

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION  
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

October 11, 2023  
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Bhargava, Vice Chair Goepple, Commissioners Brown, Cálad, Khanloo, Malakoutian

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Commissioner Ferris

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Emil King, Sofia Fall, Justus Stewart, Dr. Kate Nesse, Department of Community Development; Matt McFarland, City Attorney’s Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Robertson

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER  
(6:30 p.m.)

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Bhargava who presided.

2. ROLL CALL  
(6:31 p.m.)

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA  
(6:32 p.m.)

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Chair Goepple. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brown and the motion carried unanimously.

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None  
(6:33 p.m.)

5. STAFF REPORTS  
(6:33 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Comprehensive Planning Manager Thara Johnson took a few minutes to review the Commission’s schedule of upcoming meeting dates and agenda items. It was noted that the annual retreat was slated for November 8, and that an additional meeting would be scheduled for

November 29.

## 6. WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Chair Bhargava took a moment to note that in compliance with Washington state public disclosure laws regarding the use of public facilities during elections, no election-related topics could be discussed during oral communications or any other public participation portions of the agenda, including promoting or opposing ballot measures, and supporting or opposing a candidate for election, including oneself. Any speaker discussing topics of such a nature will be asked to stop. Additionally, under Ordinance 6752, the topics about which the public may speak during a meeting are limited to subject matters related to the city of Bellevue government and within the powers and duties of the Planning Commission. Additional information about the new rules of decorum governing conduct of the public during meetings can be found in Ordinance 6752.

### A. Written Communications (6:35 p.m.)

Thara Johnson said five or six emails had been received, all relating to the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and some of the policy issues before the Commission, including the tree canopy and the tree code.

### B. Oral Communications (6:36 p.m.)

Walter Scott with Legacy Companies, owners of a property called the Bellevue Design Market, said the work to update the Comprehensive Plan is very exciting. The Commission will be working on some very important things that will have an effect for 20 or 30 years. The planning department has done a great job in terms of allocating densities. The city's serious traffic problem will only get worse when all the offices fill up again. Having light rail will be a great opportunity, especially during the commute. There is a light rail station very close to the Bellevue Design Market property but the pedestrian connections associated with it are not ideal and should be reviewed with an eye on creating a new vision.

Alexis Tartini, an independent development manager currently working with Legacy Partners, noted also currently managing the Bellevue station project at 132<sup>nd</sup> Avenue NE and Spring Boulevard. The EIS options that have been brought forward are being closely tracked. Alternative 3 is preferable in that it concentrates the high-density zoning around the 130<sup>th</sup> station to bring more vibrancy to the area. The five- to ten-minute walkshed from the 130<sup>th</sup> station go all the way up to Northup Way and down to Bel-Red Road. The street grid does not extend well east and west. With regard to rights-of-way dedication, it was noted that a great deal of land had to be dedicated, even though that will not build out the full right-of-way. All of the dedicated land will now not be available for the construction of housing. The rights-of-way should be revisited with a push for more pedestrians.

Lee Sargent, a Sherwood Forest resident, spoke on behalf of Trees for Livability. Appreciation was voiced for the work of the Commissioners and the staff. The mayor has mentioned in the past about the desire to see something in the Comprehensive Plan about trees. The cookbook for the city is the Comprehensive Plan. In the Comprehensive Plan there are sections. Much of the focus of the document has to do with housing. There are certain ingredients needed to make

housing work, including trees. Large trees are a resource to the city overall and they should be recognized as such. It takes anywhere from 40 to 100 years to develop the resources, and once they are removed the opportunity to regrow them may be lost.

July Tucker, a resident of Newport Hills, reported that recently someone cut down landmark cedar trees in the neighborhood. It was heartbreaking. The tree provided shade in the summer, protection from the wind and noise, and it took carbon out of the air. The trees were removed without the proper permits and that has been reported to the city. The Commission was asked to consider having a very strong tree code. Trees are beautiful but they are also necessary. There should be strong consequences for anyone removing a tree without the proper permit. It takes a lifetime to grow such trees. Quality of life in the neighborhood has gone down since the trees were removed. Tree protections should not be reset with every new property owner, and the city should set up a tipline for reporting the cutting of trees. There should be a minimum tree density requirement for residential lots. Preserving and enhancing the tree canopy should be a major focus.

Nicole Myers amplified the two previous speakers regarding trees. A large tree was recently cut down in the speaker's neighborhood. The property had recently been sold, and the city only has a 30 percent retention requirement. Walking in the neighborhood, especially in the summer, always benefited from the shade provided by the tree, which was very large. Now the tree is gone and it will take a hundred years to replace it. The site would have been a prime location for a neighborhood pocket park. The city is talking about increasing housing densities and more parks are going to be needed. The city should take a look at which properties have strong, healthy trees and should consider properties as they come up for sale and turning them into little neighborhood parks.

Heidi Dean, a Newport Hills resident, noted having been sad to hear about the illegal removal of a tree from the neighborhood. In 2014 when neighborhoods were added as an element to the Comprehensive Plan, testimony was provided along with Ron Sher about the importance of the neighborhood shopping centers as community gathering places and third places for neighborhoods. The term "neighborhood centers" has become a type of pot that many unrelated properties have been thrown into. Some of what are currently being called neighborhood centers are actually just amenities. There needs to be more of a deep dive on that. There has been a broadening of the term "community" when it comes to who is giving input on the city's Comprehensive Plan. The deep dive event in 2022 was attended by a lot of people who do not live in Bellevue, many of them representing special interest groups. The Comprehensive Plan is not a regional plan, it is Bellevue's plan, and the planning work should be done with that in mind.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None  
(6:57 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION  
(6:57 p.m.)

A. Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update: Overview of Policy Changes in the Land Use and Neighborhoods Elements

Assistant Director Emil King briefly summarized the timeline for updating the Comprehensive Plan. The target date for the final EIS has been moved out to January 2024, but that will not impact the planned Land Use Code adoption for Wilburton which is set for June 2024. The targeted adoption of the overall Comprehensive Plan has been shifted from May 2024 to

September 2024. The Commission has the lead on both the Land Use Element and the Neighborhoods Element.

Senior Planner Dr. Kate Nesse reminded the Commissioners that the various element updates are guided by the Council vision and updates made to the Growth Management Act, the Countywide Planning Policies and the Multicounty Planning Policies, as well as various reports and analyses and community input. The FEIS and additional community engagement will continue to inform the update work.

Continuing, Dr. Nesse said the statistically valid survey yielded a lot of information about what residents of the city want. The survey went only to Bellevue residents. People were asked to design their ideal neighborhood in terms of the mix of residences, how convenient businesses should be, if there should be big businesses near houses or just small ones. The people were also asked to comment on amenities such as parks, the style of streets, and the presence of affordable housing. Unsurprisingly, the ideal neighborhood was defined by the style of residences and the mix and availability of businesses. People indicated a priority for walkable streets over cars; some affordable housing in the neighborhoods; and access to parks. About a quarter of the respondents indicated a desire for single family homes without businesses around, and being able to drive to businesses. About three-quarters of the respondents indicated wanting some other type of neighborhood with a mix of housing styles and access to businesses. Bellevue currently has a lot of single family residential neighborhoods, but also a lot of the urban core style neighborhood with mostly apartments. What is largely missing is low-scale residential and mixed use residential.

People who prefer urban core neighborhoods are less likely to have children, according to the survey. About 30 percent of Bellevue households have children, and roughly the same percentage of those households with children indicated a preference for mixed use, low-scale residential and single family residential neighborhoods. About 90 percent of those indicating a preference for urban core living do not have children. Those with a preference for single family residential neighborhoods tend to be a little older, while those preferring the urban core tend to be a little younger. The income distribution for those with a preference for urban core neighborhoods or low-scale or single family residential is similar to the mix in the city overall. Those preferring mixed use housing tend to have lower incomes, which could presage an opportunity for affordable housing in those developments.

Turning to the key policy moves, Dr. Nesse began with the identification of centers. The update to the Multicounty Planning Policies resulted in the creation of a new type of center called Countywide Center. The Countywide Planning Policies outline how to identify Countywide Centers, which are very similar to Bellevue's Mixed Use Centers. All three action alternatives of the DEIS framed growth around the mixed use centers. There will be more information in the FEIS, and the preferred alternative also includes the Mixed Use Centers, which are based on the Countywide Centers. Updating the definition of Mixed Use Centers in the Comprehensive Plan will align them with the Countywide Centers in the Countywide Planning Policies. The Multicounty Planning Policies and Countywide Planning Policies both create a framework for local centers, which in Bellevue are called Neighborhood Centers. Identifying the local centers, along with a framework for locating future Neighborhood Centers, will be part of the update work. Policies localized to apply to a particular Neighborhood Center or Mixed Use Center will be addressed through the neighborhood area plan update process.

Commissioner Khanloo asked how many respondents there were to the statistically valid survey. Thara Johnson said there were about 1500.

On the topic of trying to gather input from the community, Commissioner Ferris pointed out that there are hosts of people in the community who either do not know about the efforts or cannot attend events for various reasons. Given the angst around some of the neighborhood centers, staff should be posted to visit shopping centers to share information and gather input. Dr. Nesse said the show is being taken on the road to Crossroads Mall on October 14. Emil King added that in regard to the Wilburton effort staff has spent time at Uwajimaya. Opportunities to do the same in other places will be sought.

Commissioner Malakoutian asked what the differences are between Countywide Centers, Regional Growth Centers and Mixed Use Centers. Dr. Kate Nesse explained that Bellevue only has one Regional Growth Center, which is the Downtown. The designation is made by the Puget Sound Regional Council. Each county developed their own criteria for identifying Countywide Centers. Under the King County criteria, Bellevue's Mixed Use Centers with only a little adjusting from the current Comprehensive Plan can be called Countywide Centers. The term "Mixed Use Center" resonates with Bellevue residents and is consistent with the language used in the Comprehensive Plan. Under the Countywide Planning Policies, Countywide Centers have size limits, therefore the Mixed Use Center in BelRed must be trimmed down to less than the entire BelRed subarea. The county does not like centers that cross freeways given that the centers are supposed to be walkable, so the Eastgate Countywide Center will need to be smaller than the entire Eastgate neighborhood.

Commissioner Malakoutian agreed staff are doing an amazing job at outreach, but stressed that even more needs to be done. Effort should especially be put into hearing from those who have not been heard from.

Commissioner Cálad said it is projected that 20 years out the senior population will be significantly higher than it is currently. Dr. Kate Nesse said the intent is to plan for people at all stages of life, including the older population, particularly in light of the fact that people are living longer than they have in the past. As people age they may find it difficult to continue to manage a single family home, but the intent is to make sure there will be housing options that will allow them to stay in Bellevue. While those who currently are young will grow old, when they do there will be another generation of young people who may have a similar profile.

Commissioner Cálad asked about data regarding persons with disabilities. Dr. Nesse said that topic was not addressed in the statistically valid survey. One thing that has been particular effective in hearing from voices that do not usually speak up has been to go to groups that work with specific populations, including cultural groups or groups that represent a particular age group. Emil King noted that earlier in the day staff from all of the different city departments met with the Bellevue Network on Aging. There is a correlation between older adults and disabilities and that was a key part of the discussion about long-range planning. The data is pertinent to planning urban neighborhoods. The Network even had comments about micro apartments and the need to design them to be friendly to older adults.

Commissioner Cálad referred to the finding from the survey that people want to prioritize walking rather than cars and asked if that meant getting rid of car lanes or building new walking facilities. Dr. Kate Nesse noted that in asking people to design their ideal neighborhood, the two types of streets they could choose from were those that prioritized cars and those that prioritized walking and biking. While there was a clear preference voiced for having neighborhood streets that are safe to walk on, the findings cannot be generalized into saying people want to get rid of cars. Safety is clearly important to the people of Bellevue. Commissioner Cálad suggested the

reaction of the survey respondents would be very different if asked about taking away car lanes or adding space for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Commissioner Brown asked if the survey respondents were only Bellevue residents or if there were some who might someday want to live in Bellevue if they could afford it. Dr. Nesse said the respondents were all Bellevue residents.

Commissioner Brown said emphasized that people residing on a street may want to have sidewalks and bike lanes that are protected from cars, and may want to have traffic calming measures that slow traffic down. Outside of the neighborhoods, streets prioritized for cars may be the preference. People want a mix of different kinds of neighborhoods but Bellevue currently really only offers two kinds.

Chair Goepple remarked that when people talk about what they want in terms of neighborhoods, it is the missing middle of mixed use centers and low-scale residential that seems to rise to the top. On the issue of dissimilar uses adjacent to one another, the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update process should look carefully at transition zones. As density increases in some areas, transition zones will be essential to honoring the expectations people have about a certain neighborhood character.

Chair Bhargava suggested that no survey is needed to better understand the need for accessibility. Access to transit should be identified as a preference. Dr. Nesse said transit was not talked about specifically in the survey. Chair Bhargava suggested transit should be considered.

Chair Bhargava asked if Mixed Use Centers and Neighborhood Centers are similar. Dr. Nesse said a Mixed Use Center is a specific type of larger center. Neighborhood Centers have a much smaller scale. Chair Bhargava asked if a Neighborhood Center has a requirement to have a big box anchor or a specific mix of uses. Dr. Nesse said the way Neighborhood Centers were initially identified was by looking at areas outside of the Mixed Use Centers that have commercial development. Those areas were then further characterized by what was anchoring them. In some cases it was a grocery store, but in other cases it was a gas station. In two cases there were just offices without an anchor. The Neighborhood Centers are different and serve different purposes, something that should be kept in mind.

Emil King said there was a full range analyzed in the EIS, everything from an acre or smaller up to Kelsey Creek Shopping Center. Showing the full range in the Comprehensive Plan will be highlighted.

Chair Bhargava stressed the need to address a mix of age groups based on the data.

Chair Bhargava asked how many people are attending the visioning engagement events. Dr. Nesse said traffic during the day has been sparse. Traffic goes up where there are meetings or other events that provide reasons for people to be at City Hall. The practice has not been tried in the past and the results will be evaluated in terms of how well they are reaching people. Chair Bhargava if the events at City Hall are not drawing much traffic and are reaching only the kind of people who come to City Hall, it would be better to concentrate on the larger events. Emil King added that an online event was conducted on October 11 that was attended by 60 persons.

Commissioner Ferris agreed with the comment by Chair Bhargava that accessibility should absolutely be included. Commissioner Ferris added that Bellevue is in a state of transition. What are currently called Neighborhood Centers can be identified but it should be stressed that they

will change over time as greater density happens and as there is more housing around those centers.

Commissioner Khanloo voiced surprise to learn that 71 percent of the households in Bellevue do not have children. Dr. Nesse pointed out that in the 1970 census the percentages were almost completely reversed given that 65 percent of the households had children. Commissioner Khanloo suggested the current percentages should be highlighted as one of the characteristics of the city. It makes sense that some middle schools are being closed.

Commissioner Brown said Bellevue used to be a bedroom community for those who worked in Seattle but who wanted their children in Bellevue's schools and wanted a better quality of life. Dr. Nesse commented that although the number of households with children has declined since 1970, the percentage has remained relatively steady over the last decade.

Commissioner Brown asked how a gas station or even an office building can be considered to be a Neighborhood Center. The general understanding is that Neighborhood Centers have grocery stores. Dr. Nesse said that is one of the things that will need to be discussed in more detail when talking about identifying Neighborhood Centers.

Chair Bhargava stressed the importance to have clear definitions, and also expressed surprise to learn that 71 percent of the households in Bellevue do not have children. Many still think of Bellevue as a bedroom community, and that people come to Bellevue because of the family environment. The density in the urban core and the associated lifestyle has undoubtedly facilitated folks moving into that area, most of whom do not have children. Given the dramatic shift over the past 35 years, the projections for what are expected in the coming years become even more important in terms of neighborhood character.

Commissioner Malakoutian said the planning itself will have an impact on what the future will look like. If the city will be affordable in the future, families with children will come back. Planning involves far more than just projecting data forward.

Chair Bhargava agreed and suggested the forecasting model should take into account all the factors involved in people moving to and out of the city, including income dynamics and changing demographics.

Emil King said access to different amenities like parks and open space in the new urban areas, access to good schools, and housing unit size, all contribute to families wanting to live in Bellevue.

Commissioner Malakoutian suggested affordability is a key factor. If the schools cannot hire bus drivers or teachers because neither can afford to live in Bellevue, then the schools will be lost and families will not be drawn to the city.

Dr. Kate Nesse said the second key policy area involves updating the future land use map, which is a required part of the Comprehensive Plan under the Growth Management Act. The Multicounty Planning Policies and the Countywide Planning Policies create a framework for updating the growth targets. The state allocates projected growth to the various regions, and locally the Puget Sound Regional Council takes those regional estimates and allocates them to the different counties. The counties then identify how the growth is to be distributed between their jurisdictions. The numbers contained in the Countywide Planning Policies relative to Bellevue have been ratified by the City Council. The DEIS looked at a No Action scenario along

with three action scenarios, each with the same growth targets but with different amounts of capacity. Accordingly, the main difference between the action scenarios is the type of development allowed and where it would be allowed. In the Comprehensive Plan the growth targets need to be updated to reflect the adopted growth targets in the Countywide Planning Policies. The relationship between future land use designations and zones is also under review as directed by the Council, primarily because Wilburton will acquire some new land use designations. Capacity will need to be added for housing and jobs. Currently, the land use map lives in all of the subarea plans in Volume II of the Comprehensive Plan and the suggestion has been made to put them all together and move them into Volume I.

Commissioner Khanloo asked about the specific growth targets for 2044. Dr. Nesse said the Countywide Planning Policies call for 35,000 new housing units and 70,000 jobs. The Countywide Planning Policies were recently updated to include housing need, and ratification of that is being debated by the Council.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Malakoutian, Emil King said the 35,000 housing units and 70,000 jobs are set numbers based on the Countywide Planning Policies. The new Countywide Planning Policies that focus on housing related pieces, including the expression of need for Bellevue and all other King County cities in the different area medium income brackets must be planned for and accommodated. The Council has viewed them as aspirational and staff agrees with that. There was a methodology the staff and elected officials participated in, and there were some concerns expressed with it. The countywide approach differs from Bellevue's housing needs assessment.

Commissioner Malakoutian asked if it can be said that the upper limit of what the city can do is the King County suggestion, and that the lower limit is what Bellevue's consultant came up with. Emil King said staff will return to the City Council in the spring of 2024 to talk about the city target. The county need that was developed for all the cities attempted to spread the countywide need across all 39 cities in the county. Bellevue's review with staff and the consultants came up with something a bit different. It was predicated on the needs of the current residents, the needs of those who work in the city but who might want to live in the city, and those who might want to move to the city. Bellevue currently has 65,000 housing units. If there are to be 35,000 new housing units added, then in the future there will be people living in Bellevue who do not currently live in Bellevue. The city to be planned for is indicative of the kinds of land use and housing. It will be the Council that ultimately sets the city's target for affordable housing. The proposal will include looking at things like area median income, household size, owner versus renter, and distribution across the city.

Answering a question by Commissioner Cálad about adding capacity for housing and jobs, Dr. Nesse explained that the land use map the Commission debated to be studied in the FEIS, which is the preferred alternative, serves as the starting point. There can be adjustments made within it as the map is looked at specifically.

Commissioner Brown pointed out that much of the city is dedicated to single family residential communities. ADUs and up to triplexes are now allowed in those areas, but there are only so many single family property owners that will choose to construct an ADU. In order to accommodate the addition of 35,000 new housing units, capacity will need to be added. The land use map ultimately show where a lot of new housing will be added and where only a few new housing units will be added. Dr. Nesse said the future land use map shows the anticipated style of development by area. It might be a style of development that already exists, or it might be substantially different.



Commissioner Brown asked if the city has a way of determining how many property owners will construct ADUs or turn their properties into triplexes based on the new legislation. Dr. Nesse said that is something that has been discussed with planning colleagues in other cities, with consultants and with the Washington State Commerce Department. Because the territory is uncharted, it is not known exactly what percentage of people will choose to add ADUs. Incentives or other means of lowering barriers could encourage people to add those densities.

Chair Goepple noted that the agenda memo addresses how well the city has done in relation to the last Comprehensive Plan relative to the issue of capacity. The city is behind on the 2035 goals in terms of housing production. The new goals for 2044 are even higher. If the city wants a shot at actually meeting the goals, it will have to add a generous amount of extra capacity.

Dr. Nesse said one of the major updates to the Growth Management Act was around the housing element. One of the pieces involved addressing racially disparate impacts and potential displacement in housing. Land use and neighborhoods have a lot to do with setting the framework for housing that develops in the city, thus there are some applications of those changes in the Growth Management Act to the Neighborhoods Element and the Land Use Element. Some of the major changes in the Multicounty Planning Policies and the Countywide Planning Policies were around incorporating equity into almost every element. The Racially Disparate Impact Analysis is the source of the majority of the recommended policy updates. Respondents to the vision survey rated the city low on achieving equity, and in outreach to underrepresented groups a common theme has been that people are not sure they are wanted or feel at home in Bellevue. The policies in the Land Use Element and the Neighborhoods Element should not perpetuate exclusion.

The recommendations include using specific language and clarifying subjective terms; rephrasing deficit-based language to focus on the reasons why and to be more solution oriented; acknowledging there are differences in the way people understand terms that may evolve over time; considering the historical context and the need; and seeking input from those who are the most impacted.

Commissioner Ferris asked for an example of deficit-based language. Dr. Nesse said one example would be to acknowledge the reasons why buildings might be derelict rather than simply calling them derelict buildings, in essence, taking responsibility for the current state of things.

Commissioner Ferris suggested that acknowledging the differences and evolution of terms is a slippery slope. The Comprehensive Plan is to be a document in a point of time and the whole idea of evaluation of terms means it will change over time. The current differences can be acknowledged, but it is not clear how they can be addressed over time. Dr. Nesse gave as an example how different people understand the term “citizen engagement” differently given that the term has evolved over time. That is why the term was changed to “community engagement.” The idea is to ferret out terms that may have different cultural understanding and changing them to have a more common understanding. Emil King added that even a simple word like “neighborhood” in the Neighborhoods Element can have the connotation of a single family neighborhood. There are now 15,000 people living in the Downtown, but in the planning documents do not call the area a neighborhood. The idea is to acknowledge there are lower-density historically single family neighborhoods as well as new urban neighborhoods.

Commissioner Malakoutian agreed with the need to seek input from those who are the most

impacted. That is a reflection of the engagement process and how the city works to hear from specific populations, including the elderly, low-income families that have three jobs and cannot take the time to come to City Hall, people of color who may just not want to come to the City Hall, or immigrants and those facing language barriers. That is the most important and should be the main task.

Commissioner Cálad suggested that seeking input from those most impacted may involve going outside of Bellevue, especially if the desire is to bring families with children into the city. The homeowners association documents from the property owned by Commissioner Cálad specifically state that children below the age of 11 are not welcome. That sort of thing tells families they are not welcome in Bellevue.

Commissioner Brown agreed with the need for inclusivity and recognizing racial impacts, but stressed the need to remember that such impacts may be correlated with income. Bellevue is a minority majority city, which is wonderful, but the city still skews toward the rich. It needs to be recognized that in order to truly deal with racial impacts, it will be necessary to deal with affordability in the communities.

Chair Goepple agreed with the proposed changes as outlined.

Chair Bhargava asked for specifics on how the city has reached out to underrepresented groups. Dr. Nesse said in some cases organizations were contacted with a request to talk with their constituents. The city also contracted with Eastside for All which resulted in reaching a number of groups that are not necessarily based in Bellevue but which serve Bellevue residents. Additionally, the city's three cultural outreach assistants have been phenomenal in reaching out to various cultural communities in Bellevue.

Chair Bhargava stressed that acknowledging the need for diversity, the need for bringing in the voices of the underrepresented and the economically marginalized communities is not a decorative change but a truly substantive change. There are changes that could be made that would have no real impact. If the fundamental premise is to have substantive change, consideration must be given to the expectation of how the changes will have an impact.

Chair Bhargava asked if, in preparing plans of large magnitude for the city, the city considers diversity in the mix of those who are working on the plan. Dr. Nesse said it does not. Bellevue's staff is admittedly not as diverse as the community overall. One of the reasons the city has the cultural outreach assistants is due to the recognition that the staff cannot do the outreach as well as those who are already members of those communities. Chair Bhargava added that beyond just outreach, having a diverse team drafting the plans can ensure diverse thinking. Dr. Nesse pointed out that the Planning Commissioners also represent the community. The staff bring recommendations to the Commission and relies on the knowledge of the Commissioners and their connections with the community.

Commissioner Khanloo said asked why the exclusion in housing section was added and if it was because of some discriminatory wording in the existing documents. Inclusion should be the base, it should not be a separate issue. Dr. Nesse said addressing racially disparate impacts represents a substantial update to the Growth Management Act. The focus is on undoing the racism from the past, which is admittedly a very tall order. Changing the language of a few policies will not undo the past, but some corrections can be made that will start the city down that path. Diversity was a major component of the last Comprehensive Plan update, but equity was not a component of that work.

Chair Goepple said language matters in terms of how the city expresses itself, especially for those who have been affected by adverse or pejorative language. If Bellevue wants to be a welcoming city for all, some updates are probably overdue.

Chair Bhargava agreed with the need to make language changes, but stressed that language changes alone may not be sufficient. The microaggressions that can come from subtle language can be very harmful and they can negatively impact inclusion.

Turning to the land use incentive system, Dr. Nesse said new housing needs have been identified by King County. Additionally, the city has internally identified a need for affordable housing. A land use incentive system is one tool the city can use to add affordable housing in the city. The FEIS looks at a completely mandatory system and a completely voluntary system and the amount of affordable housing that might be added under each approach. The DEIS concluded that more affordable housing units would be created with a mandatory system, so the analysis included in the FEIS considers the difference between both approaches. Policies in the Land Use Element will need to be updated to support which system the city decides to go with. That will include the prioritization of uses of the incentive system, be it for affordable housing, the preservation of significant trees, daylighting streams or creating arts space.

Commissioner Brown said one clear usage of the Land Use Code is to encourage uses that are beneficial to the city and its residents. Housing is obviously a priority. The question asked was if the approach could include lowering barriers for homeowners to add ADUs or other additional density, and for developers to add affordable housing. Emil King said the incentive system has the most play where larger upzones are done, places such as BelRed and Wilburton. The Commission and the Council will be facing new ground in regard to the lower-density areas. HB-1110 says cities must allow four units per lot, but six can be allowed if the additional two are affordable. That is a type of incentive. Whether or not folks will want to include the additional two affordable units. Stakeholders will have a host of other things in mind when upzoning areas that will be to the benefit of the public, including sidewalks, parks and public spaces.

Commissioner Khanloo asked about incentives around preserving trees. Emil King said there are ways to think about what happens from a built environment standpoint. Saving a significant tree could have benefit both to a property owner and the public. Getting into the details regarding incentives will be taken up during the discussion of the tree ordinance. Commissioner Khanloo suggested that if the fine for illegally removing trees is significant enough, property owners likely will think twice. Emil King added that when it comes to amending the Comprehensive Plan, policies could be included that would influence things like that.

Commissioner Ferris commented that the city is growing in wonderful yet scary ways. The Commission and the Council are tasked with making decisions that will impact the community for years to come. While zoning will certainly be impactful, the incentive system will be a paramount importance when it comes to making the vision work. There is a clear need to find the right balance between supporting businesses and property owners and achieving community benefits. There are certain things the city knows it wants, including affordable housing, preserving trees and open spaces, but some of those things will not happen unless there are mandatory requirements associated with increased density and building height. The staff have been amazing and brilliant in evaluating the options. There is a clear need to get the incentive system right given that it will govern what happens in the city for years to come.

Chair Goepple concurred and pointed out that the FEIS directs comparing voluntary versus

mandatory, particularly in regard to things like affordability. Judgement should be held until those details are made known.

Chair Bhargava also agreed, adding that the incentive system will be a fundamental part of the overall approach.

Commissioner Malakoutian suggested the most important part of the incentive system will be its design and implementation. The goal is to seek for a win-win, and the output should be to yield more affordable housing units. Instead of focusing too much on just the wording, the Commission should wait to see what the calibrations. In the end, more affordable housing units must be the goal.

Commissioner Khanloo noted that incentives alone have not been sufficient in the past to achieve the goals, and the same is likely true going forward.

A motion to extend the meeting to 9:30 p.m. was made by Commissioner Malakoutian. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brown and the motion carried unanimously.

#### B. Bellevue Climate Vulnerability Assessment (8:51 p.m.)

Sustainability Program Coordinator Sofia Fall said the city has in place policies that support the climate vulnerability assessment work. Policy EN-7 in the Comprehensive Plan speaks to increasing climate resiliency. The Environmental Stewardship Initiative strategy C.1.1 calls for performing a climate vulnerability assessment to better understand the city's vulnerabilities to climate change, and to identify next steps in terms of resilience. There is also state legislation that supports the work, primarily HB-1181 that requires cities to include a climate change element in their comprehensive plans. The Washington State Department of Commerce developed a draft model climate element that provides guidance on complying with HB-1181. The city received a grant from the commerce department to conduct the climate vulnerability assessment as part of the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update. The draft policies in the climate vulnerability assessment itself are under review by subject matter experts and will be evaluated and considered as part of the Comprehensive Plan process.

Three metrics are used in evaluating vulnerability. Exposure is determined by the extent of a climate impact a community or a resource experiences. Sensitivity is the degree to which the community or a resource is affected, and adaptive capacity is the ability of the community or resource to cope with an impact experienced. Using the impact of high heat as an example, exposure to the heat wave would be how hot it gets, sensitivity would be measured in terms of susceptibility, and adaptive capacity might be something like access to cooling. Vulnerability is highest when exposure and sensitivity are both high and adaptive capacity is low. Vulnerability is not based only on the type of impact or the location of the impact. Bellevue is relative small so exposure is somewhat similar across the city. However, the sensitivity and adaptive capacity of different sectors, different communities and different populations results in differential vulnerability to climate change.

All that is to say that sensitivity to climate change is somewhat socially determined. One example is the urban heat island effect. Though exposure to a heat wave may be similar throughout the city, residents from historically disadvantaged communities are more likely to live in an urban heat island, which is an area with more pavement and less tree canopy where heat is retained and magnified. Such areas tend to have lower adaptive capacity in terms of

access to cooling or shade, making people living in those areas more vulnerable to extreme heat even if the initial exposure of the heat wave is the same throughout the city. Climate impacts interact with other social and economic stressors; groups that tend to be more vulnerable are also vulnerable to other system impacts and exclusions, including older people, children, low-income families, immigrant community, and BIPOC individuals.

To assess vulnerability across the city, the report uses what is called a climate vulnerability index. The index takes 30 different indicators of the three metrics and combines them to produce a vulnerability score for the different areas of the city. The score is rated from low to high. The resulting map is not intended to compare Bellevue to the region as a whole, nor to the entire country. The index is specific to Bellevue. It is also meant to provide only a planning level view of vulnerability across the city. It does not take into account population density, and it is not necessarily a map indicating which parts of the city will experience more climate impacts.

The climate vulnerability assessment uses regional data from the University of Washington climate impacts group and the US Environmental Protection Agency. It also uses regional models to create five primary climate impact categories: air temperature/extreme heat; extreme precipitation/flooding; drought; stream changes; and wildfire and wildfire smoke. The primary climate impacts are all expected by 2050 or earlier. More frequent and intense heatwaves are expected to occur, in addition to general average increases in temperature. Extreme precipitation and flooding events are also expected, which can lead to erosion and landslides. The Northwest has not historically experienced droughts but they are expected to occur more frequently. Stream changes include both historic highs and historic lows, and increase in temperature. An increase in wildfires and wildfire smoke is also expected.

The climate vulnerability assessment looks at the impacts of the adaptive capacity of and the overall vulnerability of ten specific sectors: buildings and energy; cultural resources and practices; economic development; ecosystems; emergency management; human health; land use and development; transportation; utilities; and water resources.

Sustainability Program Manager Justus Stewart called out from the report the finding that every sector is vulnerable to extreme heat and extreme precipitation. There are quite a few vulnerabilities associated with buildings and energy. There are risks to the energy supply relative to extreme heat events that trigger demand spikes; to energy infrastructure relative to extreme precipitation events; to hydroelectric systems in cases of drought; and to solar energy generation in terms of wildfires, which produce smoke and particulate matter that obscures solar productivity. Smoke can also potentially increase the cost of buildings due to increased need for air filtration. The most direct risk to buildings from wildfire is associated with buildings located near the wildland/urban forested areas.

Land use and development share a lot of similarities with buildings and energy. The risks include extreme heat and precipitation; increased demand for cooling during heat events; green infrastructure, including the tree canopy; and displacement due to wildfire smoke. Green infrastructure is a solution to a lot of issues, including urban flooding. Low-impact development and green infrastructure are tools that can provide mitigation to some of the impacts, but they are themselves susceptible to drought.

There are risks to transportation systems as well. Extreme heat can directly damage transportation infrastructure, though Bellevue has not historically had, and is not projected to have, the intensity of heat that triggers extreme effects. More likely are extreme precipitation events which can cause flooding, erosion and landslides, triggering service disruptions. One

finding of the report specific to transportation vulnerability is that adaptive capacity may be limited in terms of expense and time relative to major infrastructure projects. The adaptive capacity for the transportation system for Bellevue as a whole will increase significantly when light rail fully opens and as it expands.

With regard to ecosystems, the report indicates the sector to be highly vulnerable given limited adaptive capacity. At the watershed scale, ecosystems are vulnerable to stream damage, stream water temperatures and reduced flow levels to which certain species are highly vulnerable. City actions can help but not solve the risks.

Justus Stewart said the climate vulnerability assessment is not intended to serve as the city's adaptation plan. It is only an assessment of current vulnerabilities. It provides some actionable information that can be used in crafting strategies and programs to increase resilience to the impacts. The climate vulnerability assessment includes a section in each of the ten sectors outlining ways adaptive capacity can be increased. The most overarching of them are: climate-smart development; green storm water infrastructure; increasing the tree canopy; access to cooling; and support for the most vulnerable citizens. They tend to fall into a few categories for adaptive capacity, beginning with general internal strategies that have to do with the services the city provides. One example would be the parks department thinking about climate change impacts when considering their planting palette, thus they plant trees that are both historically native and more future proof by being more resilient to some of the impacts. The next category is specific place-based interventions, such as where heat islands are anticipated to be an issue, places where flooding is known to be an issue, and geologic hazard areas that may be worsened by increased precipitation. The third category are actions the city would take through partnerships.

In terms of the next steps, Justus Stewart said the initial list has two particularly key pathways. The first is the policy recommendations within the vulnerability assessment that have been and are being reviewed by subject matter experts. Those policies will go through the same Comprehensive Plan update process as all other policies. The second is the strategies outlined in the climate vulnerability assessment for specific actions the city might take. Those strategies are currently being reviewed, differentiated and prioritized for implementation.

The findings of the climate vulnerability assessment will be incorporated into the city's Hazard Mitigation Plan and the Environmental Stewardship Initiative Sustainable Bellevue Plan updates. Discussions are under way with staff from Facilities and Asset Management who are interested in undertaking a climate risk and resilience assessment for city-owned buildings and facilities.

A motion to extend the meeting to 10:00 p.m. was made by Commissioner Malakoutian. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cálad and the motion carried unanimously.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Malakoutian, Sofia Fall explained that older persons are more sensitive to heat and often have health conditions that result from being exposed to high heat. That does not necessarily mean that a person who is very sensitive has low adaptive capacity. For instance, an older person may in fact have access to cooling. Older persons who have higher incomes may not be as vulnerable overall as a younger person who is unhoused and does not have access to cooling. Overall, lower-income families are generally more vulnerable.

Commissioner Malakoutian asked if the planning exercise will include taking steps to prevent issues that make people more vulnerable. Sofia Fall said there is a need both to plan for

situations and to address situations once they arise. The city needs to lower its greenhouse gases emissions to prevent the impacts from being even worse, and preparations need to be made to address the impacts that are going to occur regardless. Ideally, those steps need to be taken before the impacts occur. Justus Stewart added that there are a lot of strategies that both prepare for impacts and address impacts once they occur. One obvious strategy is increasing the amount of solar which reduces fossil fuel use, improves the resilience of the grid, and can provide backup power. In the absence of reducing greenhouse gases emissions, the amount of effort and money spent on resilience actions will just keep going up because the impacts will just keep going up.

Commissioner Khanloo asked what can or is being done to prevent heat island effects. Developers will take the least expensive option so if that means no air conditioning, they will not include that amenity. Building standards generally in Bellevue are very low, which is disappointing. Justus Stewart said there are regulatory elements that are larger than the city that will have a real impact. That includes the state energy code which exerts a constant downward pressure on how much energy buildings are allowed to use, which will drive design decisions.

Commissioner Khanloo said if developers continue to just develop low-quality housing, those who cannot afford very expensive homes will be more vulnerable. Justus Stewart noted that the assessment provides the information that will inform policies and code language going forward.

Thara Johnson added that the climate vulnerability assessment is part of the overall Environmental Impact Statement. There will be a lot more discussion about mitigation strategies as the FEIS is brought forward.

Commissioner Ferris said it is understandable why there is a focus on how community members are impacted, but consideration should also be given to how the flora and the fauna are impacted in ways that ultimately will come back to impact the residents in various ways. It should also be asked who will come to help in times of climate impacts and disasters. As bad as things may get in Bellevue, they will be worse in other places, like Arizona or Mexico, which may become untenable places to live. When that happens, the people there will have to move elsewhere where things will not be as bad, such as the Pacific Northwest. That could exacerbate how Bellevue responds to the impacts. Justus Stewart said by design the climate vulnerability assessment evaluates the direct physical impacts of climate change. It looks at some of the ways those impacts might ripple out, but it cannot look at everything. Staff are having internal discussions about those issues.

Commissioner Cálad noted having lived in Chicago some years back where every summer, because there was no air conditioning, children and the elderly would fall out of windows, especially in low-income developments. In the winter months, large numbers of elderly people would die as they tried using their stoves as a heat source, resulting in fires. The most vulnerable are children and the elderly. The assessment looks at the impacts that will occur by 2050, and planning to address those impacts needs to start now. The less tree canopy there is, the more vulnerable the community will be. The city's current tree code is very weak. Sofia Fall clarified that many of the impacts highlighted in the climate vulnerability assessment will be felt before 2050. The heat dome experienced in 2021 is a good example. Commissioner Cálad said that argues in favor of acting right away. Priority should be given to protecting the tree canopy. The city does not have a budget to provide cooling spaces for the majority of the population. Justus Stewart said the city currently does operate a number of dedicated cooling centers, though whether there are enough of them to meet the needs of the future is an unknown. The climate vulnerability assessment suggests as a priority strategy to engage Emergency Services in

reviewing the data against current systems to see what the future needs might be. This would include looking at how community partners and the community itself might help address the impacts.

Commissioner Cálad pointed out that currently the majority of Bellevue residents does not have air conditioning. Moving forward, that will continue to be the case because the code does not require air conditioning. The question asked was if the city would start requiring air conditioning in the same way it already requires heating. Currently, a resident of a 1000-square-foot condominium wanting to install air conditioning would have to come up with \$17,000 (ROM for the current cost of a heat pump). The majority of those in the city who will be impacted cannot afford that. Not everyone in town can afford that. Furthermore, installing air conditioning on existing units may not be allowed by building owners who want to protect the appearance of their buildings. If air conditioning is not required as buildings are constructed, it will not be possible to add it later.

Commissioner Cálad said many older and low-income units have outdated heating systems that consume a lot of energy. Continuing to use the older systems will use a lot more energy. Absent air conditioning, residents will turn to portable units, which will consume even more energy, leading to electricity blackouts and more vulnerable persons being affected.

Commissioner Brown voiced appreciation for the city's effort to assess vulnerabilities and noted living in a house in a low elevation that is surrounded by trees, reducing the possibility of heat impacts. The same property, however, may face other impacts, such as flooding and landslides. Properties higher up on the hills may be more susceptible to smoke impacts. Having an honest assessment of the impacts climate change will have on the city will provide incentives to invest in mitigation strategies, including prevention strategies.

Chair Goepple underscored the need for urgency and remarked that four or five years ago as a member of Bellevue Essentials class a number of questions were asked about climate change and it became evident the city was doing nothing about it, or at least no one at the Bellevue Essentials class was able to speak to actions the city was taking. That leaves the city playing catchup. The legacy that will be left to future generations is inexcusable. Drought, flooding and extreme weather events are particularly concerning. A recent NPR broadcast focused on adaptive strategies being used in China to address flooding issues; their approach of creating absorbing landscapes should be carefully examined.

Commissioner Khanloo asked what Bellevue is doing about the idea of opting out of using natural gas systems. Justus Stewart said the issue is a complicated one. The first city that enacted an outright ban on gas was Berkely, California, and that ban was struck down by the courts. Even so, there are other municipalities that are discussing the options. Locally, Puget Sound Energy is already required to phase gas out of its electricity mix, but that will not happen soon.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None  
(9:54 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES  
(9:54, p.m.)

A. September 27, 2023

Thara Johnson noted a call by Commissioner Malakoutian for a minor amendment clarifying a



statement made about the retreat.

A motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Commissioner Brown. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Malakoutian and the motion carried unanimously.

11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS  
(9:55 p.m.)

A motion to continue the meeting to 10:05 p.m. was made by Commissioner Malakoutian. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brown and the motion carried unanimously.

Eddie Chang, a Newport Hills resident, commented on the issue of housing capacity. The Comprehensive Plan looks out 20 years, which means the last time it was updated was in 2003. Buildings constructed after that date have not been torn down and rebuilt just because of a change in zoning. The Puget Sound Regional Council has set capacity goals for a 30-year horizon, but the actual capacity compared against what will really get built does not always line up.

Pamela Johnston encouraged the Commission to look at the comments associated with the statistically valid survey. Many have called for bike lanes, but the comments from the survey indicate the focus is on recreation rather than on commuting by bike. The survey asked people to outline their ideal neighborhood, but nothing was asked about what they would be willing to give up. There was outreach done, but those in the room were not told there would be professional people from outside of Bellevue who bowled over the rest of the people. Besides just air conditioning, there are other options, like passive solar and heat pumps that should be considered.

Joe Sargent offered praise for the presentations made and the answers offered by the staff.

Jonny Lu, a Newport Hills resident, said the topographical differences between some of the city's neighborhoods is worth considering in terms of the lack of sidewalks and bike lanes. The climate vulnerability assessment appears to evaluate the current state of things without necessarily encompassing the future state envisioned by all the current planning work in places like Wilburton and around Lake Bellevue. When planning for the future, the focus should be on equitable and resilient infrastructure and how it can either solve or exacerbate affordability issues.

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None  
(10:03 p.m.)

13. ADJOURNMENT  
(10:03 p.m.)

A motion to adjourn was made by Chair Goepple. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ferris and the motion carried unanimously.

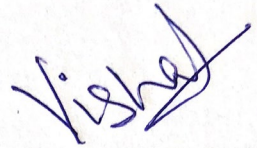
Chair Bhargava adjourned the meeting at 10:03 p.m.



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Thara Johnson  
Staff to the Planning Commission

11/21/2023  
Date



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Vishal Bhargava  
Chair of the Planning Commission

11/21/2023  
Date