

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

November 29, 2023
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Chair Bhargava

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Emil King, Kate Nesse, Janet Shull, Justin Panganiban, Department of Community Development; Kathy Gerla, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER
(6:31p.m.)

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m. by Vice Chair Goepple who presided.

2. ROLL CALL
(6:32 p.m.)

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Chair Bhargava.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
(6:33 p.m.)

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

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None
(6:34 p.m.)

5. STAFF REPORTS
(6:34 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.

Thara Johnson noted that one topic had not been addressed at the Commission's annual retreat, specifically what is working well for the Commission and areas where improvements could be

made. There was agreement that a survey with questions on the topic should be circulated, and that the feedback should be reviewed at a future meeting.

Thara Johnson informed the Commissioners that a training session with Assistant City Attorney Matt McFarland focused on the decision criteria for Land Use Code amendments will be scheduled for the first or second meeting in January.

6. WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Vice Chair Goepple 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 (6:39 p.m.)

Thara Johnson noted having included in the Commission packet several written communications received prior to the publishing deadline. The majority of the comments were related to Wilburton Vision Implementation, but there were also comments relative to Vision Zero for gun safety. Additional comments received after the publishing deadline were also forwarded to the Commissioners, including comments relating to Wilburton.

B. Oral Communications (6:41 p.m.)

Jonny Land use, a resident of Newport Hills, referred to the Economic Development vision statement that says Bellevue is a hub for global business and innovation, a statement that sounds good in theory but which is a bit tougher in reality. The Bellevue-based climate startup called Lithos Carbon currently has 14 employees and is anticipating doubling that number over the next year. The organization is currently looking for office space but is struggling to find something that is affordable, transit friendly and urban. When it comes to office space, Bellevue is a tale of two cities. There are cost-effective options, but they tend to not be transit friendly and in the case of redevelopment the leases can be canceled on short notice. The more urban, transit-friendly options, have rents that are double or even four times higher. For most startups, the urban options are not affordable. Lithos Carbon has been forced to start looking for space in Seattle. There are policies that could put implemented that would help, including considering the adaptive reuse of space rather than just incentivizing full-on tear downs. That could help keep lease costs low and could potentially preserve some of the older buildings. Small business incubator policies should also be considered. Commotion Labs at the University of Washington and the Global Innovation Exchange are good examples of co-located space that should be incentivized. Finally, there could be mandates for more affordable space along the lines of what is done for affordable housing.

Bill Finkbiner spoke representing himself as a Wilburton property owner, and the Wilburton Property Owners Group, which meets monthly to talk with city planning staff. Wilburton is

unique in that it is home to a lot of long-term businesses that are privately owned and operated. The Pumphouse is an institution that has been around for a long time, and the owner is clearly a part of the community. Mutual Materials has been operating in the subarea for decades by the same family. As someone who has been working in the Wilburton neighborhood for many years, it is exciting to see the changes happening, including light rail and EastRail. The Commission was urged to be aggressive when considering heights and densities to take full advantage of all the infrastructure.

John Darvish, owner of a property across the street from Overlake Hospital zoned BR-MO-H-2, noted having followed the BelRed rezone with interest and curiosity for the past 15 years. The area has historically been zoned for medical office. In the current iteration, part of what has been medical office between NE 8th Street and Bel-Red Road, was zoned mixed use, with a part of it retaining the BR-MO-H-2 zoning. The potential for medical office development for the area in question is 1.3 million square feet of development. Over the past 40 years, no medical office was developed in the area, and that seems to be an indication that there is no need for medical office in that location, at least not that much. An email was sent to the Commission and the staff suggesting six alternatives, and they have been discussed with the staff. Given the proximity to light rail, it is imperative that the zoning be gotten right.

Alex Tsimerman, president of Stand Up America, noted having been threatened by the City Council two months ago, and reported having been poisoned. The question is whether they will kill Alex Tsimerman or allow to live for another four years. The problem is very serious. The issues are not tied to the fact of being a Jew, rather it is the pure banditas that are around. Everyone who belongs to the democratic mafia is a bandita and everything they do is a crime. It is okay if the Commissioners are anti-Semite, but when the democratic mafia tries to kill somebody, it is a problem. It is happening everywhere Alex Tsimerman speaks and the situation is critical. The city's ordinance 6752 was drafted only because of Alex Tsimerman. People with different opinions should not be killed.

Vice Chair Goepple asked to have the record reflect that the comments just made were not in compliance with Ordinance 6752 given that they had no bearing on the specifics of Bellevue city government or the scope of what the Planning Commission is supposed to be covering.

Alexis Chartouni commended the staff for their work in creating documents and in engaging with the community. The Commission was urged to support Alternative 3 from the DEIS rather than the preferred alternative. There is a clear interest in seeing more density brought to the node. Alternative 3 meets the housing vision statement. More density means more supply, and more supply means more equity in housing. It is not the sole solution, but by providing more there will be more diversity in housing. More density also leads to the creation of more vibrant neighborhoods. A huge investment has been made in the transportation node. The city has repaved Spring Boulevard twice and to capitalize on those investments more density will be needed, which Alternative 3 will provide.

Tsang Wong shared having been an investor and landholder in the BelRed area for more than 20 years, including in the 130th station area. It is exciting to see the entire area transform into a technology hub. Having grown up in the densely populated and dynamic Hong Kong, where all actions are centered around transit, the benefits of urban living were made clear. That should be the vision for the Bellevue area in general as it transitions into a global hub. The current code, however, needs to be updated to enable the growth of the area. Alternative 3 is the best option for meeting the transportation vision and housing vision statements. The city should have the foresight to update the code in a way that will accommodate future growth. Alternative 3 allows for the building height needed for the area to grow, particularly in the 130th station area.

Pamela Johnson commented that there are many cultures in the city. Many are new having arrived recently, but there was culture in Bellevue before that. People have a culture even if they do not have an ethnicity culture. There is culture to the neighborhoods, with different neighborhoods having a different look and feel. In Bridle Trails there is a horse curling crew that comes through, and no one else has that. One thing missing from the planning document is economics. There is talk of bringing in people, but who are they? The city needs people to take the jobs that are coming in to the city. Those people are being trained through the schools. Someone should look into what careers Bellevue school kids went into after school. When Safeway and Coca Cola are lost there will be big open spots there, and it will not just be housing. The city is not very balanced with tech, and that makes everything more expensive. The only thing heard from economic development is that art and visitors are good, but that does not give the city a balance. Some HOAs are very concerned about legislation that basically says HOAs cannot have laws that cannot be overridden. Sometimes HOAs are put together because the people want a certain culture in their neighborhood, and that cannot be judged for good or bad. People want to live in neighborhoods that have certain ways.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(7:05 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION

A. Planning Commission Bylaw Amendments
(7:05 p.m.)

City Attorney Kathy Gerla said the bylaws for all of the city's boards and commissions were set to be updated. Per the Commission's bylaws, the actual vote on the changes will have to come at the Commission's next regularly scheduled meeting, and they must be approved by a two-thirds majority vote. The proposed changes are aimed at synching with changes made by the Council to the code in August. The changes relate to three categories: remote participation, public participation, and additional enforcement language and procedures for how to enforce the rules. Each of the amendments mirrors what is in the ordinance and as such they are not optional.

The one proposed amendment that is optional is the recommendation to remove the second oral communication period. The Council removed their second oral comment period in 2022 and the recommendation is that all city boards and commissions do the same to be consistent with the Council. Removing the item from the Commission's agenda will not refrain the Commission from allowing for public comment at the end of a meeting by a majority vote to amend the agenda accordingly.

Commissioner Khanloo concurred with the proposed changes, as did Commissioner Cálad.

Commissioner Brown voiced support for fixing the remote participation issue, and for addressing the issues the Commission has had with certain public speakers who have been offensive. Having a space where all can feel comfortable, and a space that reflects the diversity and strengths of Bellevue, is very important, and the proposed revisions meet that objective. Vice Chair Goeppel concurred.

Commissioner Ferris voiced support for all of the changes, as did Commissioner Malakoutian.

A motion to direct staff to bring back the changes recommended by staff for a vote at the Commission's next regular meeting was made by Commissioner Brown. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cálad and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update: Vision Updates (7:13 p.m.)

Assistant Director Emil King clarified that when talking about a vision, the focus is on a future 2044 state.

Senior Planner Dr. Kate Nesse said the Council vision and the Council priorities are a guiding element for the update. There have been a number of changes to the Council priorities since the Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 2015. While the categories are similar, there is a stronger emphasis on many housing types and housing for all income levels, and there is a broader definition of community in line with the tagline of Bellevue as a welcoming city. Other updates include connecting businesses to each other and to the world; an emphasis on cross-cultural connections and innovation as integral to the community; increasing access to parks and open space; and giving more priority to environmental sustainability.

With regard to the state and regional requirements, Bellevue is planning for 35,000 housing units and 70,000 jobs. Beyond that, however, the Puget Sound Regional Council updated its growth centers structure to include countywide and local centers, thus Bellevue needs to update its plan accordingly. The update also addresses equity throughout the plan in line with Council priorities and state law and regional documents. Planning for the causes and impacts of climate change is scattered throughout the plan. There is also planning for housing that is affordable to all households, and planning for middle housing.

To date the community engagement process has stretched over 18 months. More than 5000 community members have been engaged, and there have been discussions with a full spectrum of people ranging from those in the business community, the development community, the arts and tourism communities, and those working for non-profits and social service organizations. All of the community feedback was used to inform the update, and the statements were brought back to the community in September and October to verify whether or not they accomplish the stated goals. In general, the community had a positive reaction, showing favor for including equity and inclusion; the emphasis on environment and sustainability; and the way in which the vision statements are supportive of a community in which everyone can thrive.

There was a general interest in having more specificity across all of the vision statements. Most of the feedback received can best be addressed in policy language rather than in making the vision statements more detailed. One thing that has come up across all of the community feedback is an interest in having low crime and an emphasis on safety. Staff is talking about policy language in the Comprehensive Plan that would emphasize those particulars. Feedback relative to the transportation vision included giving more emphasis to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, or a stronger emphasis on autos and traffic flow. The public expressed an interest in having more of an emphasis in the housing vision on housing that is affordable across all income levels, a topic that should be addressed in policy language. With regard to the environment vision, the feedback included a desire to see more of an emphasis on climate change and sustainability. Finally, feedback in terms of the parks, recreation and open space vision was around increasing equitable access to parks, which also should be addressed at the policy level.

Continuing, Dr. Kate Nesse said the Council priorities were added to the introduction section exactly as the Council wrote them. Additionally, the vision statements for each element were removed from the introduction; they will continue to be included in each element. The demographics section was removed, but the demographics sidebar has been retained in that it sets the context. A sidebar was added listing the functional plans, and the monuments in Bellevue's history timeline was updated to include the past ten years and events related to racial exclusion.

With regard to the citywide vision, Dr. Kate Nesse said the city mottos were added at the top. Previously the top line was more of a tagline. Language was also added around diversity of people and diversity of neighborhoods. The focus of growth was identified more broadly than just the Downtown. The 2015 version placed a heavy emphasis on growth in the Downtown and as revised includes the mixed use centers. The revisions also recognize the importance of the business centers across the city.

Some of the vision statements for the elements are almost identical to what they were in 2015, while others have seen more substantial updates. For the community engagement vision, the primary change is use of the word “community” instead of “citizen” to be more inclusive. For the land use vision statement, the primary changes are to enhance livability through growth; to identify the mixed use centers as the focus of growth; and to support many types of neighborhoods. The changes to the neighborhood vision seek to add resiliency; references to well-maintained neighborhoods; and references to broadened connections within and across the neighborhoods. The housing vision statement received the most dramatic updates, adding equitable access to housing; a focus on current and future needs; promoting housing that is affordable to households at many levels; promoting housing that meets the needs of people across all life stages; and indicating that the city has a more active role in ensuring housing for the lowest income residents. To the capital facilities element vision, references were added in regard to efficiency and climate resiliency. The utilities element vision was updated to include a focus on supporting a growing city, not just a growing economy; and to give consideration for visual, social and environmental impacts of utilities. The primary change to the transportation element vision was to focus on all modes of transportation. The word “workforce” was added to the economic development element vision statement. The environment element vision was revised to include enhancing natural systems through growth; to add climate resiliency; and to add language that makes sure new buildings and in have a positive impact on the environment. To the human services element vision the notion of equity was stressed; and more specificity was added in regard to meeting essential needs. The parks, recreation and open space element vision statement was updated to focus on community health; and connections and access for everyone. The revisions to the urban design and the arts element call for replacing new buildings with the built environment.

Commissioner Cálad called attention to Page 4 of the introduction and vision chapter and noted that the picture included shows Main Street with makeshift divisions. The picture is not indicative of good planning. Dr. Kate Nesse said staff will consider using a different photo.

Commissioner Cálad agreed with the need to place more of an emphasis on business development opportunities and incentives in order for the city to thrive. The photo does not come across as making Bellevue a business-friendly city. Emil King said the business climate is primarily addressed in the economic development vision statement, which did get only a light touch.

Commissioner Ferris supported the comment made by Commissioner Cálad and the comment made during public comments about the need for the city to support small businesses and incubator space. Commissioner Malakoutian concurred.

Commissioner Brown agreed as well and noted recently having to give up office space in the city due to affordability. Bellevue needs a diversity of businesses ranging from the small to Amazon and Microsoft. The city has come a long way from the standpoint of equity, inclusion and political correctness and that is to be commended.

Vice Chair Goepppele voiced support for the idea of focusing on small businesses. Big businesses

are able to look out for themselves. Helping small businesses thrive is important when it comes to creating a pipeline of new employers and opportunities.

Commissioner Ferris praised the staff for the amount of work put into the vision statements and said the work is to be commended. With regard to including the Council priorities in the vision statement, Commissioner Ferris pointed out that over time the Council changes as do the Council priorities. Reference should be made to the current Council priorities, which led to the proposed vision statements, rather than making it sound like the current Council priorities will still be in place in 2030. While the specifics regarding things like improving the tree canopy and the city's waterways will be addressed in the policies, the vision statements could stress their importance. Under capital facilities, it might be good to include flexibility of use given that over time a building constructed for a particular use may find that use no longer appropriate in the future. Additionally, the vision statement regarding parks does not include language about keeping the parks well maintained.

Commissioner Malakoutian also praised the staff for their work and proposed including something about crime prevention. There is specific language about preventing homelessness, but nothing about preventing crime. Additionally, given the current focus on AI, something should be said about technology and AI can be incorporated in ways that will make Bellevue a smart city. Commissioners Brown and Ferris concurred.

Commissioner Khanloo referred to the vision statement regarding Bellevue as a city in a park and asked why the references to open spaces, cultural facilities and providing abundant access to areas of natural beauty had been eliminated. The added sentence does not cover all of that. Dr. Kate Nesse said the shift in focus was toward how the parks system impacts people as opposed to specific facilities.

Commissioner Khanloo agreed with the need to include an emphasis on AI and technology, which will be even more dominant in the future.

Vice Chair Goepppele noted that the agenda memo referred to changing the environment element to the climate change element. While it is good to include an emphasis on climate change, "environment" is a broader umbrella term. Dr. Kate Nesse said that is part of an ongoing discussion. It was included in the memo, but the determination was made that things are not at a point of bringing forward a recommendation. There is recent state legislation requiring a climate change element. Many of the requirements are already met in the environment element. A recommendation on changing the name of the element will be brought forward when the policies are up for discussion. Vice Chair Goepppele voiced support for calling it the climate change/environment element.

With regard to the topic of public safety, Emil King said the best place to address it would be in the neighborhood element. When the public talks about public safety, their references are both to crime and transportation.

Commissioner Cálad called for not only calling for crime prevention but also for combating crime. The police cannot prevent crime, but they can fight crime provided they have the resources to do so.

Vice Chair Goepppele stressed that the vision statements all address land use issues. In that regard, crime prevention refers to things like having places well lit. The funding of the police force is not a topic for the Land Use Code.

Emil King said the topic of Bellevue as a smart city and using AI and technology will likely fit in

multiple elements. There was full concurrence on the part of the Commissioners.

With regard to the parks, recreation and open space vision, Dr. Kate Nesse allowed that the missing items are present in the revision with the exception of cultural facilities and systems that are well maintained.

Commissioner Calad suggested that the issue of well-maintained should apply also to the streets. Commissioner Malakoutian agreed but stressed that the specifics belong in the policies, not the vision statements.

Commissioner Brown supported having the vision statement call out the need for having a clean, well-maintained and beautiful system of parks and facilities. How that plays out is the role of the policies and the City Council.

Dr. Kate Nesse did not have a specific reason for why the reference to cultural facilities had been left out. Cultural facilities are addressed fairly extensively in the cultural design and arts element. As used, “recreational facilities” is intended to be an overarching term.

BREAK
(7:57 p.m.)

C. Wilburton Vision Implementation: Phase 2 Engagement and Discussion of
Community Input
(8:03 p.m.)

Strategic Planning Manager Janet Shull briefly reviewed the project timeline and highlighted upcoming activities. The FEIS will be released in February and actual recommendations for policies and the Land Use Code amendment will follow. The goal is for the Wilburton Vision Implementation to be before the Council for adoption in June 2024.

Senior Planner Justin Panganiban said the feedback offered by the Commission has been instrumental in affirming many aspects of implementing the Wilburton vision. In March the Commission offered direction on the draft vision statement and the policy topics and goals, then in a series of study sessions in May through July the Commission discussed policy focus areas and key policy moves. The draft transportation policies were before the Transportation Commission in July at which time the Transportation Commission took action to approve a recommendation on draft policies. A refreshed version of the draft transportation policies were before the Transportation Commission in November. At that meeting several key transportation policy issues were queued up, including the extension of NE 6th Street, which has been identified as a key east-west arterial extension between I-405 and 120th Avenue NE. The environmental review process will determine if the city’s policies will continue to support the extension. The Transportation Commission also weighed in on draft access concepts for Wilburton that provide new accessible neighborhood connections in support of a future multimodal network in Wilburton. The Transportation Commission will take action on the refreshed version of draft policies in the first quarter of 2024 and transmit its updated recommendation to the Planning Commission.

The last update on community engagement came as Phase I was being wrapped up. The process included reengaging with stakeholders who had been involved in the earlier 2018 visioning effort, as well as community members who had not previously been engaged in the process. The Phase I input supported the development of the action alternatives that were studied in the environmental review process, and helped support the identification of key policy moves relating to the vision. Phase 2 was focused on input to help craft the policies and regulations to

implement the vision and the engagement took place between January and September. More than 350 people engaged across a number of different events. More than 900 mailers were distributed to residents and businesses within the Wilburton TOD area.

It was noted in the Phase I engagement that the youth population had not been as engaged with. At the same time, the value of the youth perspective was recognized in terms of shaping a TOD area that is inviting for families with young children and as future residents of and workers in Wilburton. Planning and Youth Link staff co-led a workshop for approximately 30 youth as part of the Youth Involvement Conference in April. The exercise helped youth to imagine and think about different priorities around climate change, equity, and activities around the Wilburton station and Eastrail.

There also was engagement with the Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network and Bellevue Network on Aging advisory boards to identify key equity considerations for communities of color and older adults. Participation in Welcoming Week resource fair hosted by the Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network at Crossroads Mall helped to bring key policy moves to community members in the area. The concept of universal design came up along with more affordable housing and transportation opportunities.

Continuing, Justin Panganiban said the community open house held in August at the Bellevue Botanical Garden saw 87 attendees, including a number of new persons engaging on Wilburton for the first time. The event was structured in a way to best facilitate community feedback on key policy moves.

A questionnaire on Engaging Bellevue was live between August 16 and September 18, providing a way to engage with folks not able to attend, or not aware of, the open house. A variety of social media avenues were utilized to get a diversity of folks engaged in providing feedback on key policy moves. Demographic information was collected via the Engaging Bellevue platform, and there were 169 respondents.

At the open house, there was a higher proportion of folks who live, work or own property in the Wilburton area, while the online questionnaire captured a variety of folks, most of whom identified as those who visit, eat, shop or access services in the area. Not surprisingly, the Wilburton neighborhood had a large representation of folks who provided input, but there was input from residents from across the entire city.

The engagement process included participants from a number of demographics. 20 percent were people of color; 41 percent were between the ages of 18 and 44; and 22 percent reported being renters rather than homeowners.

Generally, those who engaged in the process viewed the policy moves as bringing positive change to the community, and indicated expectations for change that are generally aligned with the intended policy outcomes. There were, however, areas of diverging opinions. With regard to the tree canopy, on the positive side many favored planting more trees and prioritizing the tree canopy in future development and green spaces. On the negative side, some pointed out that future development will result in the loss of mature trees and wildlife habitat, possibly ushering in more concrete. There was a clear priority expressed for policies that seek to increase the tree cover, native landscaping, and preserving mature trees. Staff noted this is something that can be articulated more clearly in policy as important elements through the development process.

Much was heard about the success of small businesses in the Wilburton area. On the positive side, the need for a greater variety of local businesses, especially food and beverage services, were highlighted. On the negative side, the loss of mom and pop stores and small businesses not

being able to afford retail space was highlighted. The priorities were for programs and incentives to help small businesses thrive, and a preference for local retail over chain operations. Staff noted that some of this can be addressed in the code through development regulations that support small business; and that programs and partnerships can also support small businesses.

In the area of public art, positive comments were made in regard to the need for community driven public art that is integrated into future development. On the negative side, the focus was on public art that is unattractive or which caters to or represents only specific communities. The priorities were recognition of cultures, diverse representation, and support for local artists and the youth. Staff noted that policy should communicate an inclusive approach to arts and culture, and that creating a welcoming community involves focusing on communities that have not felt welcome due to historical exclusion.

The issue of future densities and heights triggered one of the highest areas of divergence. On the positive side, the comments recognized greater opportunities around transit and Lake Bellevue and for affordable housing. On the negative side, there were comments about greater traffic congestion, negative aesthetic impacts, and infringement on single family residential areas. The priorities were around transitions in scale, adequate parking, and building standards that provide for light, air and public views. Staff noted this can be addressed across different policy topics, and that staff can ensure policy language supports appropriate mitigation regarding transition in scale and use between the Wilburton TOD area and its surroundings.

Housing affordability also generated positive and negative comments. On the positive side, the comments were focused on the need for housing that is affordable to those who work in the area and families, and which is accessible to transit options and services. The negative comments were about the fact that new housing will still be unaffordable, and about new housing that may not be compatible with single family residential. Staff noted that the city is studying different programs to deliver affordable housing, and that as more information from the analysis is shared, policies can be updated to support parameters that achieve affordable housing.

Commissioner Brown said one big issue was the low rate of respondents who were renters. While 47 percent of Bellevue residents rent, only 22 percent of the respondents were renters. Clearly those who own their own homes have invested heavily in their properties and as such have a vested interest making sure city policies will make those investments work. More needs to be done to reach out to apartment residents seeking conversations and input. They need to be educated about why they should care.

Commissioner Ferris agreed that more outreach to the rental community would be beneficial. It was good to see that staff met with success in engaging young folks who ultimately will be the most impacted by the policies under consideration. It is not surprising to see a divergent of opinions, but through it all the focus needs to be on the needs of the city 30 to 50 years out, which means support for businesses and more housing.

Commissioner Malakoutian suggested that the majority of individuals who attend things like the open house regularly attend such gatherings. Staff was asked if they have a baseline percentage when it comes to reaching out to engage with different persons. Justin Panganiban allowed that there are things the city can do on the back end to better monitor whether or not new persons are being engaged with. Some events have not been as successful as others when it comes to tracking the participating voices. There was much learned during Phase I that informed the second phase, but there remains more work to be done in tracking and monitoring new voices.

Commissioner Khanloo agreed with Commissioner Malakoutian and stressed the need to hear more than just the loud voices. Staff was asked if they had numbers attached to the positive and

negative comments for each issue. Justin Panganiban said Appendix B of the engagement report has all of the comments that were received through the open house and Engaging Bellevue. One of the challenges in terms of quantifying the data comes from the fact that often comments cut across many different things. The focus has primarily been on capturing the general sentiments by area.

Commissioner Khanloo noted having attended the open house at the Botanical Garden and hearing many people express concerns about highrises that might block views of the garden and clog the streets with traffic. The Botanical Garden is clearly a gem and it should be protected for the benefit of the community. Justin Panganiban said EIS includes a chapter on aesthetics. There are a number of 3D renderings that show the impacts of shade within the area; they are intended to help communicate the story of the potential impacts to the garden and the area in general. Commissioner Khanloo added that that should be communicated to the public.

Commissioner Cálad said one of the great things about Hong Kong is that public transportation provides everyone with opportunities to enjoy the city. Their transportation system is 99 percent reliable and it is very clean. Hong Kong is a large city and the majority of it remains green. In the most dense areas, however, no attention was paid to retaining green spaces. The density is very high, and most of the buildings do not have air conditioning, making things unbearable. Bellevue needs to be careful in balancing the built environment with the natural environment.

Vice Chair Goepple said the sentence in the agenda memo “respondents expect to see increased density providing for public benefits that expand walking and cycling, as well as create open spaces,” struck a chord. The idea of having greater density involves a high element of trust for the public, where the public is trusting that in exchange for more density there will be upsides for them. It will be important going forward for the city to deliver on those benefits.

Vice Chair Goepple voiced surprise at not seeing more people expressing anxiety about how all the change coming to the Wilburton area will be managed. Downtown Bellevue has a lot of challenges in terms of all the change that is occurring, and hopefully there will be some good planning put into how to manage change in Wilburton.

Vice Chair Goepple commented that divergence of opinions often comes down to balancing competing objectives that people have. It is clear the staff have done a good job of that thus far.

Commissioner Brown stressed the need to incorporate safety going forward for Wilburton residents.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None
(8:47 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
(8:47 p.m.)

A. October 25, 2023

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

11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS
(8:48 p.m.)

Lee Sargent, 16246 NE 24th Street, commended the Commission and the staff for a job well done. Commissioner Malakoutian was also congratulated for being elected to the City Council. The country operates under the constitution. The first amendment the Bill of Rights has much to say about the importance of freedom of speech. Too often there is a rush to get things done, forgetting that the only way to do that is to act harmoniously. What is too often overlooked is the fact that people are not all being heard. History is rife with history that stemmed not because of words spoken but because of views not shared. Political correctness is great in the sense that it shows respect, but it does not tell what a person is thinking. If people are not allowed to express themselves and thus are not heard, problems can result. The speaker added that having served as a police officer in Walla Walla county, it is true that the police do not prevent crimes, it is the people.

Pamela Johnston emphasized the word “community” the way it is used in the vision statements. The word by itself is a little too broad. Bellevue residents are in charge of making the city the way they want it to be. People who do not live in Bellevue should not be allowed to tell the city how to draft the Comprehensive Plan just because they may be engaged in the community by virtue of living nearby or because they work or shop in Bellevue. Likewise, Bellevue residents should not be allowed to tell other cities how to do things. Bellevue’s plans should be focused on those who are invested in the city. Those who visit Bellevue on vacation are not necessarily the community. People who work in Bellevue are part of the community, but they only have so much power. The businesses and the people have to get the same opportunities to be able to say what is going on. Local residents are responsible for helping to educate others about what is going on.

Saghar Amini, a Downtown resident and renter, noted having heard a lot over the past year about outreach to renters, and noted being subscribed everywhere to all kinds of notices coming from the city. Even so, information about some of the events was not received. It is the responsibility of the city and the staff to make a real effort to reach out to renters and others. The city certainly can do better in terms of outreach.

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(p.m.)

13. ADJOURNMENT
(9:59 p.m.)

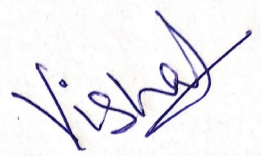
A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Brown. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Malakoutian and the motion carried unanimously.

Vice Chair Goepple adjourned the meeting at 8:59 p.m.



Thara Johnson
Staff to the Planning Commission

01/11/2024
Date



Vishal Bhargava
Chair of the Planning Commission

01/11/2024
Date