Proposed modification |
|---------|---------|--|
| S-DT-23 | | <u>Increase access to affordable commercial space for small-scale retailers to grow and retain small businesses in Downtown.</u> |
| S-DT-29 | S-DT-25 | <u>Meet the needs of a variety of household sizes in diverse economic circumstances with</u> Provide for a range of Downtown urban residential types and densities, including affordable housing. |

7. Add policies related to planning for people of color, people with low incomes, and historically underserved communities.

The following policies have been added or amended to address planning for people of color, people with low incomes and historically underserved communities. Addressing the needs of historically underserved communities is primarily addressed at the citywide level in the Comprehensive Plan (Volume 1). The recognition of the contribution of historically marginalized communities to the continued evolution of Bellevue is something that Downtown, as a hub of activity, is in a unique position to do. In addition, policy S-DT-119 was updated to focus on meeting the needs of a wide variety of park users rather than on the specifics of park programming. (All policies and proposed amendments are included in Attachment B).

| New No. | Old No. | Proposed modification |
|----------|----------|---|
| S-DT-24 | S-DT-21 | <p>Work with local heritage groups to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit items that document the history of Downtown Bellevue; • Use plaques and interpretive markers to identify existing and past sites of historic and cultural importance; • Develop a contingency plan and prioritization for Downtown's historic resources, which may include voluntary relocation of significant historic structures to Bellevue parks property. • <u>Recognize the contributions of historically marginalized communities to Bellevue.</u> |
| S-DT-119 | S-DT-116 | <p>Provide an equitable distribution of neighborhood-serving parks and open spaces throughout Downtown. These amenities should include a mix of passive, green open space along with more</p> |

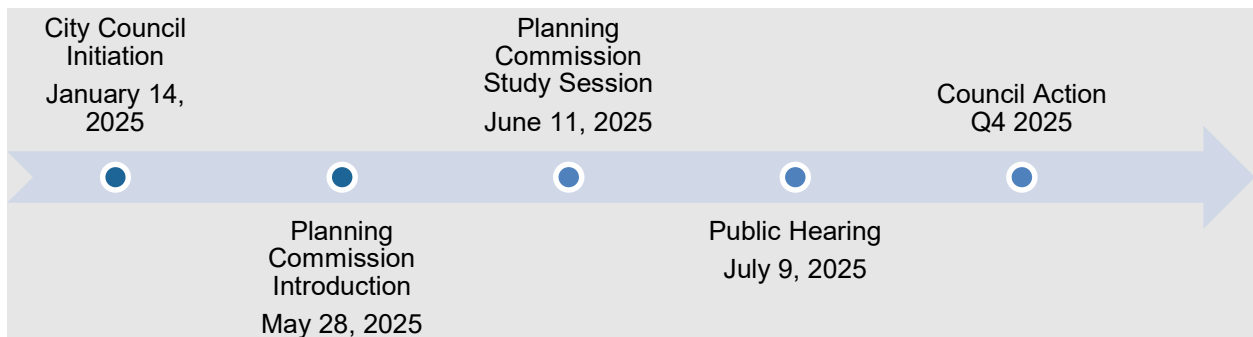
~~formalized hardscape areas~~ address the needs of a wide variety of park users.

8. Add policies to reduce the impact on the environment through greenhouse gas emissions and other means.

The following policies have been added or amended to reduce the impact on the environment. Two policies are proposed to be added to encourage low carbon building design and expanding sustainable stormwater infrastructure. In addition, green space was added as an option for public open space. (All policies and proposed amendments are included in Attachment B).

| New No. | Old No. | Proposed modification |
|----------|----------|---|
| S-DT-17 | | <u>Support strategies for net-zero and net-positive development and create opportunities to pilot low-carbon building design principles.</u> |
| S-DT-39 | | <u>Look for opportunities to expand sustainable stormwater infrastructure, tree canopy, and landscaping that enhances ecological functions and urban wildlife habitat connectivity.</u> |
| S-DT-108 | S-DT-104 | Require developer contributions for a coordinated system of major and minor public open spaces along the pedestrian corridor and at designated intersections. These could include areas for seating, fountains, courtyards, gardens, places to eat, and public art, <u>and green space.</u> |

Project Timeline



Public Engagement

This update is relatively minor and does not involve any changes in strategic direction. The primary goal is to inform people of the process as the update is focused on meeting the Regional Growth Center requirements. The City has received no comments on this proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment to date.

ATTACHMENT(S)

- A. Downtown Subarea Plan Narrative Proposed Amendments
- B. Downtown Subarea Plan Policies Proposed Amendments