

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC

2025 Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendments: Downtown Center Redesignation – Update the Downtown Subarea Plan to redesignate Downtown Bellevue as a Regional Growth and Metro Center as part of the Puget Sound Regional Council’s (PSRC’s) Regional Centers Monitoring and Redesignation process.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**DIRECTION**

The City Council will review the 2025 proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan for an update to the Downtown Subarea Plan to support PSRC’s Regional Growth Centers monitoring and redesignation process for Downtown Bellevue to maintain its designation as a Regional Growth and Metro Center. Planning Commission recommendations will be presented to Council, and staff seek Council direction to prepare Ordinances for final action to adopt the proposed amendments to the Downtown Subarea Plan and the general documenting Ordinance for all proposed 2025 Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendments (CPAs).

RECOMMENDATION

Direct staff to return with an Ordinance to adopt the changes to the Downtown Subarea Plan and the general documenting Ordinance for all proposed 2025 Annual CPAs.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS**Background**

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. Bellevue has submitted its application to PSRC for redesignation of Downtown as a Regional and Metro Center based on the draft updates to the plan. Bellevue has not yet received any feedback from PSRC on the draft policies.

The monitoring and redesignation process evaluates how the region’s system of centers meets regional objectives and determines whether updates to the centers may be needed. PSRC released its monitoring report in June. The monitoring report identifies Bellevue as a city that has experienced significant growth in the region. Downtown Bellevue has increased its activity units (population + jobs per acre) by 77 activity units between 2010 and 2023 – the second largest increase in density among Regional Centers (Seattle’s South Lake Union was the only center that increased its density more – by

200 activity units). This makes it the third most dense Regional Center, behind South Lake Union and Downtown Seattle.

City Council launched the update of the Downtown Subarea Plan to support the redesignation of the Regional Center on January 14 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. This update is part of the 2025 annual CPA process along with updates to the Crossroads and Newport neighborhood plans. The scope of the update to the Downtown Subarea Plan was limited to:

1. Updating the growth targets to align with the updated targets in the Comprehensive Plan.
2. Describing the potential for growth in Downtown and how Bellevue is planning for that growth.
3. Updating current measures of housing, population, and jobs in the plan specific to Downtown Bellevue.
4. Describing activities to ensure equitable engagement in the plan update process.
5. Updating or adding maps describing current environmental and transportation infrastructure.
6. Adding policies to mitigate residential and commercial displacement.
7. Adding policies related to planning for people of color, people with low incomes, and historically underserved communities.
8. Adding policies to reduce the impact on the environment through greenhouse gas emissions and other means.

The redesignation of Downtown Bellevue as a Regional Growth Center and Metro Center will allow Bellevue to continue to be eligible for federal transportation funding. The recommended updates are focused on amendments that bring the plan up to date and meet new requirements for Regional Centers under Vision 2050.

Planning Commission Recommendation

The Planning Commission discussed the update to the Downtown Subarea Plan at two study sessions (May 28 and June 11) and held a public hearing (July 9). The recommended plan includes updates to the narrative and policies to support the redesignation of Downtown as a Regional Center. The Downtown Subarea Plan has been placed in the new plan format with updated photos and is included as Attachment E for Council's information. The following description of the amendments to the Downtown Subarea Plan will refer to the strike/underline version (Attachment A).

Updating the narrative and figures to reflect current conditions (scope items 1-3)

The recommended plan includes updates to the narrative and policies. These changes do not change the vision for Downtown. Rather, they were made to ensure that the description matches the City's current policies and practices and reflects changes in the urban environment. This includes updates to the description of:

- The growth targets and descriptions of growth (Attachment A; pages 4, 13)
- Description of Downtown's role as a Regional Center (Attachment A, page 5)
- References and descriptions of recent development (Attachment A; Bellevue Square, page 2-3; Ashwood Park, page 3; recent development in Downtown, page 3; Grand Connection, pages 5,

7, 8, 9, 16, 19; Eastrail, pages 5, 7, 20; urban design, pages 8-9, 12; Link Light Rail, page 3, 11, through-block connections, page 18)

- The Mobility Implementation Plan and transportation planning process (Attachment A, pages 13-14, 15, 18, 19-20; the Curb Management Plan, page 16, 17)

Describing equitable engagement in the plan update process (scope item 4)

The City's policies for equitable engagement are in the Community Engagement element of the Comprehensive Plan, Volume 1. Because these policies apply to all plan updates, including updates to the Downtown Subarea Plan, there is no reason to repeat them in this plan. However, a paragraph was added to the narrative generally describing the inclusive approach the City takes to updating the Downtown Subarea Plan (Attachment A, page 1-2).

Update or add maps describing environmental and transportation infrastructure (scope item 5)

The current Downtown Subarea Plan includes one map. This update adds two additional maps, and the changes on each map are described below. The maps are included as Attachment C, including the revised Map S-DT-2.

- Map S-DT-1. Downtown Subarea Boundaries. This map was updated to use colors and symbols that are accessible to a wider variety of readers. In addition, the Perimeter Area was updated to match the Perimeter Overlay Map shown in Bellevue's Land Use Code (Figure 20.25A.060.A.3).
- Map S-DT-2. Transportation, Open Space & Environmental Resources. This is a new map, added to meet the requirement for Regional Centers to describe transportation and environmental resources. This map also shows the Grand Connection segments, a significant piece of the transportation network in Downtown. Staff noted that the map that was included in the Planning Commission materials for their recommendation was inaccurate. Staff recommend adopting the revised Map S-DT-2 which shows the existing bicycle facilities accurately.
- Map S-DT-3. This map is included in the current Downtown Subarea Plan but was not numbered. It has been numbered and updated to use colors and symbols that are accessible to a wider variety of readers.

In addition to the updates to the maps, there are several figures and diagrams on maps, showing concepts described in the plan. These figures have been updated to be larger and more readable. They have also been numbered and references included in the text, so it is clear where the figure is relevant. The colors of Figure S-DT-5 were updated to respond to a community comment. All of the figures are included in Attachment D.

Add or amend policies to address residential and commercial displacement, plan for historically underserved communities, and reduce the City's environmental impact (scope items 6-8)

All of the changes, including renumbering and minor updates, are included in Attachment B.

In addition, the narrative has been updated to include the contributions of native people and Japanese-American immigrants to the evolution of Downtown Bellevue (Attachment A, page 2).

Community Engagement

Engagement with the community focused on sharing information, and the scope of engagement was designed to match the narrow focus of the update to the plan. As the update was under development, the City provided opportunities for the public to learn about the update by sharing information through existing meetings and presentations with residents and businesses in and near Downtown.

When the proposed changes came to Planning Commission, a couple of stakeholders provided comment on the updates. The comments included:

- A more current description of Bellevue Square.
- The representation of open space in Figure S-DT-5.
- A desire to expand the scope to include updates to transportation policies.
- Concern over potential implications of Policy S-DT-23 leading to mandatory affordable commercial space in new developments.

At the Planning Commission's direction, the updates were revised to address all of these comments except the expansion of scope to include updates to transportation policies. The recommended plan reflects these changes.

Timeline

The Downtown Subarea Plan is part of Volume 2 of the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan may only be updated once per year, therefore all updates under consideration come to Council for action together at the end of the year. If Council directs staff to return with an Ordinance to adopt the amendments to the plan, the update to the Downtown Subarea Plan update will be included as one of the 2025 CPAs along with the updates to Crossroads and Newport neighborhood area plans through the Great Neighborhoods Program.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

Growth Management Act and Comprehensive Plan

The Growth Management Act states that comprehensive plans may be amended no more frequently than once per year (with limited exceptions) so that the cumulative effect of the proposals can be considered.

The Comprehensive Plan's Land Use element provides policies to maintain Downtown Bellevue's designation as a Regional Growth Center.

Comprehensive Plan Policy LU-19 directs the City to, "Sustain Downtown's designation as a Regional Growth Center." The monitoring and redesignation process is a procedure carried out periodically by PSRC to ensure that the Regional Growth Centers continue to comply with PSRC's regional Vision, recently updated to Vision 2050. The update supports the redesignation of Downtown as a Regional Growth Center.

State Environmental Policy Act

The Environmental Coordinator for the City of Bellevue determined that the Downtown Subarea Plan amendments will not result in any probable, significant adverse environmental impacts. A final threshold Determination of Non-Significance (DNS) was issued for the Downtown Subarea Plan on June 18, 2025.

Final Review Decision Criteria for CPAs

The Planning Commission may recommend, and the City Council may approve, or approve with modifications, an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan if all the Final Review Decision Criteria from Section 20.30I.150 of the Land Use Code are met:

- A.1 There exists obvious technical error in the pertinent Comprehensive Plan provision; or
- B.1 The proposed amendment is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and other goals and policies of the City, the Countywide Planning Policies (CPP), the Growth Management Act, and other applicable law; and
- B.2 The proposed amendment addresses the interests and changed needs of the entire City as identified in its long-range planning and policy documents; and
- B.3 The proposed amendment addresses significantly changed conditions since the last time the pertinent Comprehensive Plan map or text was amended (See LUC 20.50.046, included below, for the definition of “significantly changed conditions”); and

Significantly changed conditions are defined as: Demonstrating evidence of change such as unanticipated consequences of an adopted policy or changed conditions on the subject property or its surrounding area, or changes related to the pertinent Plan map or text; where such change has implications of a magnitude that need to be addressed for the Comprehensive Plan to function as an integrated whole. This definition applies only to Part 20.30I Amendment and Review of the Comprehensive Plan (LUC 20.50.046).

- B.4 If a site-specific proposed amendment, the subject property is suitable for development in general conformance with adjacent land use and the surrounding development pattern, and with zoning standards under the potential zoning classifications; and
- B.5 The proposed amendment demonstrates a public benefit and enhances the public health, safety, and welfare of the City.

Fiscal Impact

Downtown’s designation as a Regional Growth Center makes the City eligible for federal transportation funds. The redesignation of the center would ensure that Bellevue continues to be eligible for these funds.

OPTIONS

1. Direct staff to return with an Ordinance to adopt the changes to the Downtown Subarea Plan and the general documenting Ordinance for all proposed 2025 Annual CPAs.
2. Provide alternate direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Downtown Subarea Plan Narrative – Strike/Underline
- B. Downtown Subarea Plan Policies – Strike/Underline
- C. Downtown Subarea Plan Maps
- D. Downtown Subarea Plan Figures
- E. Downtown Subarea Plan Draft Layout
- F. Planning Commission Recommendation

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A