



Bellevue Planning Commission

July 8, 2026

PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Study Session on the BelRed Look Forward Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA)

STAFF CONTACT(S)

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POLICY ISSUES

In 2009, Bellevue adopted the BelRed Subarea Plan to guide BelRed’s transition from an industrial area to walkable, transit-oriented neighborhoods. In 2022, the city launched the BelRed Look Forward to evaluate whether existing policies and Land Use Code (LUC) were achieving the BelRed vision and to reflect new conditions, including increased housing and job targets.

In October 2024, the Council adopted [Ordinance No. 6810](#) and [Ordinance 6811](#) amending the BelRed Subarea Plan and future land use map. These ordinances aim to strengthen implementation, clarify guidance, and increase development capacity through 2044 to 7,900 housing units (23 percent of the City’s target) and 14,200 jobs (20 percent). The BelRed Look Forward LUCA will implement these changes. Tonight, staff will summarize community engagement to date and introduce the first set of proposed LUCA components.

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION

DIRECTION

INFORMATION ONLY

Staff will present the components of the proposed LUCA in several study sessions, and seek Planning Commission feedback at each study session.

	Topic Areas
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Study Session 1 (April 22): Overview, LUCA Review 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to LUCA Structure • BelRed Land Use Districts • Standards for Mixed-Use Land Use Districts • BelRed Street Network
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Study Session 2 (May 27): LUCA Review 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighborhood Districts and BelRed Arts District Intensive Area • Building Design • Amenity Incentive System
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Study Session 3 (July 8): LUCA Review 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recap of recent feedback, topics under development • Life Sciences and Medical Uses Follow Up

<input type="checkbox"/>	Study Session 4 (September 9): LUCA Review 4
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public Hearing (To Be Scheduled): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Public Hearing • Planning Commission Recommendation

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

On October 22, 2024, the City Council adopted the updated BelRed Subarea Plan and Future Land Use Map. The update reflects changed conditions, strengthens implementation strategies, increases development capacity, and provides clearer guidance for implementation, particularly around local streets.

On February 25, 2025, the City Council initiated the BelRed Look Forward LUCA and emphasized the need to enhance incentives for stream daylighting; explore incentives for affordable commercial space and performance venues; review affordable housing requirements; and strengthen support for a multimodal transportation network.

Planning Commission Feedback and Staff Response

The Planning Commission held a study session on May 27 to discuss components of the proposed LUCA. Most of the Commission’s discussion focused on the local street network. In response to the April study session, staff presented new code language providing an option for projects to propose replacing defined local street segments with private streets. The Commission generally supported providing this option, and provided the recommendation to reduce the required active use percentage of facades along private streets replacing local streets to 50%. This change has been made in the strike draft provided as **Attachment A**.

Commissioners requested staff responses to individual stakeholder comments received during the meeting. Responses to these comments, as well as additional comments received since the April study session, have been provided in the comment tracker provided as **Attachment B**. The July 8 study session will focus on summarizing notable areas of alignment with stakeholders, along with topics which are still under development. Planning Commission will not be requested to provide direction to schedule the public hearing during this meeting. Instead, staff will take the opportunity to check in on considerable progress which is underway, and take in any additional updates to Planning Commission feedback.

Street Grid: Overall Flexibility

In general, Commissioners expressed support for the need for the BelRed street grid at a conceptual level, but requested additional review to ensure that the process would be flexible yet predictable. Commissioners expressed interest in achieving greater flexibility in the location and typologies possible for streets, while also providing greater certainty that flexibility will be granted for specific projects. There is a fundamental tension in these goals which provides some practical limits on the extent to which both goals can be maximized. True flexibility requires the ability to respond to highly project-specific circumstances, while true predictability requires minimizing exceptions for specific circumstances. To maximize predictability, performance-based standards may need to take a more conservative approach to account for unintended consequences. Staff continue to work toward these goals, and will be able to respond to the Commission’s feedback on this topic at the next study session.

This memo will summarize the options for flexibility in the street grid currently provided in the draft LUCA, their considerations for predictability and flexibility, as well as remaining options available for the Commission's consideration.

- **Fewer Defined Segments.** The overall number of required segments has been reduced to retain segments which are most important for maintaining access within the district and remove segments which impose excessive impacts on individual parcels, among other considerations.
- **Ability to Move Defined Segments and Intersections.** The current code is restrictive in the circumstances when a defined street segment can be moved, and emphasizes maintaining intersection alignments. The updated draft allows for the exact location and alignment of defined local street segments and intersections to be moved within a project limit through the typical development review process. The exact flexibility available will be highly sensitive to the specific site and project proposal. As a result, it is difficult to establish greater certainty or performance-based standards for when streets can be moved, as these standards will need to be more conservative to be broadly applicable. The advantage of reviewing site specifics through the development review process is that the exact impacts and mitigation options can be tailored to the proposal.
- **Private Street Options.** Minimum block size requirements help to ensure that large sites in areas where defined public segments have been removed will provide connectivity, but can do so with an array of private streets, including pedestrian- and active transportation-only options. Projects have flexibility to choose the private street types that are most appropriate for their circumstance.
- **Ability to Substitute Local Streets for Private Streets.** The proposed LUCA includes criteria for a project to propose an alternative street layout which replaces defined local streets with private streets, subject to specific criteria which were suggested by development industry stakeholders.

Staff recommend this structure as providing a high degree of flexibility, while still reflecting the practical realities of the development review process. One additional option which the Planning Commission may want to consider would be a Development Agreement pathway for projects of a large size and which are required to provide local streets. This could be offered as a development catalyst opportunity, similar to the conditions which led to the development of the Spring District. This pathway could allow for the City Council to negotiate directly for specific public benefits provided in exchange for private project-level gains, with the intent of achieving a better outcome than would otherwise be possible under the standard Land Use Code process. As Development Agreements are complex and resource-intensive for city staff, this option should be calibrated carefully to be available only for exceptional circumstances.

Regarding the flexibility in widths of specific components, there are practical limits to the extent of further flexibility. In general, the areas with the greatest opportunity for further flexibility in width are those that also offer the greatest improvement to the public realm, including sidewalks and amenity zones. The minimum widths of specific components in the draft code are as follows, going from the center of the street or path to the outer edge:

- Vehicle area: Minimum 20 feet wide, includes two travel lanes. This is considered the minimum width for any travel lane requiring emergency vehicle access. This is also the minimum width for active transportation lanes requiring emergency vehicle access.
- Shared use paths: Minimum 14 feet wide when pedestrian and bicycle traffic is combined, and emergency vehicle access is not required. This is recommended as a best practice for safety and comfort.
- Parking lanes: Minimum eight feet wide on any side where required.
- Amenity zones: Minimum five feet wide on each side, except a minimum 11 feet wide on Green Streets and 6 feet wide on enhanced shared use paths and active transportation access corridors. For flexible access corridors, minimum four feet wide and only provided on one side. Tree planting is required in all amenity zones, helping to improve pedestrian comfort and prevent urban heat island effects. 5 feet is considered the minimum width to support tree planting without requiring significant additional investments in soil volume.
- Sidewalks: Minimum eight feet wide on each side. In Wilburton, sidewalks are a minimum six feet wide. This is considered technically adequate, but much less comfortable for pedestrians.

The single largest potential gain in these components is to remove unnecessary parking lanes, and staff are developing updated language to provide greater clarity on flexibility to remove on-street parking. At the same time, parking lanes are currently not required on private streets, only local streets. The ongoing Parking Reform LUCA will also remove all off-street parking requirements for residential and mixed-use development located within one-half mile of a light rail station or one-quarter mile of a bus rapid transit station, which could increase demand for on-street spaces in BelRed. These on-street lanes are also helpful for short term loading and drop-off locations.

While amenity zones are technically optional in terms of a transportation network, they are critical in providing for a high quality pedestrian environment and in advancing Bellevue's environmental and tree canopy goals. As noted, Bellevue has soil volume standards for tree planting to support the long term health of street trees, and these standards can be challenging and more expensive to meet in narrow planters. This is particularly important in BelRed, which has some of Bellevue's lowest existing tree canopy. Street tree planting represents an excellent opportunity to increase BelRed's tree canopy in a density-friendly way. Amenity zones also provide opportunities for placement of natural drainage systems, particularly along green streets.

This leaves sidewalks with one area which, technically, have room to be reduced by two feet on either side. These two additional feet will have a significant, sustained impact in the quality of the pedestrian environment over time, particularly if there is no amenity zone buffering the sidewalk from the street, and staff do not recommend reducing the minimum width below eight feet.

Streams and Critical Areas

Commissioners requested that staff consider the request to allow for early phases to harvest FAR earned by amenities in later phases. While staff do not recommend this approach in most circumstances with other amenities, stream daylighting is considered an exception due to both the high expense associated with daylighting streams and the high importance of the opportunity to daylight a stream. Draft language providing for early phases to harvest FAR from stream daylighting occurring in later

phases will be provided before the September study session. This will also include provisions to provide assurance that the planned daylighting will still occur in the future phase.

Commissioners requested additional focus on connections to the Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) and improvements to the stream restoration amenity. Staff have identified several opportunities to clarify CAO provisions related to steep slopes to better align the CAO with BelRed's challenges and the city's own intent in last year's update. Continued analysis of the CAO and potential updates is ongoing, and recommended updates will be provided for the September study session.

The current draft LUCA has progressed in clarifying eligibility for the stream restoration amenity, and limiting circumstances where projects must differentiate between CAO-required improvements and additional improvements for credit, though staff acknowledge that clarity can be improved. An update is underway to replace current eligibility language with a performance-based threshold that would grant bonus points to projects that are demonstrating a significant improvement to stream function, regardless of the type of project or degree to which it is surpassing CAO requirements.

116th Corridor Medical and Life Sciences Prioritization

In May, staff presented proposed base FARs by Land Use District. Base and maximum FAR and height limits for new mixed use land use districts in BelRed were proposed to follow the model established with Wilburton introducing consistency in how districts were defined as highrise, midrise, or low rise, with the exception of the Mixed-Use Medical Highrise (MUM-H) district.

The area proposed to be rezoned as MUM-H is currently zoned BelRed Medical Office (BR-MO). This designation currently does not permit standard residential development in any form. The only residential uses permitted in BR-MO today are senior housing, nursing homes, assisted living, supportive housing, hotels and motels, and ADUs. Dimensions standards for permitted uses allow a base FAR of 1.0, maximum FAR of 4.0, base building height of 45 feet, and maximum building height of 150. The updated BelRed Subarea Plan continues to envision the 116th Corridor as a hub for medical and life sciences, but also provides for greater flexibility regarding residential development, with the following specific policies:

- S-BR-16. Provide for medical office, life science, and limited office uses along 116th Avenue NE allowing for high-intensity development within the half-mile walkshed of light rail stations transitioning to lower intensity development to the north.
- S-BR-17. Provide for some residential mixed-use development east of 116th Avenue NE and south of NE 21st Street transitioning from high-intensity near the station to medium-intensity farther north.

Bellevue's Economic Development Plan also includes recently adopted relevant policies:

- 2.1.2: Support the growth of emerging industry sectors, such as artificial intelligence, life sciences, and climate tech, to increase employment and investment in Bellevue.
- 2.1.2.1: Position strategic areas, like the 116th corridor, as a global center for life sciences companies through partnerships with industry leaders and property owners.

In the May 27 draft, the maximum building height and FAR in this district were maintained consistent with other high rise districts for both residential and nonresidential projects. This includes a maximum

FAR of 8.0 for all uses, and a height limit of 250 feet, a substantial increase in capacity compared to current zoning. In response to updated policy direction, the draft permitted residential outright in the corridor, but proposed a lower base FAR for residential projects on the west side of 116th compared to the east side of 116th, and a higher base FAR for nonresidential projects. Residential projects could still achieve the same maximum buildout on both sides of 116th, though projects on the west side would need to earn more bonus points in the amenity incentive system to do so. This limit would not apply to affordable housing projects as all affordable housing is exempt from FAR calculations.

The Planning Commission received comments from several property owners in the corridor seeking to apply a consistent base FAR for residential on both sides of the street. After discussion, the Commission recommended applying a consistent 4.0 FAR for residential in the corridor. This change has been made in the draft LUCA.

Staff recommend continued discussion of ways to further incentivize medical and life sciences uses in this important corridor. While residential development remains a critical priority throughout the city, opportunities to support emerging industry clusters, including life sciences, benefit from a location-specific focus. This topic was also reviewed during the Wilburton Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) process. During the [April 3, 2024 Planning Commission study session](#), Commissioners considered whether to maintain a specific medical district in Wilburton, or to shift toward a general mixed use district with incentives for medical and life sciences uses. The Commission opted to shift toward mixed use in Wilburton, but that discussion included an acknowledgement that the potential for these uses could be greater in BelRed. During the study session, staff will provide additional context and options to consider, in partnership with Economic Development.

Public Engagement

Staff has developed a public engagement plan with six modes of outreach to ensure the public, stakeholders, and interested parties have the opportunity to be informed and to provide comments. These modes will be employed across both phases of work, allowing members of the public to provide comment at key intervals and for staff to respond to feedback in developing recommendations.

- **Process IV Requirements.** Consistent with Chapter 20.35 LUC procedural requirements, public input will be solicited by a notice of application, notice of public hearing and the required public hearing.
- **Public Open House.** One in-person public open house was held on February 23 to provide information on the project and solicit feedback from the general public.
- **Listening Sessions.** Focused listening sessions with representatives from Bellevue departments implementing BelRed code provisions.
- **Online Questionnaire.** Online questionnaire to gather broad perspectives on project priorities, ideas, and concerns. The questionnaire was advertised through a mailer to all BelRed addresses and during in-person engagement and received 161 complete responses.
- **Direct Engagement and Feedback.** Dialogue with developers, residents, employees and other interested parties. Staff presented to and led exercises with the BDC to generate feedback on multiple occasions, including a “Code Lab” focused on key components of the BelRed LUCA on

February 25. Staff tabled in person at Meta and at several BelRed events to provide information on the project and answer question.

- **Online Presence.** Engaging Bellevue and City webpages to provide the public information about the project, who to direct questions to, and how to submit comments.

ATTACHMENT(S)

- A. Strike Draft LUCA
- B. Updated Comment Tracker