

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES

January 5, 2026  
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Singh, Commissioners Gonzalez, Hays, Perelman, Phan, Rashid, White

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Christy Stangland, Toni Esparza, Ruth Blaw, Saada Hiltz, Gysel Galaviz, Department of Parks & Community Services

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present

POLICE LIAISON: Major Ellen Inman

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Singh who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

At the roll of the call, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Perelman who arrived at 6:04 p.m.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. December 1, 2025

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Vice Chair White. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gonzalez and the motion carried unanimously.

4. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Chilimbwe Washington noted being a new resident of the city, recently arrived from Texas, shared having multiple sclerosis, and remarked that the moderate climate of the Pacific Northwest is a better choice. Also to be praised is the area's cultural diversity, air quality, and overall experience. It was surprising and concerning to have experienced racism, which had not been anticipated. Despite all that, appreciation was voiced for the region and its healthful

benefits.

5. COMMUNICATION FROM CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None

6. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Commissioner Phan noted having participated in the parliamentary training early in December along with Commissioners Gonzalez and Rashid. The material was presented in a very interesting way.

7. INFORMATION FOR THE COMMISSION – None

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Officer Elections

Chair Singh opened the floor to nominations for Chair.

Vice Chair White nominated Commissioner Phan.

There were no other nominations and Commissioner Phan was elected Chair by unanimous vote.

Chair Singh handed the gavel to the new Chair.

Commissioner Phan nominated Commissioner Phan to serve as Vice Chair.

There were no other nominations and Vice Chair White was elected Vice Chair by unanimous vote.

Department of Parks and Community Services assistant director Toni Esparza took a moment to thank Commissioners Singh and White for their years of service as Chair and Vice Chair.

Commissioner Phan also thanked Commissioners Singh and White for their service, and for continuing to serve on the Commission.

B. Probation Services Division and Community Court Presentation

Probation Manager Craig Fritz explained that the probation services and human services divisions both operate within the Department of Parks and Community Services, and both divisions serve and impact marginalized populations. There is alignment between probation and human services given that there are shared intersections with access to essential services, behavioral health needs, economic insecurity, and housing instability.

Probation serves as an alternative to incarceration, allowing individuals the opportunity to serve a period of supervision in the community rather than in jail. Within the city, probation services handle misdemeanor-level offenses by referral from the district court. Felony cases are managed at the superior court level or by state and federal agencies. Probation and parole are not the same even though they are often spoken about together. Probation allows individuals to continue working, supporting their families, attending school, and remaining engaged in their communities. Probation is a mechanism for accountability and support, achieved through regular contact with probation officers and program coordinators. It enables individuals to complete court-ordered requirements while maintaining stability in their daily lives. Probation is essentially pre-incarceration or in-lieu of incarceration, while parole occurs post incarceration.

The City of Bellevue operates in partnership with the King County District Court. The city does not operate a municipal court system and does not elect its own judges. Instead, Bellevue has entered into a longstanding contractual agreement with King County to provide court services for individuals charged with offenses within the city. The arrangement is governed by a general administrative order and a Memorandum of Understanding that defines all responsibilities and expectations.

Craig Fritz shared data with the Commission regarding probation referrals over the past five years. The data showed a pronounced upward trend in probation referrals, with increases of approximately 22 percent over 2024, 48 percent over 2023, 123 percent over 2022, and roughly 215 percent since 2021. The growth was attributed to Bellevue's overall population increase, greater activity in the city, and expanded investments in public safety, including policing, which can result in more reported and processed offenses.

Data was also presented regarding probation referrals by reported gender and race for 2025. It was acknowledged that not all individuals report the information, which results in incomplete datasets. Efforts are ongoing to improve data collection given that available demographic information is considered when designing and offering programs and services.

Commissioner Hays asked whether the increase in probation referrals correlates with growth in cases referred to King County courts. Craig Fritz said there likely is a direct correlation given the substantial increase in overall caseloads. It was also suggested that the probation division's strong outcomes and service offerings may contribute to higher referral rates.

Major Ellen Inman asked about comparisons between pre-COVID and post-COVID referral levels. Craig Fritz explained that referrals dipped during the height of the pandemic when court operations were limited; that was followed by a significant rebound. By 2025, referrals had exceeded pre-COVID levels by a substantial margin.

Craig Fritz said there are some common barriers and challenges faced by individuals on probation. They include accessibility issues related to disabilities; economic hardship stemming from limited employment opportunities; transportation difficulties; childcare responsibilities; housing instability; and reliance on public assistance. Court requirements can compound the challenges, such as when individuals who have lost their driving privileges are required to complete multiple obligations. Limited access to education and employment opportunities was

also highlighted, with an emphasis placed on the importance of connecting individuals to resources rather than framing the gaps as personal failings. Housing affordability, language access, and transportation were identified as persistent challenges. Although the region has relatively strong transit options, the location of the probation office presents access difficulties for some; that has been partially addressed through awareness of local on-demand transportation services.

Craig Fritz reiterated the benefits of probation for individuals associated with the ability to remain in the community and avoid incarceration while continuing to work, attend school, and maintain family connections. Particular emphasis was placed on having access to resources, services, and treatment, much of which is provided directly within the probation office, reducing the burden on clients who might otherwise be required to travel to multiple locations. All services are offered at no cost to clients; the service fees were eliminated in 2024. There are benefits to the broader community as well, including increased accountability, enhanced public safety, cost savings to the city, reduced repeat law enforcement contacts, and consistently low recidivism rates.

Commissioner Perelman asked how recidivism is measured, particularly for individuals who commit offenses in Bellevue but do not reside in the city. Craig Fritz explained that probation tracks repeat offenses both within the City of Bellevue and anywhere beyond the city limits. The lower recidivism rate reflects offenses committed within Bellevue, while a separate, slightly higher rate reflects offenses committed in any jurisdiction. Even when considering offenses committed anywhere, the rate remains relatively low at approximately 15 percent based on the most recent analysis. The figures are calculated over a three-year period, during which a representative sample of clients is reviewed. Each selected case is examined manually to determine whether any new offenses occurred during the timeframe. It was clarified that recidivism analysis is conducted using a sample rather than the full population, due to the size of the client list and the manual nature of the process.

Toni Esparza added that the sampling methodology involves a manual process which has produced stable and consistent results over many years, which suggests it is representative of overall outcomes. The three-year period was selected to exceed the one-year standard often used elsewhere and to better reflect the typical duration of probation supervision. Recidivism rates outside Bellevue are higher than those within the city but still remain lower than the broader national and regional averages.

Commissioner Perelman asked how Bellevue's probation program compares with those in other jurisdictions. Craig Fritz explained that King County operates a centralized probation division with officers assigned to satellite locations in several cities, including Redmond, Shoreline, and Seattle. Some cities, including Des Moines and Tukwila, operate their own municipal courts and probation divisions, while others rely on King County services. Auburn is currently transitioning toward establishing its own municipal court system. Kirkland already has its own probation services. The structure and availability of probation services varies depending on the jurisdiction.

Craig Fritz emphasized that probation allows individuals to continue their lives within the community while being supported and supervised. Probation officers and program coordinators

maintain regular contact with clients, conducting monthly or more frequent meetings as needed. The interactions focus on ensuring compliance with court orders, identifying unmet needs, and coordinating services. Risk and needs assessments are conducted when required, supplemented by evaluations from external providers such as substance use and mental health professionals. The assessments inform the supervision strategies and service referrals.

There are additional core probation functions, including reviewing client backgrounds and criminal histories, monitoring compliance, and maintaining close communication with the courts. Reports are provided to judges not only when violations occur but also to document compliance and positive progress. When clients reside outside Bellevue, the staff work to connect them with services closer to their place of residence in order to minimize unnecessary travel and barriers to participation.

Craig Fritz provided an overview of the probation program offerings, which include the Alive at 25 defensive driving course for individuals aged 16 to 24; an anger management program for non-domestic assault-related offenses; and a six-month moral recognition therapy program for domestic violence cases. A separate defensive driving course is available for individuals aged 25 and older. Additional services include an in-house resource connection program addressing needs such as housing, insurance, employment, and education, as well as a license support program that assists clients in resolving driver's license suspensions.

There is a resource closet located within the probation office that provides food, hygiene items, clothing, shoes, backpacks, and other essentials. Clients are invited to select items they need with staff support. In one case a client appearing in court without appropriate clothing was assisted via the resource, allowing them to present themselves with dignity. A consumer awareness and anti-fraud class is also included in the suite of supportive services offered through the probation program.

Commissioner White asked if the classes are offered in person, virtually, or through both formats. Craig Fritz responded that classes are available in both formats, although only a small percentage are conducted virtually. Virtual participation is maintained in order to reduce barriers and to accommodate clients based on individual circumstances, including those who live far from Bellevue or who face transportation challenges even when they reside relatively nearby. Judges generally prefer in-person participation but remain open to virtual options when a demonstrated need exists; determinations are made on a case-by-case basis to ensure services are accessible and responsive.

Craig Fritz said the Bellevue work crew program is the division's structured community service option that can also serve as an alternative to confinement. In some cases, individuals ordered to serve brief jail terms may be permitted to complete equivalent days on the work crew. The program operates in partnership with other parks-related divisions, and much of the work takes place in parks and natural areas, including the blueberry farms at Kelsey Creek, Mercer Slough, and Winter's House. Participants often particularly value assignments at Kelsey Creek due to opportunities to work near animals. Work crew sessions are reported as occurring consistently every Wednesday and Thursday, year-round, with cancellations or indoor alternatives only in cases of severe weather. The consistency helps clients complete service requirements more

efficiently than they might be able to do independently, while also delivering tangible benefits to city park operations and the community.

Craig Fritz explained that electronic home monitoring is used at the pre-trial level primarily for continuous alcohol monitoring through a transdermal bracelet. Additional monitoring tools include portable breath testing devices that prompt clients at random times to submit breath samples. Post-sentencing, electronic home monitoring may be imposed as an alternative to incarceration, generally involving a bracelet that can include GPS capabilities when ordered. Electronic home detention is essentially incarceration at home, though judges commonly authorize limited movement for essential obligations such as employment, school, grocery shopping, and childcare-related travel. The division works closely with clients to ensure compliance with all conditions established by the court.

Craig Fritz then addressed diversity, equity, and inclusion within the probation division, focusing first on language access. Care is taken to make sure that clients are provided with access to all programs regardless of primary language, using both language line services and in-person interpretation. As an example of Title VI compliance, services were offered in multiple languages through in-person interpretation during the prior year, including Cantonese, Farsi, Mandarin, Mongolian, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Tigrinya, and Vietnamese. The probation team consists of twelve individuals with diverse professional experiences and varied backgrounds, including different genders, languages, and races. Program quality and outcomes are monitored through client exit surveys and annual reviews of performance measures, including recidivism statistics, and the staff pursue ongoing training to remain current with evolving practices and requirements.

The Bellevue community court is a King County District Court program that operates in Bellevue as part of a broader regional model. Planning for the approach began with a steering committee meeting in February, which was followed by a program launch in July and an open house in October. The community court is held at the Bellevue library rather than at the courthouse. The presiding judge is Judge O'Toole, a King County District Court judge who also serves at the Bellevue courthouse. Community court is a meaningful alternative to traditional court processes, and it is designed to address underlying issues and to reduce barriers to success through supportive services, accountability, and early intervention. Many participants are individuals with a first offense or a first offense in many years, making early intervention a key feature of the approach.

The library's central location, proximity to the transit center, and its welcoming environment are significant strengths. The city was involved early on as the deputy city manager participated on the steering committee. The Bellevue Police Department provides security, and the city attorney's office works closely with the court and public defenders to investigate and process referrals. The city's homelessness outreach team has a regular presence at the community court and is one of the most frequently visited resource tables at the accompanying resource center; numerous connections have reportedly been made since the program began. The probation division has been an active partner from the outset, offering access to its classes, skill-building programs, and support services. The work crew program is a particularly common avenue through which participants complete their required community service.

Craig Fritz said individuals are approved by the city prosecutor and eligibility is limited to nonviolent misdemeanor cases, with common referrals including trespass, disorderly conduct, theft, and drug possession. Driving-related offenses such as DUI and reckless driving, as well as domestic violence cases, are ineligible under the current criteria. The community court serves as an alternative problem-solving approach that addresses underlying needs and issues. The court is of benefit to Bellevue residents through enhanced public safety and restorative resolution of low-level offenses, and to city operations through reduced future criminal justice involvement and improved coordination among departments and community partners.

Craig Fritz said the community resource center is a core component of the community court model. The resource center operates concurrently with the community court. It is shifting from Tuesdays to Thursdays beginning, with weekly hours from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. The resource center is open to any community resident, not only community court participants. The services offered include food assistance, with the Salvation Army providing hot lunches weekly; healthcare and health insurance enrollment; housing and homelessness outreach supports; mental health and substance use services; programming such as probation-related offerings; and transportation assistance, including immediate provision of bus passes or ORCA cards. Virtual access to providers is available for individuals unable to attend in person.

Commissioner Hays asked if Bellevue has a municipal court or if defendants must travel to Seattle for hearings. Craig Fritz clarified that Bellevue does not operate a municipal court. However, court proceedings for Bellevue cases are held at a courthouse located in the Bellevue office park area south of Downtown. The King County District Court judges assigned to Bellevue work from that courthouse, and defendants do not need to go to Seattle for Bellevue hearings.

Commissioner White asked if the fact that someone is on probation or who has completed their probation shows up on an employment background check. Craig Fritz said it depends on the type of case disposition. There are several forms of supervision and resolution, including judgments and sentences involving a conviction; deferred sentences that may result in a lesser sentence upon successful completion; deferred prosecutions that may result in the prosecutor electing not to proceed; and stipulated orders of continuance that can lead to dismissal if conditions are met. Even when charges are dismissed, an arrest record may still appear on background checks, and employers may not review records deeply enough to distinguish between an arrest and a final disposition. The dynamic can be a significant economic barrier for many clients, particularly those whose employment opportunities are limited by the mere presence of an arrest record. Clients are encouraged to read application questions carefully, noting that some inquiries ask about arrests while others ask specifically about convictions, and clients are told to consult legal counsel to ensure accurate responses. Records may sometimes be sealed or removed, although that does not guarantee complete removal from all databases or background check systems. It is important to be honest and transparent with employers. Some clients have secured long-term employment after openly addressing their histories.

Commissioner Hays sought clarification regarding the primary difference between community court and regular court, and asked if community court distinguishes itself through active

guidance by the judge and court officers toward resources to address underlying causes. Craig Fritz said both probation and community court work to connect individuals with services. Community court differs principally in its structure and level of judicial involvement. Specifically, participants do not report to probation officers or engage in monthly supervision; instead, they report to community court, typically meeting with the judge on a weekly basis. Community court is designed as an early-intervention model where cases may be resolved quickly, often within three months or so but with a general target of no more than four months.

Commissioner Hays noted that community court appears to offer a greater concentration of resources and asked why similar support services are not extended more broadly to other, more serious cases. Craig Fritz responded that the model is inherent to the design of the community court. The community resource center is available to all residents, including individuals on probation, and probation clients are encouraged to use it. Expanding equivalent services directly within probation would be constrained primarily by staffing capacity and funding. The resource center's universal availability allows staff to direct clients to needed supports even when they are not community court participants.

Craig Fritz said probation services have been offered at no cost since August 2024. Toni Esparza explained that during the budget process for 2025 and 2026, an analysis showed that fee collection cost the city more than the revenue generated given the staffing time and the administrative overhead. It was also noted that a growing number of clients live in poverty and for them even sliding-scale fees frequently result in unpaid balances and accumulated debt, creating burdens for clients and administrative complications for the city, including potential debt collection activity. Based on the cost and equity considerations, the city approved elimination of the fees. Craig Fritz added that services are funded through the division's budget, which is supported by the city's general fund, and emphasized that removing the fees eliminated a substantial barrier for clients.

## 10. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Phan reminded the Commissioners that the Commission's next meeting was slated for Monday, January 26, and that the Commission's funding recommendations would be presented to the City Council on January 27 for discussion and approval. All Commissioners were invited to attend the Council meeting at which the Chair will represent the Commission.

Commissioner Phan adjourned the meeting at 7:15 p.m.