



# Bellevue Planning Commission

September 27, 2023

## PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM

### SUBJECT

Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update: Overview of Policy Changes in the Citizen Engagement, Economic Development, Transportation and Urban Design & the Arts elements

### STAFF CONTACTS

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### POLICY ISSUES

The City is currently updating the Comprehensive Plan in accordance with the schedule set forth by the State (RCW 36.70A.130(5)). The update was launched in February 28, 2022, and was followed by extensive public engagement (the latest summary of engagement was presented to Planning Commission on April 26, 2023). Updates to policies are largely based on feedback from the community along with the state and regional requirements and the recommendations in study documents such as the Racially Disparate Impact Analysis and the Economic Analysis. This memo focuses on key policy changes in the following elements:

- Economic Development
- Engagement
- Transportation
- Urban Design & the Arts

### DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

**ACTION**

**DIRECTION**

**INFORMATION ONLY**

### BACKGROUND

The major changes to Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan stem from three sources: 1) changes required by state law including consistency with King County's Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) and the Puget Sound Regional Council's (PSRC's) Regional Growth Strategy (Vision 2050); 2) changes recommended by study documents that focus on a specific topic or policy area in the plan; and 3) changes derived from community input.

The Comprehensive Plan must follow the state’s Growth Management Act (GMA) and be consistent with PSRC’s Vision 2050 Multi-County Planning Policies (MPPs) and King County’s CPPs. Both the MPPs and the CPPs were updated in preparation of updates to city comprehensive plans. They provide direction on the scope of policy changes needed in the Comprehensive Plan. In addition, recent amendments to the GMA have led to additional requirements relating to housing typologies and approaches to address the housing crisis.

Bellevue has commissioned several study documents to assist with informing policy changes for the Comprehensive Plan and related projects. These study documents include:

- Racially Disparate Impact Analysis (June 2023)
- Climate Vulnerability Assessment (October 2023)
- Air Quality and Land Use Planning Report (April 2023)
- Economic Impact Report (June 2023)

There are also additional studies completed for related work that the City has undertaken that contain recommendations for updates to the Comprehensive Plan. For these elements, this includes:

- Survey of Businesses (June 2021)
- Creative Space Needs Survey (October 2022)

Bellevue has engaged with the community since the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update launched in early 2022 through a variety of means including surveys, open houses, focus groups and presentations. The Planning Commission has been kept informed of the results of the engagement as each phase came to a close. Summaries of each phase can be found on EngagingBellevue.com.

- July 14, 2022 (Summary of Engagement during Phase 1, especially the Vision Survey)
- September 28, 2022 (Brief summary of engagement during Phase 2a)
- February 22 (Summary of engagement with specific groups)
- April 26 (Summary of engagement during Phase 2b)

The purpose of this memo is to identify key policy areas or questions that the Planning Commission would benefit from a more detailed summary or information to inform their recommended policy changes.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

There are two additional bodies of information that will inform the Planning Commission’s work on policy changes. The first is the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), comprised of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and the forthcoming Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The DEIS details the potential environmental impacts of a buildout scenario

for four different possible future land use maps and policies. In addition, it identifies possible actions the City can take to reduce or mitigate those impacts. The FEIS will add information that comes from the study of a fifth land use map and policies. In addition, the FEIS will include additional study of the impact of the development on the tree canopy and the impact of using a mandatory and/or voluntary affordable housing program on the production of affordable housing.

The second body of information is additional feedback from the community. The City has engaged extensively with the community regarding the vision, growth scenarios and policy directions. In this next phase, engagement will be focused on key policy moves and specific proposed changes to the Comprehensive Plan.

### **KEY POLICY UPDATES**

The key policy areas are groups of policies where needed changes have been identified through a combination of state and regional requirements, recommendations from study documents and community input. Future policy changes will also be informed by the City's growth strategy and supported by technical information contained in the FEIS. The general direction of those changes is described below along with the rationale for the changes.

The Planning Commission will have the opportunity to review the key policy areas in elements grouped by topic. The schedule for considering the key policy updates in the elements is outlined below.

- **September 13:** Utilities, Environment, Parks, Recreation & Open Space, and Capital Facilities elements
- **September 27:** Citizen Engagement, Economic Development, Transportation, and Urban Design & the Arts elements
- **October 11:** Land Use and Neighborhoods elements
- **October 25:** Housing and Human Services elements
- **November 8:** Vision

The key policy update areas in the Citizen Engagement, Economic Development, Transportation, and Urban Design & the Arts elements include:

- Inclusive engagement
- Arts and cultural opportunities
- Design policies tailored to locations
- Tourism
- Use specific language about residential areas
- Mobility hubs and multimodal transportation
- Reference to Functional Plans

**Inclusive engagement.** Inclusive engagement is the practice of actively seeking, valuing, and incorporating diverse community voices into planning and decision-making processes, discussions, and events. The goal of inclusive engagement is to ensure that all perspectives and experiences are heard and respected, regardless of factors such as race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or any other characteristics that can lead to underrepresentation or marginalization. According to PSRC, inclusive engagement is driven by innovative outreach strategies to identify the most impacted communities, develop equity-driven public engagement goals and outcomes, establish meaningful relationships, and remove barriers to participation (PSRC. Equitable Engagement for Comprehensive Plans, July 2022).

The Growth Management Act establishes public participation as part of the planning process. Building off this baseline, recent regional and local planning requirements have implemented additional policies to ensure equitable engagement. PSRC’s Vision 2050 outlines numerous MPPs that call for local governments to conduct inclusive engagement to identify and address the diverse needs of the region’s residents. King County CPPs expand on this guidance with additional strategies for promoting equitable outcomes in partnership with priority populations.<sup>1</sup>

Bellevue has also commissioned numerous study documents that elevate the need for inclusive engagement. The 2023 Racially Disparate Impacts Analysis makes recommendations for additional policies that emphasize the role of those most directly impacted by projects and decisions, especially if overlapped with historically underserved populations, and increased monitoring of engagement priorities. Altogether, these policies and recommendations drive key policy changes relating to inclusive engagement in the Comprehensive Plan update process.

The current Comprehensive Plan includes guidance on facilitating expanded public participation, encouraging equitable access, and providing culturally relevant experiences. However, a greater focus on equity and inclusion is needed to reach all members of the Bellevue community, especially those most impacted by City activities. Key policy moves include,

- replacing the word “citizen” with “community”,
- incorporating a more expansive definition of community,
- applying innovative equitable engagement techniques,
- encouraging two-way communication through community report backs and feedback, and

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<sup>1</sup> Priority populations in the King Count CPPs include: Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color communities; immigrants and refugees; people with low-incomes; people with disabilities; and communities with language access needs.

- investing additional resources in engaging historically marginalized or underrepresented communities.

These key policy changes would primarily impact the Citizen Engagement Element, which is proposed to be renamed as Community Engagement. “Community” is a more inclusive term as compared to “Citizen” and avoids implications related to immigration status for members of the Bellevue community.

**Arts and cultural opportunities.** The arts and cultural community is supported through a wide range of artists, art and cultural institutions, privately and publicly owned artwork, events, and art groups. As part of the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, the City’s Arts Commission has been directed to provide recommendations on arts and cultural policy amendments. The City engaged the Arts Commission on the scope of policy amendments and heard of the need to emphasize the BelRed Arts District and arts and cultural opportunities in Neighborhood Centers, capture private interest in arts and arts programming, and to consider art space needs and the preservation of affordable space for artists to both work and live. The City also conducted a Creative Space Needs survey published in October 2022. There has been engagement on the BelRed Arts District during the development of a BelRed Arts District Implementation Plan and formation of the BelRed Arts District Community Alliance (also known as the BelRed Arts District).

The current Comprehensive Plan includes support for arts and culture. However, policies can be strengthened to pave the way for arts and culture in the Economic Development Plan when it is next updated. The key policy moves would update policies to support the activation of the BelRed Arts District in both the Urban Design & The Arts Element and BelRed Subarea Plan, and capture new and/or emerging arts and culture opportunities. These changes would primarily impact the Economic Development and Urban Design & the Arts elements.

**Design policies tailored to locations.** Urban design has the potential to create unique places that are visually distinct while maintaining Bellevue’s high standards for functionality. Policies in the Urban Design & the Arts Element are currently organized into the following sections: Character, Arts and Culture, Design Quality, Public Space, and Landmarks and Historic Resources. This has led to some redundant policies and confusion about where they apply within the City. The DEIS identified that all alternatives could have an impact on the views, access to light, shadows and glare in places where development occurs. The DEIS includes mitigation measures that can be implemented in the Comprehensive Plan including,

- Regulate the building form to preserve access to light and minimize glare in public spaces such as parks.
- Prioritize vegetation that enhances the pedestrian experience along major streets.
- Identify view sheds from key points in the city to maintain.

The DEIS also included a Historic Resources Survey that surveyed and inventoried resources in select areas of the City's Eastgate, Lake Hills, Lake Heights, and Sherwood Forest neighborhoods. The DEIS includes recommendations that can be implemented in the Comprehensive Plan to provide stronger policy support in the preservation and coordination (i.e. other jurisdictions, agencies, tribes) of historic, visual, and cultural resources throughout the city.

The current Comprehensive Plan does a good job supporting urban design within the City but could be better organized by geographic area. A key policy change for the Urban Design & the Arts Element is to reorganize policies so there is a clearer indication as to where urban design policies apply geographically. This also helps to address the placement of new policies that are specific to areas where more development is expected such as in the City's Mixed Use Centers (Downtown, BelRed, Wilburton Commercial Area, Crossroads, Factoria, and Eastgate) and Neighborhood Centers. Policies that apply to one specific neighborhood or a part of a neighborhood would be found in the Neighborhood Area Plans.

**Tourism.** Tourism is a key industry in Bellevue. People visit the City for entertainment and cultural events as well as for shopping and outdoor experiences. Tourism is one of the industries hit hardest by the COVID Pandemic and continues to evolve in its wake. In the City's 2021 Survey of Businesses, tourism-related businesses gave Bellevue a score of seven out of 10 as a place to do business and nearly eight out of 10 as a vibrant arts and cultural destination. However, tourism is not an industry independent of other location and industrial factors.

The current Comprehensive Plan has one policy to support tourism (ED-22). The key policy change is to recognize the interdependence of tourism, retail and the downtown economy. The primary impacted element is Economic Development.

**Use specific language about residential areas.** The primary euphemism that is used in the Comprehensive Plan to mean a residential area is "neighborhood." All parts of Bellevue are in one of the 16 neighborhood areas so this language can lead to confusion about how to apply the policy. In addition, some policies aim to do things like protect residents from poor air quality that are good to do in mixed use or other areas of the city. Finally, the use of the term "neighborhood character" can be exclusionary when it prioritizes some residents' definition of character over others. The Racially Disparate Impact Analysis cataloged the ways that the Comprehensive Plan furthers racially disparate impacts in Bellevue. One of the recommendations is to use specific language in policies so that it is clear to all what the goals and standards are and can be uniformly applied. In addition, in the vision survey, residents rated Bellevue relatively lowly on equity (49 percent agreed or strongly agreed that Bellevue was meeting its vision of being an equitable city).

The current Comprehensive Plan has policies to promote and celebrate diversity but does not address equity. In fact, as the RDI Analysis revealed, some policies could lead to racially

inequitable outcomes. The key policy changes in the Transportation Element include using more specific language to describe the intent of the policy, for example,

- Use “residents” or “residential areas” instead of neighborhood when that is the intended target of the policy, or
- Describe the aspects of the area that are important to maintain, such as visual continuity or architectural style, instead of using “neighborhood character”.

This impacts most elements but among the elements being summarized at this meeting, it primarily impacts Urban Design & the Arts and Transportation.

**Reference to functional and implementation plans.** Functional plans and implementation plans guide the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. For transportation, Functional Plans and Implementation Plans include,

- Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
- Transportation Facilities Plan (TFP)
- Mobility Implementation Plan (MIP)
- Transit Master Plan
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation Plan

These plans are updated periodically under the guidance of the Transportation Commission. The plans include details of implementation such as lists of projects, prioritization of projects and performance targets. Among the objectives identified with City Council at the launch of the update was the objective to “Make policy changes in all of the elements that reflect the City’s priorities for the next 20 years” (Council Memo February 28, 2022). This means that the Comprehensive Plan sets the direction for the future updates to these functional plans.

The current Comprehensive Plan references the functional/implementation plans but provides details that focus on a shorter time horizon. Policies in the Transportation Element in particular mention shorter term priorities that are better addressed in a functional plan or an implementation plan. The key policy changes are to revise policies to give general direction in the Comprehensive Plan and refer to the relevant functional plan or implementation plan for details and to repeal policies that are redundant with the purpose and content of the functional/implementation plans. This has the added benefit of reducing the number of policies so the element is more focused on overall direction of the city’s transportation network. The primary impacted element is Transportation.

**Mobility hubs and multimodal transportation.** The region has begun using a more wholistic view of transportation to evaluate the effectiveness of the transportation network. Multimodal transportation includes active transportation such as walking and biking, transit such as bus and light rail, personal vehicle travel and freight rail and truck. Mobility hubs is a new term used in

the CPPs to refer to areas where multiple modes of transportation meet, such as a bus station or ride-hailing depots. One key change in the MPPs is MPP-T-13, focusing multimodal connections and improving transit connections between centers. The CPPs create a structure for identifying Countywide Centers, areas to focus future transportation investment. These centers may contain one or multiple mobility hubs that allow people to easily move between modes of transportation. The CPP policy, CPP-T-8 focuses on expanding the transportation network focused on “multi-modal mobility and safety, equity and climate change, as well as centers....” The City has proposed 5 countywide centers (BelRed, Wilburton and East Main, Crossroads, Factoria and Eastgate) which meet the criteria in the CPPs for countywide centers. Policies in support of planning for the centers is required as part of the Update.

The current Comprehensive Plan includes policies that support multimodal transportation. It was updated in December 2021, in advance of the MIP adoption, to support the new approach to assessing the ability of the transportation network to meet the demands for movement to, from and through Bellevue. One key policy change may be to adopt the mobility hub language used in the CPPs, align language to match the performance targets in the MIP, repeal or modify policies that focus on the adequacy of one mode at meeting the demand for that mode and instead rely on the performance targets established in the MIP for all modes. This primarily impacts the Transportation Element.

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

N/A