



# Bellevue Planning Commission

## Staff Responses to Commissioner questions from December 11, 2024 study session.

### **1. What are the reasons for maintaining the access corridor widths as proposed in the December 4, 2024 LUCA draft (Draft 3)?**

Staff do not support further reductions to corridor width standards included in the latest LUCA draft. The rationale for the proposed corridor standards includes:

- Flexible Access Corridor (51 feet):
  - The 10-foot travel lane widths and six-inch curbs are the minimum necessary for low- and medium-volume roads.
  - A 10-foot sidewalk width is appropriate for the planned TOD densities. The greater width also offers flexibility for outdoor dining and retail without requiring additional setbacks from the sidewalk edge. The NACTO Urban Street Design Guide, advises that sidewalks in a downtown or commercial areas should range from 8 to 12 feet in width, ensuring safety and accommodating pedestrians and businesses. NACTO emphasizes that well-designed sidewalks—with ample width, lighting, shade, and street-level activity—enhance pedestrian and business success. Similarly, the WSDOT Design Manual recommends 10-foot-wide sidewalks in urban cores and advises additional width when sidewalks abut storefronts to accommodate mixed pedestrian activity, avoid door conflicts, and provide seamless access to active transportation networks.
  - A 5-foot planter width is necessary to support tree canopy goals in Wilburton and minimize the urban heat island effect.
  - Any reduction in corridor width would result in a smaller sidewalk.

FLEXIBLE ACCESS SECTION VIEW



Staff will provide an option for the Planning Commission to amend the sidewalk widths from 10 feet to 8 feet, but this is not advisable. If corridor widths are reduced, staff will need to reevaluate the potential impacts of the proposed allowances for buildings to span across all private access corridors and adjust building standards as needed.

- **Active Transportation Corridor (30 feet):**

- The initial proposal required a 40-foot corridor width without the option to incorporate a fire lane. In the October draft, this width was reduced to 30 feet, with the added flexibility to incorporate a fire lane, provided its width is increased from 20 feet to 30 feet. The proposed 30-foot width is intended to accommodate elements such as furniture, lighting, landscaping, or other amenities. This corridor width allows for the inclusion of five feet on either side of the corridor—or alternatively, 10 feet on one side—for features that enhance comfort and create a more legible and inviting block.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION ACCESS SECTION VIEW: CONDITION A

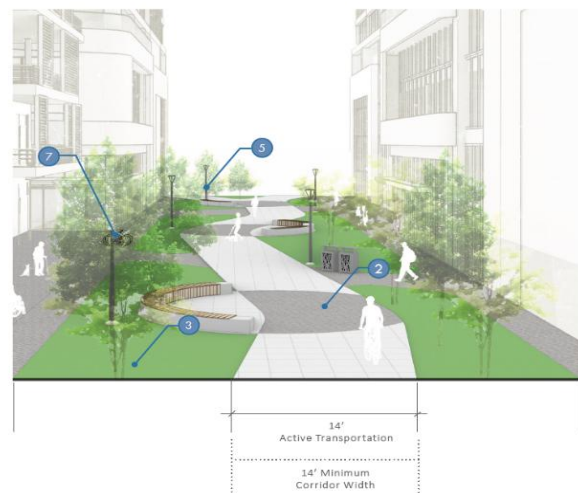


- While examples such as Cady's Alley were presented to the Planning Commission by stakeholders as inspiration, it's important to recognize the differences in scale. Smaller corridors like Cady's Alley, while undeniably charming, are framed by 2-story buildings—a stark contrast to the 40-story developments envisioned in the core of Wilburton. Also, the examples shared with the Commission did not account for a critical factor: private corridors in Wilburton will permit buildings to extend both below and above the corridor. This is important as this flexibility is intended to minimize the reduction in building density resulting from the required corridor width, ensuring development potential is maintained.

- **Pedestrian Corridor (14 feet):**

- This new access type was added in the October draft following stakeholder requests for more and smaller access options to frame a block.
- The 14-foot width meets the minimum standard for a multiuse trail, accommodating both pedestrians and wheeled users.

PEDESTRIAN CORRIDOR SECTION VIEW



**2. How can we ensure abutting properties share an access corridor to minimize curb cuts and prevent overly wide gaps between buildings, while accommodating vehicle access effectively?**

The proposed LUCA promotes shared access corridors through the following provisions:

- Half-Street Improvements for Local Street: When a local street is situated at the edge of a project boundary, the property owner must construct half-street improvements, with the street's centerline aligned at the property line.
- Other Access Corridors Spanning Property Lines: Other shared access corridors spanning property lines are permitted, provided the full corridor width is constructed and the applicant demonstrates that all relevant property owners have granted the necessary rights and authorizations for the design, construction, and ongoing maintenance of the access corridor.

While the City cannot compel property owners to design shared facilities, the proposed LUCA provides strong incentives through flexible code language. This approach promotes collaboration among property owners to meet block size requirements, reduce curb cuts, and create fully functional access corridors, supporting both project needs and a cohesive streetscape.

**3. What are the general concerns from “small sites”, defined in the LUCA as sites less than 40,000 square feet in size, as it relates to maximizing FAR and building height and what can the Commission do to better support small sites in achieving dense development?**

A stakeholder owning a small site in the proposed Wilburton TOD Urban Core has expressed concerns about achieving dense development under the current LUCA draft. The Urban Core allows a base building height of 250 feet, a maximum building height of 450 feet, a base residential FAR of 8 under the Option A approach, and unlimited residential FAR with bonuses. The stakeholder is concerned about the feasibility of achieving a target FAR for their site of 27.0 for a residential tower. They believe the following: the base FAR is insufficient for small sites, feels there are limited amenity options for earning additional FAR, and finds the costs and burdens associated with bonus FAR requirements prohibitive.

- The base FAR is too low for small sites;
- There are limited amenity options for earning additional FAR above the base; and
- The costs and burdens associated with earning bonus FAR requirements are prohibitive.

To address these challenges, the latest LUCA Draft 4 proposes several exceptions for small sites, including the removal of open space requirements, exemptions from block size and tower separation requirements, and reduced access width and green and sustainability factor requirements.

Additionally, Draft 2 (published October 10, 2024) provided an increased FAR bonus for green building, and Draft 3 added public art as an amenity option to better support small sites in achieving dense development, and in the latest LUCA draft (Draft 4), another amenity option was added to support small sites: childcare use.

Staff do not support increasing the base FAR or granting further FAR exemptions for small sites as suggested by the property owner as this could undermine the amenity incentive program by reducing developer participation. This may also result in fewer contributions to public benefits and a reduced alignment with the Wilburton TOD goals. Additionally, increasing the base FAR or granting blanket FAR exemptions would introduce administrative complexities, making the program more difficult to navigate for both developers and staff.

This latest LUCA draft provides a balanced approach aimed at supporting small sites while preserving the integrity and effectiveness of the incentive program.

**4. Consider whether a prescribed 15-foot upper-level stepback along certain access corridors adds value compared to what might be lost in terms of housing unit production.**

The proposed LUCA includes several exceptions to the 15-foot upper-level stepback requirement and the LUCA introduces a requirement for building facade modulation that works together with the prescribed 15-foot stepback. However, based on Commission feedback at the December 11, 2024 study session, and upon further review of this requirement, staff have updated Draft 4 to eliminate these tower stepback requirements.

**5. To streamline review and minimize perceived barriers, consider allowing developers an as-of-right option to replace the 20-foot ground-floor habitable space requirement in above-grade parking garages with the design enhancements currently offered through the departure process.**

The proposed LUCA requires a minimum of 20 feet of habitable space—intended for residential or commercial uses—on the ground floor of above-grade parking garages to promote a pedestrian-friendly environment. However, based on Commission feedback at the November 6, 2024 study session, and recognizing the challenges of leasing these spaces and the construction inefficiencies they may introduce, the updated December 4, 2024 LUCA draft (Draft 3) provides an alternative compliance option through the departure process.

This alternative compliance pathway allows developers to meet the intent of the 20-foot requirement through other means, such as artistic treatments, high-quality glazing, or other façade improvements, that activate the pedestrian environment. Importantly, while this approach offers flexibility, it does not meet the recent requirements passed by the state under [House Bill 1293](#) that are being implanted through the proposed [Objective Design LUCA](#), which require clear and objective language for code requirements. By requiring a departure process to review an alternative path to compliance, this enables the use of creative, flexible language while ensuring that equivalent or better design outcomes can be achieved through project review.

Stakeholders have expressed support for this departure option, and no concerns from stakeholders and the community have been raised regarding the proposed language. Additionally, staff have experience applying similar garage wrapping departure provisions in East Main for a recent project in that TOD area, demonstrating the feasibility of the approach.

**6. Could staff provide a comparison between the general nonconforming provisions proposed for Wilburton in the December 4, 2024 LUCA (Draft 3) with the BelRed nonconforming provisions (LUC 20.25D.060) and assess whether similar provisions for the Wilburton TOD would better support existing uses, sites, and structures?**

A high-level comparison of the general nonconforming provisions with the BelRed nonconforming provisions is included in the January 22 planning commission study session memo as Attachment D. Stakeholders and Commissioners have noted that the BelRed provisions appear simpler to apply and offer more predictable thresholds for triggering full or proportional compliance. One perceived advantage of the BelRed approach is its cap on required site improvement costs, which are limited to 20% of the value of the proposed alteration. This contrasts with the general nonconforming code approach, which ties improvement costs to a percentage of the assumed conformance plan cost, derived from the percentage of improvement value compared to the replacement value of an existing structure.

Commissioners also expressed interest in adapting the BelRed nonconforming approach for the Wilburton TOD area, including developing a prioritized list of site improvements that would be required under proportional compliance.

Based on a detailed review of both the general and BelRed nonconforming provisions, along with feedback from the Commission and community, staff propose creating a new nonconforming section specific to the Wilburton TOD (LUC 20.20.561). This new section is included in Draft 4, mirrors the BelRed provisions and incorporates the same compliance thresholds.

The proposed list of required site improvements for the Wilburton TOD prioritizes incremental Eastrail improvements and circulation needs, ensuring that these critical elements are addressed first when proportional compliance is triggered:

- Non-motorized access to Eastrail
- Emergency vehicle access to the Eastrail corridor
- Public open space connecting to Eastrail
- Frontage paths along the Eastrail corridor
- Local streets
- Access, block, and circulation required under LUC 20.25R.020.B.
- Landscaping
- Active uses along the Eastrail corridor
- Active uses along the Grand Connection
- Overhead weather protection
- Landscape buffer from the property line adjoining Interstate 405

The Director may approve a change in priority order above for a specific development.

**7. What information and analysis can staff share regarding the proposed LUCA approach to the minimum off-street parking requirements?**

At the March 27, September 11, and November 6, 2024, study sessions, as well as in LUCA Drafts 1 and 2, staff proposed eliminating minimum parking requirements for the four main reasons cited in the [December 11, 2024 Agenda Memo](#) (transportation accessibility, environmental sustainability, affordability and housing production, and policy precedent).

Commissioners expressed mixed opinions about the proposal to eliminate minimum parking requirements in the Wilburton TOD at the March 27, September 11, November 6, and December 11, 2024 study sessions. As a result, LUCA Draft 3 (published December 4, 2024) removed the "no minimum parking" provision and instead proposed reducing citywide parking minimums by 75% within the Wilburton TOD area.

The proposed LUCA, published on January 2 (Draft 4), introduces a new land use category called "Mixed-Use Commercial" (LUC 20.20.590.F.1.t). This category establishes a minimum parking requirement of 4.5 parking stalls per 1,000 net square feet, applicable citywide to non-residential uses in mixed-use developments. The proposed rate represents a blended average of parking demand for typical commercial uses in mixed-use developments and shopping centers, which often include retail, restaurants, and personal service establishments such as fitness studios and salons.

The intent of this new category is to streamline the tenant improvement building permit review process. Currently, this process requires recalculating available parking based on the latest mix of uses within a mixed-use development. Under the existing citywide minimum parking requirements, parking rates vary by use—for example, 4 stalls per 1,000 net square feet for retail versus 16 stalls per 1,000 net square feet for restaurants. As a result, a change in use from retail to restaurant can lead to permit denials if the developer initially provided parking only at the retail rate.

The new "Mixed-Use Commercial" category allows developers to provide parking at a flat rate of 4.5 stalls per 1,000 net square feet, enabling a flexible mix of ground-floor uses without requiring each tenant suite to meet specific parking requirements individually. In Wilburton, this minimum parking requirement may be reduced by up to 75%.

For reference on how the proposed minimum parking requirements would apply to a future project in Wilburton, we have the following hypothetical project example:

Project type: Seven-story mid-rise residential development with ground floor commercial uses

Residential component: 250 units:

- 215 one-bedroom or studio units (1.2 stalls per unit)
- 32 two-bedroom units (1.6 stalls per unit)
- 3 three-bedroom units (1.8 stalls per unit)
- **Minimum parking for residential units: 315 stalls**

Commercial component: 10,000 net square feet of “mixed-use commercial” (4.5 stalls per 1,000 net square feet)

- **Minimum parking for commercial uses: 45 stalls**

**Total parking required:**

- Residential: **315 stalls**
- Commercial: **45 stalls**
- Total before reduction: **360 stalls**
- After 75% reduction: **90 stalls required**

The proposed LUCA provides an option for projects to reduce or eliminate minimum parking requirements through a parking study. Applicants must demonstrate, via a study conducted by a qualified expert, that the project can meet its parking needs without adversely impacting nearby uses or streets. The LUCA also promotes shared parking arrangements between developments or uses with complementary parking demands at different times of day.

By requiring some minimum parking, offering a process to reduce or eliminate requirements, and encouraging shared use, the city can ensure sufficient parking to support current needs without overbuilding parking. This approach aims to foster efficient land use and reduce the urban footprint of parking. This proposed LUCA approach also balances the realities of the current built environment in Wilburton and current behavior with aspirations for a more transit-oriented future.

At the public hearing, the Commission will have the ability to recommend either a LUCA option with no minimum parking requirements or the proposed 75% reduction to the citywide minimum parking standards.