



Bellevue Planning Commission

February 25, 2026

PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM

SUBJECT

2025 Annual Process Improvement Survey

STAFF CONTACT(S)

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Community Development Department

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION

DIRECTION

INFORMATION ONLY

This memo follows up on the conversation the Planning Commission conducted at its annual retreat held on November 5, 2025 relating to the results of the annual Planning Commission survey on continuous improvement. Since that time, staff has had internal discussions about how to best address the recommendations and feedback from the survey results. Staff request direction on implementing the process improvements at this meeting.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

The Annual Planning Commission survey was conducted prior to the Planning Commission Retreat on November 5, 2025. Six Planning Commissioners responded to the survey. The Commission had a conversation about the results at the retreat. The following items were identified as strengths of the commission:

- Respectful and collaborative relationships
- Substantive dialogue that occurs during the meetings
- Effective integration of newer members

The Commissioners discussed possible improvements to processes that would assist them in their duties. Below is a summary of the possible improvements, staff assessment of the improvement and the specific direction sought to implement the improvement (if desired).

1. Response to public input: The Planning Commission desired to more clearly understand how staff is responding to public comments.
 - a. Staff Assessment. For most Comprehensive Plan Amendments (CPAs) and Land Use Code Amendments (LUCAs), the engagement plan is created as the legislative proposal is initiated and is part of the scope that Council takes into account at the launch of the proposal. Different engagement plans result in different ways of collecting and reporting input from stakeholders.

As a baseline, public notice and public participation in connection with the CPAs and LUCAs processed through the Planning Commission complies with the requirements of the Growth Management Act and the Process IV requirements in the Land Use Code. The Department Directors for Community Development (for CPAs) and Development

Services (for LUCAs) determine the scope of public outreach and the staff resources devoted to public engagement in association with CPAs and LUCAs. The Planning Commission does not have any role or authority to direct the Department's public outreach and engagement plans for CPAs and LUCAs, although City staff provides the results of that public engagement and stakeholder input when the legislative items come before the Commission.

Tools like the table mentioned by Planning Commissioners, included in the Critical Areas Ordinance LUCA Public Hearing agenda materials (October 22, 2025), can be helpful in connection with a CPA or LUCA that is controversial or particularly detailed; however, it may not be appropriate for all CPAs or LUCAs or at all stages of the Process IV legislative process.

Staff often has conversations with stakeholders throughout the process and work to balance the needs and desires of diverse groups in their recommendation. However, the nature of the public process is that the recommendation may not meet the desires of all stakeholders. Staff work to convey to the Planning Commission the recommended balance among all of the stakeholders – both the vocal participants in the process and those that have less of a voice.

Finally, it is difficult for staff to address last minute comments that come in the day before or the day of the meeting. Under City Code, public hearings must be noticed at least fourteen (14) days in advance with all of the information about the proposed CPA or LUCA. This requirement in Bellevue's Land Use Code gives people time to review and comment on the proposal in advance of the hearing. Staff seek to be responsive to the public, especially folks who have historically not been engaged in local government and may not understand the nuances of commenting, and will do their best to be able to respond to comments on short notice. Of course, the Planning Commission should hear all sides of issues before taking action or giving direction but Commissioners should also consider the context of the comments. Comments that come in at the last minute after a long engagement process may be also difficult for staff to process without delaying the legislative proposal.

- b. Suggested Changes. As noted above, many projects report on engagement and Planning Commissioners have identified some methods of reporting that they found useful. Some possible ways of building on the useful reporting responses to public input include:
 - i. A template to document the response to public comments made to the Planning Commission. This would be an optional attachment to public hearing materials, based on the specifics and complexity of the public comments received during the CPA or LUCA process.
 - ii. A section in memos relating to CPAs and LUCAs addressing engagement, how the engagement meets the applicable Code requirements, and the progress on the engagement plan and the feedback heard so far. This section could also address the needs of stakeholders who have less power in the process. This is current practice with the materials prepared and presented to the Commission.
 - iii. Ask staff to respond to comments that come in at the last minute only if materials have not been made available to the public prior to the publishing of

the packet or if the comments come from people who have not had access to the public process.

2. Pre-meeting briefings: The Planning Commissioners commented on how helpful the pre-meeting briefings are. However, there was a recognition that they can be hard to schedule. There was a proposal for a regular briefing meeting or “office hours”.
 - a. Staff Assessment. Staff also find briefings useful and are happy to accommodate the Commissioners’ schedules. The concern with a set meeting time for briefings is the possibility of a quorum of the Planning Commission. This could be addressed by requiring RSVPs in advance, offering two or three meeting times, or reducing the time staff meet with each Commissioner during the meeting so they log off before the next Commissioner logs in. These meetings would be strictly information only with the intention to answer Commissioner questions and help staff know what to clarify in their presentation at the meeting.
 - b. Suggested Changes. Staff are happy to offer a set hour-long meeting time with the option of scheduling additional briefings outside of that hour for Commissioners that cannot make it.
3. Clarity on legislative scope and Planning Commission role: Planning Commissioners asked for additional guidance on staying within the scope of the CPA or LUCA initiated by Council. In addition, Planning Commissioners expressed a desire to focus discussions on the actions that are the responsibility of the Planning Commission.
 - a. Staff Assessment. Staff felt a focus on the Council scope as the Commission’s role would be helpful for the Commission’s discussion as well as for the community’s understanding of the process. For each proposal, staff strive to balance the detail of the staff recommendation so that Planning Commission is informed about the specific CPA or LUCA with the information about the legislative process that focuses Planning Commission decisions at a policy level. There is an opportunity to clarify the scope of the proposal, the Staff Recommendation, and the Planning Commission role in memos and presentations. For CPAs and LUCAs, the Land Use Code identifies specific and distinct decision criteria for each type of action. All memos that accompany public hearings that are held with Planning Commission outline those decision criteria and how the proposal meets the criteria. Memos could introduce these criteria in earlier memos so that the Commission can keep the criteria in mind as they are evaluating the proposal.
 - b. Suggested Changes. Memos regarding CPA and LUCA proposals include information in the memo on engagement either as it applies to the scope of the work Council initiated or as it applies to how the code requirements and scope were met (depending on the stage of the proposal). It is possible to reformat the memo template to highlight sections on the scope of the CPA or LUCA, past engagement with the Planning Commission (including past questions or decisions), and Planning Commission role in the legislative process (including decision criteria, if applicable). Presentations could

similarly, include standard slides to address common topics.

4. Use of visual aids. The Planning Commission commented on how useful visual aids are in understanding complex topics. There was a suggestion to employ maps, tables and other graphic tools to explain issues.
 - a. Staff Assessment. Staff agree that these tools can be useful in distilling issues to their essential parts. There was some concern that it could lead to an over simplification of complex ideas. However, the judicious use of these tools are helpful.
 - b. Suggested Changes. Staff can develop a “tool box” of examples over the course of the year as Commissioners identify visual aids that are particularly useful. Future presenters can refer to this tool box for examples of how they could enrich their memos or presentations with visual aids.
5. New Commissioner mentorship program. It was noted that there are many Commissioners that have been on the Commission less than 2 years. While they have been doing a great job, several expressed interest in a mentorship program to help with the onboarding experience.
 - a. Staff Assessment. In consultation with the Clerk’s Office (that oversees all Council-appointed City boards and commissions), it was determined that this would be a beneficial experience for all boards and commissions in the City. However, the City does not currently have resources to launch such a program at this time. It is something that the Clerk’s Office is looking into as they evaluate the overall onboarding experience for all boards and commissions.
 - b. Suggested Changes. In the absence of a formal mentorship program, the staff liaison can make contact information available for past Planning Commissioners who are willing to be contacted for a coffee chat. In addition, the City Attorney’s Office is always available for questions that new Commissioners may have regarding the Planning Commission’s role and responsibilities, as well as local planning processes and requirements under the State Growth Management Act and City Code.
6. Glossary of acronyms. There was a suggestion that a glossary of acronyms would be useful for Planning Commissioners as they read their agenda materials.
 - a. Staff Assessment. Staff agree that this would be a useful tool not only for Planning Commissioners but for the general public as well.
 - b. Suggested Changes. Staff can create a list based on acronyms used in Planning Commission memos and other agenda materials.

ATTACHMENT(S)

None