

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION  
MINUTES

February 26, 2025  
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
Room 1E-126

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Goepple, Vice Chair Cálad, Commissioners Bhargava, Ferris, Khanloo, Villaveces

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Lu

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Kate Nesse, Justin Panganiban, Department of Community Development; Nick Whipple, Josh Steiner, Mathieu Menard, Development Services Department; Matt McFarland, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Deputy Mayor Malakoutian

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

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

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

2. ROLL CALL  
(6:33 p.m.)

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Lu.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA  
(6:34 p.m.)

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

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS  
(6:34 p.m.)

Deputy Mayor Malakoutian shared that the Council on February 25 directed staff to initiate the scope of the Critical Areas Ordinance, which must be completed by December 31, 2025, in accordance with state law. The Council also moved forward with the BelRed Look Forward Code Amendments seeking to make BelRed a vibrant district with mixed residential, commercial, cultural, and art spaces. The Council received an update regarding progress made regarding the Centering Communities of Color initiative. The Commissioners were also

informed that the process for replacing Councilmember Zahn has started.

5. STAFF REPORTS  
(6:36 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Dr. Kate Nesse took a few minutes to review the Commission's schedule of upcoming meeting dates and agenda items.

6. WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATIONS  
(6:37 p.m.)

Chair Goepple took a moment to note that 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.)

Dr. Kate Nesse noted that all written communications received since the publication of the packet were focused on the Wilburton Land Use Code amendment. In addition, the Commission received three communications after the deadline; they will be included in the packet for the next meeting. The Bellevue Downtown Association reaffirmed its position on the future of Wilburton as a new dynamic neighborhood that will complement the Downtown. The Wilburton property owners group endorsed the letter from the Eastside Housing Roundtable. A resident submitted opposition to the HOMA changes in Newport Hills.

Vice Chair Cálad raised concerns about transparency and access to written communications, noting that emails sent to the Planning Commission are received by staff and are only forwarded to the Commission as part of the agenda packet, sometimes causing delays. Emails received should be forwarded in real-time to all of the Commissioners' city email accounts. The official email addresses of the Commissioners should be published online for direct public contact.

Dr. Kate Nesse allowed that changes to the methodology could be implemented, but it would be prudent to first check in with the City Clerk's office. The Commissioners agreed.

B. Oral Communications  
(6:46 p.m.)

Jodie Alberts spoke on behalf of the PLUSH Committee of the Chamber of Commerce and expressed support for the Housing Opportunities in Mixed-Use Areas (HOMA) initiative. The committee emphasized the importance of increasing housing density in areas well-served by transit, such as Eastlake and Factoria. The speaker commended the city's shift from a dwelling-units-per-acre model to a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) approach, citing increased flexibility for developers. However, concerns were raised about parking requirements for existing commercial spaces, which could hinder small businesses. The committee also stressed the need for a viability study before imposing affordable housing requirements, warning that financial infeasibility had already hampered progress in Wilburton.

Heidi Dean voiced concerns about the public outreach related to the HOMA initiative, noting that unlike other zoning amendments, the citywide LUCA lacks signage or direct mail notifications for affected property owners. Some impacted neighborhood centers, such as Northtown and Belle East, are likely unaware of the proposed changes. It is questionable whether it was fair to overturn a carefully crafted compromise from the previous year's Comprehensive Plan update. Greater consideration should be given to the communities affected.

Jessie Clawson voiced support for increased housing density in transit-accessible neighborhoods. The concerns voiced by Jodie Alberts about commercial parking requirements were seconded given that they create barriers for small businesses. The city should avoid blanket mixed-use requirements. Shoreline was cited as an example where such mandates hindered development. The current approach to mandatory housing affordability within the HOMA proposal was criticized, and it was stated that affordability mandates should be backed by economic analysis to ensure feasibility. Poorly calibrated policies can stall development, as has been seen in Seattle.

Nicole Myers raised concerns about the city's outreach process regarding the missing middle housing proposal and voiced having been surprised by the proposals under discussion at a recent meeting on the topic. After submitting a public comment via the city's online story map, it was later discovered that the input had not been recorded in the summary of responses. The comments will be resent via email. Other responses may also have been missed. The Commissioners were urged to ensure that all feedback is accurately included in future deliberations. Bellevue is planning to go above and beyond the requirements of HB-1110 to allow for up to nine units instead of six for areas within a half mile as the crow flies of frequent transit. That includes a large portion of the north and central parts of Bellevue. In areas where six units are allowed by right, developers will not be required to provide any affordable housing in exchange for the density. The result could be co-housing, boarding houses or SROs as large as the lot allows on all lots allowed to have six or more units. The change allowing more units per lot is even more impactful than it first appeared to be. ADUs paired with townhomes was mentioned as a viable option, so the nine unit capacity could be 18 homes. With the fee in-lieu system, a developer could avoid building any affordable housing and still gain the extra units.

Alex Tsimmerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners dirty damn Nazi Gestapo fascist cockroaches, mobsters and banditos. The speaker deviated from the focus of the meeting and made inflammatory and unrelated remarks.

Chair Goepple repeatedly reminded the speaker to stay on topic. After continued disruptions and violations of Ordinance 6752, which governs decorum at public meetings, the speaker was removed from the meeting. It was noted that the speaker's comments were another violation of Ordinance 6752.

Pamela Johnson expressed concerns about the missing middle housing initiative and argued that the original intent of missing middle housing was to reconfigure existing housing footprints rather than increase density beyond what was originally allowed. The importance of maintaining landscape requirements and low-impact development practices to protect trees and water safety was emphasized. Skepticism was voiced about Bellevue's decision to exceed HB 1110's density requirements, particularly given the existing capacity for housing development in areas like BelRed. The speaker also criticized the city's lack of clear communication with the public, noting that the Engaging Bellevue platform contained little to no information about missing middle housing.

Michelle Wanamaker highlighting issues with how the Planning Commission receives written communications, noting that the Transportation Commission faced similar delays in accessing public comments until a policy change allowed them to receive submissions in near real-time. The argument was made that written public comments should be made available to Commissioners immediately upon receipt, rather than waiting for inclusion in the next meeting's packet. The Commission was urged to advocate for a similar change to improve transparency and public engagement.

Valentina Vaneeva spoke in support of the staff's recommendations for middle housing. Citing Bellevue's ongoing housing crisis, the speaker argued that allowing greater density citywide would prevent developers from competing for a limited number of sites, which drives up land and housing costs. Broader upzoning will benefit smaller, local developers, rather than favoring large corporations that currently dominate new housing projects.

Lee Sargeant, a long-time Bellevue resident, stated that Deputy Mayor Malakoutian has been outstanding in fighting for the city, and has been an excellent example of leadership.

## 7. PUBLIC HEARING (7:16 p.m.)

### A. Wilburton Vision Implementation Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA)

A motion to open the public hearing was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Khanloo and the motion carried unanimously.

Development Services Department Assistant Director Nick Whipple introduced the Wilburton LUCA, emphasizing that it was designed to implement the vision, goals and policies outlined in the Wilburton Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA). It was stated that the goal for the meeting was to hold the public hearing and either make a recommendation or schedule further discussions.

Senior Planner Justin Panganiban provided historical context, explaining that the Wilburton Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) area has been in planning for over a decade. The guiding principles that were established in 2015 recognized the opportunity to create a vibrant urban neighborhood with affordable housing, multimodal transportation, sustainability features, and abundant open space. The planning process involved extensive public outreach and technical studies, including a Citizen Advisory Committee vision in 2018. The efforts were further refined through the city's sustainability initiatives and infrastructure projects, such as the Eastrail and Grand Connection urban design frameworks.

The Wilburton CPA was aligned with the city's Comprehensive Plan update, addressing key priorities like equity, climate change, and housing growth. Over 350 participants provided input on policy priorities through various engagement methods, including open houses, mailers, and online forums. The Comprehensive Plan update set the foundation for balancing key policy priorities such as open space, transportation, cultural connections and future land use within the framework of a walkable, mixed-use district.

Code and Policy Senior Planner Josh Steiner provided details on the LUCA, explaining that it is a city-initiated effort to implement the Wilburton CPA through new development regulations. The CPA was adopted in July 2024, followed by the citywide Comprehensive Plan adoption in October 2024. It was noted that to date the Commission had held six study sessions on the

LUCA, each addressing different aspects of development regulations.

The LUCA introduces four new mixed-use districts: Urban Core, Mixed-Use High-Rise, Mixed-Use Mid-Rise, and Mixed-Use Residential Mid-Rise. The districts are designed to foster flexible urban development, with higher-density areas concentrated along the Grand Connection and the Eastrail corridor. With regard to base building height and Floor Area Ratio (FAR), the LUCA sets varying height and FAR limits by district, creating a tapering effect within the TOD. Developers can earn additional FAR and height through an amenity incentive system. The need for greater flexibility to incorporate life sciences uses is a part of the LUCA in line with feedback from stakeholders.

One of Wilburton's primary goals is to establish a walkable, transit-oriented community. The existing large block sizes do not support the vision, so new block size regulations and street typologies are introduced in the LUCA. Blocks are required to be no larger than 105,000 square feet, with boundaries formed by a combination of public streets, access corridors, Eastrail, and the Grand Connection. New street typologies, including local streets, active transportation corridors, and shared-use paths are included to enhance connectivity. To provide greater flexibility for development, commercial driveways were added as an option for small sites. The measures are intended to encourage an active, pedestrian-friendly environment with strong transit and trail connections.

Josh Steiner continued with an overview of the open space and green factor requirements within the proposed LUCA. The amendment incorporates a ten percent open space requirement, with flexibility for small sites. Various options are available to meet the requirement, including counting open space provided within access corridors, publicly accessible podiums and rooftops, and landscaped areas. Additionally, the Wilburton TOD applies a green factor approach to landscaping, similar to the downtown Bellevue provisions. Under the approach, projects must achieve a minimum green factor by selecting from a menu of compatible urban development options.

Turning to the topic of affordable housing, Josh Steiner said two options are envisioned. Option A, the mandatory affordable housing approach recommended by staff, is designed to provide a clear and consistent framework for developers by reducing uncertainty and ensuring all projects contribute equitably to affordability goals. The option requires a ten percent set-aside for affordable units at 80 percent Area Median Income (AMI), with lower set-aside amounts at deeper affordability levels. It includes a fee-in-lieu option, and a base FAR higher than under Option B.

Option B involves a tiered voluntary incentive program. It allows developers to exceed the base FAR in exchange for providing public benefits, including affordable housing. It includes on-site performance or fee-in-lieu options, and uses a tiered approach where additional development capacity is granted for providing amenities. Under Option B, the base FAR is set lower.

The amenity incentive system allows developers to exceed the base FAR limits in exchange for public benefits. The system includes 12 options for earning bonus points, including the recent additions of child care services, dedication of park areas, and public art. The system aims to offer flexibility to both developers and the community.

Nick Whipple briefly reviewed the extensive engagement process used in developing the LUCA. Unlike past approaches, the city published two early drafts for public review before engaging in official discussions, allowing staff to work through language and policy details with stakeholders.

and the general public. The engagement process included three public information sessions and multiple stakeholder workshops, ultimately resulting in five versions of the LUCA.

With that background, the discussion moved to the four outstanding topics of interest, specifically access corridors, off-street parking requirements, small site flexibility, and affordable housing. Nick Whipple noted that in emphasizing a strong focus on density and housing, access corridors were seen by some as potentially conflicting with the density goals. Staff sought to balance the concerns by ensuring access corridors support planned growth. The Wilburton rezone is expected to accommodate 12 million square feet of commercial space, 14,800 housing units, and approximately 35,000 jobs. To support that level of growth, the access corridors were designed to facilitate movement and connectivity while preserving development efficiency.

In seeking balance, staff provided for additional flexibility for all of the corridor types that are private streets, which is all of the street types except for local streets. Where streets are private, the property owners have the ability to build garages beneath access corridors; over corridors with building cantilevers or structures that span across corridors up to 75 feet. Property owners are also allowed to double count access corridors toward the open space requirements. The corridor types only apply to sites larger than 105,000 square feet. Any corridor provided can be used to earn FAR above the base limit. The shared use path, formerly called the pedestrian corridor, was added as another option for developers to use to frame a block.

Option A, the staff recommendation, is the current draft. It maintains the existing corridor requirements, including ten-foot-wide sidewalks and landscaping strips. Option B, which involves requests made by property owners, reduces sidewalk width to six feet and eliminates one landscaping strip. Option C offers a potential adjustment by maintaining the landscaping while allowing for narrower sidewalks and the removal of on-street parking.

In recommending Option A, Nick Whipple cited the importance of preserving the sidewalk width as proposed for pedestrian comfort, for compliance with the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) guidelines, and for maintaining street parking for small businesses. Downtown serves as a viable comparison given its sidewalk widths of up to 15 feet in some locations. Maintaining local street sidewalk widths at ten feet is important, as is maintaining on-street parking, which is important to businesses, particularly smaller businesses and restaurants.

Option B seeks a reduction in sidewalk width to six feet. Eliminating on-street parking is a potential adjustment that could yield some significant width reductions.

With regard to flexible access, Option B would reduce the amenity strip by one foot and eliminate an amenity strip on one side of the street. The amenity zone is the landscape strip and is where things like bicycle racks, light poles and fire hydrants can be located. The recommendation of staff is to maintain the amenity zone on both sides of the street, in part to preserve the opportunity for landscaping and meeting the city's tree canopy goals.

The staff and the stakeholders are largely aligned around the issue of commercial driveways and sidewalks. The commercial driveway was introduced as an option with six-foot sidewalks as appropriate. For existing city streets such as NE 4th Street, NE 8th Street and 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, the staff recommendation advises a ten-foot sidewalk.

With respect to active transportation, Option A seeks to promote multimodal connections by

calling for a 30-foot corridor, a 20-foot paved path, and two five-foot amenity zones. Option B reduces the corridor width to 20 feet and does not call for an amenity zone. The Option B proponents also want the active transportation path to be allowed to be used for “back of house” service, accommodating fire lanes, garbage pickup and incidental loading. The concern with that approach is that the volume of service trips that might be generated by dense projects could introduce some unnecessary conflict with other modes. One potential adjustment would be to remove the amenity zone but restrict the purpose to active transportation and fire lane access only.

There are specific standards tied to the shared use path designation, including a required width of 14 feet as outlined in the Transportation Design Manual. Any width below that would be considered unsafe. Option B calls for a ten-foot paved path.

Regarding off-street parking, it was noted the Commission had requested an option for no minimum parking, while staff recommended a 75 percent reduction from the citywide standard.

Another area of interest has been small sites defined as 40,000 square feet or smaller. The current draft does not include flexibility for amenities but provides certain exemptions, such as no required open space. Stakeholders requested more flexibility to allow small sites to achieve their full development capacity. A proposed adjustment would permit residential projects to reach their maximum development potential if they provide two amenities: green building incentives and affordable housing. There was some confusion about whether the affordable housing would be in addition to what is required in the base requirement, but the proposal only accounts for the standard affordable housing requirement and green building standards.

Nick Whipple noted that there also had been a request for further analysis of affordable housing fees proposed in the draft. The goal is to balance attracting development with generating sufficient revenue for affordable housing. Staff evaluated five factors, and the economic analysis indicated that constructing a unit in a mid-rise building costs approximately \$314 per square foot. Without adequate private sector participation, the cost burden would disproportionately fall on public subsidies, limiting the ability to meet affordable housing needs.

The analysis included nexus and proportionality findings to determine the maximum justifiable fee; the public subsidy requirements to bridge the affordability gap, based on ARCH data that estimated a buy-down cost of \$150,000 per unit to reach 80 percent of area median income; the developer investment loss per square foot for including affordable units, a consideration that emerged from the stakeholder workshop; a comparison of affordable housing fees in neighboring cities to ensure Bellevue remains competitive in attracting development; the effectiveness of existing subsidy programs; looking at the broader citywide affordable housing goals; the feasibility for developers; and the importance of recalibrating fees periodically to maintain a balance between incentivizing development and funding affordable housing.

The Catalyst Program was another key topic of interest for the Commission. The initial request from the Eastside Housing Roundtable involved waiving requirements for a certain number of units and a certain amount of commercial square footage. That raised concerns about losing value from the rezone and failing to meet the affordable housing goals. The city’s first foray into having catalyst provision was in BelRed in 2009 during the recession and when the city did not have the infrastructure in place to support a transit oriented development or to attract private investment. The catalyst provision was geared toward spurring private investment to see the area transform. Unlike Wilburton, BelRed is now in a vastly different position given the level of both private and public investment. Once conditions are right, Wilburton will be well positioned for

growth.

One approach the Commission could take in easing into some of the mandatory requirements would be to provide a five percent set-aside requirement for the first 500 residential units, then increasing to the standard ten percent for 80 percent area median income. The approach could also propose a 25 percent reduction in commercial fees for the first 600,000 square feet of commercial development; a 50 percent fee reduction for 500,000 square feet of life sciences space on top of the general commercial square footage. Such an approach should include a periodic fee reassessment to ensure fairness and economic responsiveness.

Nick Whipple stated that both Options A and B, along with potential the adjustments, align with the required decision framework.

Jasmine Smith thanked the Commissioners and staff for their extensive work and highlighted the broad coalition of support from various organizations across the Eastside area, including Microsoft, Porchlight, Eastside for All, Amazon, and Symetra. Emphasized was the importance of creating an affordable housing plan that is both durable and equitable. The contributions of the Eastside Housing Roundtable were also recognized.

T.J. Woosley spoke representing the Brierwood Center and noted having been involved in Bellevue land use matters since the late 1960s. A letter previously sent to the Commission that outlined several important issues in detail was referenced. It was stated that one cannot legislate high costs and mandate low prices simultaneously. The Commission was urged to ensure that redevelopment in the area remains economically feasible, noting that overly stringent rules might result in deterioration rather than improvement. The Commission was also urged to consider the concerns of property owners and the insights provided by longstanding stakeholders as they deliberate on the LUCA and its implications for future development. The positions voiced by the Wilburton property owners group should be taken into account. The city has a rare brain trust of professionals who are highly knowledgeable in land use and development, all of whom have a vested interest in seeing effective policies put in place. The Commission was urged to take the lead in shaping the LUCA in a way that balances feasibility and community goals and to work closely with the City Council to ensure its successful implementation. The Commissioners were invited to visit the Brierwood Center to assess firsthand the proposed rights-of-way and topographical challenges that are outlined in the submitted letter.

Kevin Wallace provided written comments for the Commission's review and thanked staff for their collaborative approach since June. It was acknowledged that significant improvements in the LUCA have been incorporated, but there remain concerns about the financial feasibility of development under the proposed regulations, particularly with the added \$10,000 per unit fee for affordable housing. The Commission was urged to focus on reducing development costs while ensuring that Wilburton achieves the planned density. One major issue is the citywide affordable housing requirements that have been embedded in the LUCA without notice or input from property owners outside Wilburton. Any changes should initially be limited to Wilburton alone and later expanded citywide only after broader public engagement. There needs to be greater clarity in regard to the affordable housing regulations. Several regulatory requirements in the LUCA are unnecessary and should be deleted, including: the ten percent restriction on surface parking; the ten percent sidewalk width requirement the public access easement mandates the emergency vehicle access requirements to Eastrail; the ten percent open space requirement the redundant frontage path along Eastrail; the landscape buffer next to I-405; the mandatory green roof requirement on podiums; and the requirement for habitable space in parking structures, which would be a poison pill to elevated parking. Modifications were suggested to be made to



the green building requirements, the shared access corridor regulations, and the cantilever height restrictions over sidewalks. The speaker advocated for reducing active transportation corridor widths and reassessing the active use requirements to prevent commercial space mandates in locations where businesses may not be viable. There is not enough latitude in the vertical limits relative to the weather protection requirement; it needs to be about nine to thirteen feet, not ten to twelve. The base FAR requirements for the MU-M and MU-R zones are too low, requiring excessive amenity points to reach the maximum.

Jacquie Quarre, a land use attorney, provided testimony on behalf of the Beta Bellevue property in the heart of the new urban core on 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. Sound Transit's guideway crosses a large portion of the property. Appreciation was expressed for staff's responsiveness in modifying the code to allow flexibility for properties affected by the Sound Transit guideway. The Commission was encouraged to maintain Section 20.25R.020.B2V, which provides necessary development flexibility for such sites. Also speaking on behalf of Brierwood Center, support was voiced for the positions put forth by the Wilburton Property Owners Group, represented by Bill Finkbeiner. One of the big concerns is in regard to the local access street requirement at Brierwood Center, which mandates a new street connecting BelRed Road to NE 12<sup>th</sup> Street. It was argued that the requirement places an undue burden on property owners, assuming infrastructure impacts before specific development proposals exist. The Commission was urged to reconsider whether the street is necessary, especially given the legal issues it raises under RCW 82.02.020. Also emphasized was that the excessive parking and sidewalk width requirements reduce developable land, directly impacting the housing supply. The Commissioners were urged to visit Brierwood Center to better understand the practical challenges posed by the proposed regulations.

Joe Fain and Patience Malaba spoke representing the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce and the Eastside Housing Roundtable respectively. Fain opened by thanking the Commission and Deputy Mayor Malakoutian for their ongoing work on the LUCA. Following the previous Commission meeting, the Eastside Housing Roundtable revisited several key issues, particularly the Catalyst Program, and revised its recommendations accordingly. Many of their proposed changes align with staff suggestions, but the Commissioners were urged to carefully review their letter for additional refinements. While staff had made some positive adjustments to reduce costs, the LUCA still does not provide a feasible framework for large-scale development. The high fees proposed in the staff draft are unsustainable both in the short term and in the long run. Of the five factors used in setting fees, economic feasibility is the most critical. If financial conditions are not viable, development will not occur. The goal of the Eastside Housing Roundtable proposal is to create a policy framework that acts as a Multifamily Tax Exemption supercharger that will encourage the development of 80 percent of area median income affordable units at a scale that meets the housing demand. The Roundtable's proposed calibrations for fee structures and development requirements were designed to strike a balance between affordability and feasibility, ensuring that the LUCA enables, rather than hinders, new housing production.

Patience Malaba, CEO of the Housing Development Consortium and co-chair of the Eastside Housing Roundtable, reiterated the Roundtable's support for Option A with very specific modifications. The coalition supports the ten percent affordability set-aside at 80 percent of area median income. The Commission was urged to carefully consider the Roundtable's detailed recommendations. The recommendations are the product of deep collaboration across industries, aimed at ensuring that Wilburton can become a vibrant transit-oriented neighborhood while also addressing Bellevue's housing affordability needs. Appreciation was expressed for the staff's incorporation of the Roundtable's suggested changes to the Catalyst Program. The Commission was encouraged to closely review the details in the submitted letter. The access corridor

provisions are a crucial aspect requiring further refinement. Cost reduction is a shared goal among stakeholders and the city. The Commission was urged to make decisions that balance feasibility and affordability while ensuring Bellevue continues its leadership in addressing housing challenges. The Commission was commended for its thoughtful discussions and questions raised, as was the staff for their dedicated work over the past year in coordinating with stakeholders. The work being done will shape the future of the city.

Andrew Coates emphasized the significant costs associated with housing production. The CAI study commissioned by the city estimated housing construction costs at \$600,000 to \$632,000 per unit, not fully accounting for land costs which can drive up redevelopment expenses even further. There are recent sales comparisons of new apartment projects on the Eastside ranging from \$400,000 to \$430,000 per unit, which means there would need to be a 75 percent increase in value to justify new construction. The LUCA proposes an \$18 per square foot fee in the urban core, a 40 percent higher fee than other areas. High-rise projects face significantly higher construction costs of about 20 percent more than mid-rise buildings, yet they achieve only seven percent higher rents. Given that, the Commission was urged to equalize the fee across all zones at \$13 per square foot, a number that was developed as a compromise in a city-initiated roundtable discussion. Maintaining the higher fee for high-rise development would delay or discourage construction and undermine the city's long-term vision for urban density and innovative construction methods like mass timber. It is hoped that Wilburton will achieve the vision of a dense, high-rise district, but the \$18 per square foot fee would significantly hinder progress. A letter with further details was submitted for the Commission's review.

Bill Finkbeiner spoke representing the Wilburton Property Owners Group. It was stated that tremendous collaborative effort has gone into the LUCA and it was acknowledged that substantial improvements have been made over time. However, the latest draft still contains key issues that add costs and complexity that could potentially delay or discourage development. Three major concerns were raised, beginning with the access corridors. It is surprising that the latest draft does not reflect the Commission's previous direction on access corridors. The requirements need to be revised further to ensure they do not obstruct development. The comments offered by Andrew Coates were echoed in regard to the fee in-lieu charges. The urban core faces a 30 percent higher residential fee-in-lieu charge compared to other areas. The commercial fees-in-lieu are also set 30 percent higher. Adding more fees to commercial development would be counterproductive. Market conditions are already making commercial projects difficult to justify. With regard to the long-term vision for mixed use development, the speaker cautioned that the city should not focus solely on residential development at the expense of commercial uses. The Commission was reminded that Wilburton is a 20-year plan, and while the current market is struggling with commercial space, market conditions can change quickly. The city was encouraged to avoid policies that make it harder to develop commercial spaces, ensuring that Wilburton remains a balanced, mixed-use neighborhood. The Commission was thanked for considering the concerns and was urged to make further refinements to the LUCA before finalizing its recommendations.

Neal Melnick echoed the concerns voiced about commercial development, emphasizing that while the housing crisis is a major focus, Bellevue should also prioritize creating a mixed-use, 18-hour neighborhood in Wilburton. Residential neighborhoods without a strong commercial base risk becoming dormant during the day, as residents leave for work and return only in the evening. Restaurants, retail and services are all crucial for creating a vibrant urban environment. A warning was voiced that the current commercial fee-in-lieu rates are too high and could deter future commercial projects. The office market has shifted significantly, with new office buildings selling for well below replacement cost, as low as \$200 to \$300 per square foot, while new

construction costs over \$500 per square foot. Raising commercial fees would further discourage office development, making Bellevue less competitive. The Commission was urged to adopt the compromise fee-in-lieu rate of \$16.50 per square foot, which was negotiated through the Eastside Housing Roundtable. While no one is currently building speculative office space, Bellevue remains one of the few markets where demand still exists, and the city should not create additional obstacles to future commercial projects. The speaker emphasized the importance of balancing residential and commercial growth, ensuring that Wilburton will remain an attractive place to live, work and invest. Concerns about high-rise development feasibility were reiterated and it was emphasized that equalizing fee-in-lieu rates across all areas will better support the density goals.

Saghar Amini spoke representing Habitat for Humanity Seattle-King-Kittitas Counties, and as a longtime downtown Bellevue resident. Appreciation was expressed for staff's collaboration and ongoing stakeholder engagement, which has resulted in a well-calibrated LUCA draft. Habitat for Humanity, along with the Eastside Housing Roundtable, supports Option A with the modifications proposed in their letter. The importance of carefully considering every detail of the recommendation letter was emphasized given that every word was negotiated to achieve a balanced compromise. The efforts of all involved are appreciated. The Commission was urged to accept the Eastside Housing Roundtable's recommendations, including the affordable housing requirement in Option A.

Brady Nordstrom spoke representing the Eastside Affordable Housing Coalition, which is a group of over 30 organizations that develop and operate affordable housing on the Eastside, including Bellevue. The coalition fully endorsed the position of the Eastside Housing Roundtable, particularly its well-calibrated affordable housing requirement. It was stressed that affordable housing is essential for the success of Wilburton, and the need for a variety of housing options to ensure a diverse and inclusive community was highlighted. The coalition members engaged in direct conversations with the private sector, leading to compromises and balanced trade-offs that support both development feasibility and the affordability goals. The Commission and staff were thanked for their dedication. The Commission was urged to move forward with Option A.

Guillermo Rivera with Eastside for All, a racial equity and social justice group focused on amplifying underrepresented voices in decision-making processes, strongly endorsed the Eastside Housing Roundtable's affordable housing recommendations for Wilburton. The proposal is the result of months of trust-building, negotiations, and careful technical work. There is a critical need for affordable housing in Bellevue. Teachers, service workers, childcare providers and their families struggle to find housing near their workplaces, forcing many to endure long commutes. The Commission was asked to imagine a Wilburton where the workers who support the neighborhood's businesses can also afford to live. The Commission was called on to support Option A as a meaningful step toward achieving the vision.

Todd Woosley, a longtime Bellevue resident and co-owner of Brierwood Center, outlined three key objectives: to inform the Commission, to request action, and to suggest a course forward. Brierwood Center is ripe for redevelopment, but redevelopment is not a necessity. Without an economically viable LUCA, property owners may simply choose to leave properties unchanged, which is what happened with the 2007-2009 BelRed Corridor Plan which failed to spur development. The Commission was urged to get the LUCA right now, and was warned against another 15-year delay in addressing zoning and redevelopment issues in Wilburton. The current process has seen unprecedented collaboration between staff, developers, and affordable housing advocates, providing a rare opportunity to implement a well-balanced policy. The LUCA is like a

recipe. If only a small ingredient is missing, the outcome could be ruined. The Commission was encouraged to consider submitting an independent recommendation to the City Council, separate from the staff recommendation, if there are areas of disagreement. The speaker noted that while serving as Vice Chair of the Transportation Commission, there were independent recommendations forwarded to the Council outlining unique perspectives.

Sarah Dickmeyer, External Affairs Manager for Plymouth Housing, a permanent supportive housing provider, emphasized the importance of affordable housing within a thriving urban ecosystem, and stated that Wilburton's success depends on having an abundance and variety of housing options. The recommendations of the Eastside Housing Roundtable represent a rare and successful compromise achieved through years of relationship-building and months of discussions between diverse stakeholders. The proposal aligns with Bellevue's long-term affordable housing goals and demonstrates the city's leadership in responsible urban planning. The Commission was urged to support Option A with the Roundtable's recommended changes.

Valentina Vaneeva voiced support for Option A and for the staff's recommendations regarding access corridors, active transportation, and off-street parking. The recommendations align with best practices in urban planning, though they should be even bolder in promoting a walkable, accessible city. The Commission was urged to think long-term. While developers and business owners evaluate policies based on short-term profitability, residents will live with the built environment for decades. The speaker recalled personal experience with living in a neighborhood that lacks proper sidewalks, bike lanes, shortcuts, and active gathering spaces, which made daily life less convenient and vibrant. Once an area is built, retroactively fixing poor urban design is exponentially more expensive. The Commission was encouraged to adopt the staff's recommendations to ensure Wilburton is developed with people in mind.

Nicole Myers echoed the remarks of the previous speaker regarding the importance of having active transportation and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure in Wilburton and emphasized that if Wilburton reaches its planned residential and commercial growth targets. It is known from the environmental impact study for the Comprehensive Plan that significant traffic congestion will be a major concern. To mitigate it, the Commission should prioritize pedestrian-friendly spaces. Activating streetscapes will encourage people to walk instead of drive. Wilburton has unique connectivity advantages due to Eastrail and the upcoming Grand Connection, which will further enhance walkability. Sidewalk width should be planned with pedestrians as the priority, making walking both safe and attractive.

Ben Nichols, a downtown Bellevue resident, voiced support for the ten-foot sidewalk requirement, advocated for eliminating parking requirements, and expressed concerns about the proposed local street routes. It was pointed out that the proposed route would function as a cut-through for commuters rushing to reach I-405 during peak hours, potentially causing congestion and safety hazards instead of serving its intended purpose as a local access route. The local street requirement should be eliminated to improve development feasibility.

Noreen Breyer spoke in favor of the Wilburton LUCA and staff's recommendation for Option A. Having conducted a quick personal survey of Bellevue residents aged 18 to 35, it is obvious that many young people leave the city due to unaffordability and a lack of vibrancy. Wilburton's proposed mixed-use and walkable design will help retain younger residents and enhance Bellevue's appeal. Members of Eastern European communities, many of whom have not previously been civically engaged, are excited about the possibility of greater walkability in Bellevue. The proposed plan makes the city "sexier" and reinforces the need for a comprehensive approach to urban design that prioritizes both livability and economic growth.

Jessie Clawson pointed out that the Catalyst Program described in the staff presentation does not match the Eastside Housing Roundtable's official recommendation. The Commission was urged to review the actual letter submitted by the Roundtable, emphasizing that every word was carefully negotiated. When a diverse coalition of stakeholders, including affordable housing advocates, developers, and business leaders, agree on a compromise, it should be taken seriously. Highlighted was the importance of ensuring the fee-in-lieu system be structured to actually produce affordable housing while also ensuring development remains financially viable. The published draft code does not yet reflect the Roundtable's recommended changes, and the Commission was strongly encouraged to review the precise wording of the proposal before making a recommendation to the City Council.

John Darvish, representing the Wilburton Property Owners Group, echoed the previous testimony supporting the Roundtable's recommendations and humorously agreed with the statement that the plan makes the city "sexier." However, a critical unresolved issue remains: the 51-foot flexible access corridor requirement. The requirement assumes that every zone will be developed to its maximum potential, which is unrealistic. The LUCA actually prohibits full build-out in many cases, particularly for small sites, which are effectively barred from high-rise development due to restrictions on the acquisition of amenity points. The restriction leaves 50 percent of potential development capacity unused, undermining the goals of the plan. To address the issue, the city should allow small sites to qualify for high-rise development by modifying the amenity point rules, and the flexible access corridor requirement should be reduced from 51 feet to 35 feet, making it more feasible for development while still accommodating access needs. The Commission was urged to seriously consider the proposed modifications to ensure that Wilburton will reach its full development potential.

Absent additional speakers, a motion to close the public hearing was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bhargava and the motion carried unanimously.

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

**\*\*BREAK\*\***

(8:46 p.m. to 8:54 p.m.)

Commissioner Bhargava thanked the staff and the stakeholders for their extensive work on the LUCA. Much was said of importance during the hearing. Bellevue is indeed facing a housing crisis that must be addressed. Balance will be key to the ultimate success, but it has not yet been achieved. A path forward needs to be found that will not lock the city into a place. It is true that high costs cannot be legislated while also mandating low prices. Policy decisions should account for long-term flexibility rather than be based on current economic conditions alone. It is necessary to think about what will happen over the next ten years to address the housing crisis, and Wilburton is a big part of the puzzle. There is a clear need to understand the fee in-lieu and the discrepancies between the recommendations from staff, stakeholders, and the Roundtable. A deeper dive into why the fee differences exist and which structure would be most effective is needed.

With regard to the issues of access corridors and development feasibility, Commissioner Bhargava acknowledged the concerns. Further analysis is needed on whether a reduction to 35 feet, as proposed by John Darvish, would still meet city planning objectives.

Commissioner Khanloo raised the issue of the small lots in Wilburton and asked for clarification in regard to how they are addressed. Nick Whipple said staff did some analysis of where the different thresholds land. There are 79 parcels of less than 40,000 square feet, but only around 15 of those sites might qualify for small site flexibility due to ownership patterns and land assemblage.

Commissioner Villaveces expressed concern in regard to how the fee-in-lieu figures were determined. The Wilburton area covers about 300 acres or roughly 13 million square feet. There are a certain number of parcels, each of which has a certain amount of square footage. Given the FAR for each parcel, the total development potential can easily be calculated. It has been stated that there is a need for 1500 affordable units in the city, but it is not clear how many of them will come from development in Wilburton. If the fee in-lieu is too low, the city will have to absorb a disproportionate amount of the cost for developing affordable housing; it should be clear what percentage of the affordable housing costs should be covered by the private sector versus the city. There also needs to be clarity regarding the reasonable cost per square foot for affordable housing construction.

Using as an example a typical 105,000 square foot plot, Commissioner Villaveces said an FAR of 8.0 would allow for developing 840,000 square feet. At \$13 per square foot, the fee in-lieu in would come to \$10,120,000. Assuming a \$300 per square foot cost for developing affordable units, the fee in-lieu revenue could produce 36,400 square feet of affordable housing. At 1200 square feet per unit, that would be about 30 units, or about 80 smaller efficiency units at 450 square feet each. However, if the true cost is \$450 per square foot, the city would need to subsidize at least 33 percent of the cost. The key metrics need to be defined in order to determine the right fee in-lieu. It should be a straightforward calculation based on clear cost factors.

In response, Nick Whipple stated that while the approach outlined by Commissioner Villaveces is logical, determining an exact fee-in-lieu number is not so simple. The FAR for the urban core is 8.0, but that is the base and the actual is unlimited given the choices developers have to exceed the base. The 12 million square feet of commercial development and 14,800 residential units represent theoretical maximums, not realistic short-term targets. Additionally, the affordable housing targets are set citywide, not by district. If Wilburton follows a ten percent affordability mandate, it could contribute 160 affordable units to the target of 1550 affordable units citywide between 50 and 80 percent of area median income for the 2026-2036 period.

Commissioner Villaveces said the target is 160 affordable units in Wilburton, it should be a simple matter to determine what the contribution will need to be from the public sector and the city and what the fee in-lieu should be. There are competing interests who have come to a consensus, but it does not appear the city is listening. Absent a defined baseline, the Commission cannot effectively measure, manage or track whether the fee-in-lieu is realistic and effective. Nick Whipple responded by saying that subsidizing affordable housing is a policy decision that needs to be defined. The proposed fee was based on the five key factors previously noted. Staff have not fully explored the factors that informed the Roundtable's recommendation.

Commissioner Ferris expressed appreciation for the work done by staff and the stakeholders. In responding to the comments made by Commissioner Villaveces, Commissioner Ferris said the focus is not really on how much it costs to build affordable units. Rather, what really needs to be measured is lost revenue for developers. Developers can assume revenues from market-rate units, but they will not receive market rates for affordable units.

Commissioner Ferris agreed with Commissioner Bhargava that access corridors, the fees and the catalyst program are the key issues. A recommendation from the staff on the access corridors issue would be welcomed, but the need for flexibility depending on site specifics was recognized. The letter from the Roundtable states a willingness to go along with the staff where it makes sense, but also stresses the need for flexibility. The fee in-lieu absolutely needs to be maximized but also balanced so that the result will be projects built. The consensus outlined in the letter from the Roundtable is clear in regard to what the long-term fee should be, as well as the catalyst program.

Answering a question asked by Vice Chair Cálad, Nick Whipple clarified that the tables in the packet include options not yet incorporated into the draft. Additional feedback is still being sought and collected.

Vice Chair Cálad asked about the Roundtable's, noting that it consists of 31 members representing 27 major organizations which collectively represents tens of thousands of people in Bellevue. The question asked was if input from anyone in the public is being left out, or if any other stakeholders are unrepresented or disagree with the Roundtable's recommendations. Nick Whipple emphasized the extensive outreach conducted over two years, but acknowledged that complete alignment is difficult to achieve. The recommendations reflect both stakeholder input and city expertise. For its part, the Commission is free to make whatever recommendation it deems appropriate.

Chair Goepple commended the staff for synthesizing the various perspectives, and voiced appreciation for the work of the Roundtable's in developing a joint proposal. While the Roundtable represents two very big stakeholders in the process, there are additional considerations that must be addressed, such as safety and livability in the Wilburton area. The Roundtable questions certain requirements, such as a five-foot amenity zone on each side versus four feet. In some areas there could be more flexibility to move to an eight-foot sidewalk. The argument in favor of a 14-foot path instead of a 10-foot path has not been persuasive. The Commission is close to an agreement with what staff has proposed, but there should be more consideration given to how to enhance housing capacity and affordability while maintaining safety and quality.

With regard to the fee-in-lieu issue, Chair Goepple expressed agreement with other Commissioners that the Roundtable's proposal represents diverse interests. Any deviation from the Roundtable's recommendation should be well justified.

Chair Goepple voiced continued concerns about small sites and the need to ensure redevelopment remains feasible. The importance of fully evaluating the implications of regulations on such properties was stressed.

Nick Whipple acknowledges the concerns and asked if adjustments to the amenity zone should be made across all types of streets, including active transportation corridors and local streets. Regarding the proposed 14-foot multi-use path versus a 10-foot path, the Commission has the option of going with the narrower approach, though it was stressed that the shared use path is also intended to provide some multimodal opportunities, for which there are minimum standards that must be met. In the Transportation Design Manual, 14 feet is the minimum for any multipurpose path or shared facility. The Commission was reminded that the shared-use path was included in response to the interests of stakeholder in having smaller corridors that could be used as a block face.

Nick Whipple noted being uncertain of being able to come back with a different suggested amount for the fee in-lieu. The fee structure was carefully evaluated based on multiple factors and the decision-making will ultimately rely on either the Roundtable's recommendations or the current draft proposal.

Returning to the issue of small sites, Nick Whipple highlighted that recent revisions to the draft were made to align with feedback from the Roundtable. The intent is to allow full development capacity if projects meet baseline affordable housing and green building requirements. The approach eliminates the need for additional amenities to unlock higher density.

Commissioner Bhargava expressed the need for a deeper analysis before making recommendations. With regard to street dimensions, there are three parameters in play: cost reduction to encourage development, adherence to safety standards, and the balance between regulatory requirements and long-term urban planning goals. If safety and basic functional needs are met, the remaining balance becomes a matter of judgment. The staff were called on to present a clear analysis demonstrating where a balance has been struck.

With regard to the fees, Commissioner Bhargava pointed out that there are many building typologies and FAR scenarios that come into play that result in different costs. The fundamental question is whether there is a convincing argument in favor of proposing something different from the Roundtable's compromise. The need for a well-substantiated justification rather than a subjective opinion, ensuring that any departure from stakeholder recommendations is backed by clear and definitive reasoning, was emphasized.

Nick Whipple clarified for Commissioner Khanloo that small sites are defined as 40,000 square feet or smaller. The FAR depends on site location, but in the urban core the FAR is unlimited for residential development, with height restrictions being the primary limiting factor. Under Option A, ten percent of the residential units must be affordable, or a fee in-lieu must be paid. By way of example, the two-towers Bellevue Towers development in the Downtown has an FAR of 9.0 and a height limit of 400 feet, and it has around 400 residential units.

Commissioner Khanloo expressed concern that granting unlimited FAR to small sites may significantly increase land values, leading to unintended market consequences. There is a need to ensure that increased density will result in tangible public benefits, particularly in affordable housing, rather than simply maximized developer profits. A concern was also raised about the aesthetic and urban design implications of numerous tall, narrow buildings blocking the city's planned vision for the Wilburton area. Nick Whipple reiterated that the proposal is limited to residential development. Unlike other developments that might need to contribute to the Wilburton vision through other amenity options, flexibility is provided for small sites while maintaining baseline amenity requirements. Balancing development incentives with community goals is complex. Ultimately, it comes down to a policy decision for the Commission. A detailed analysis on access, safety, cost, and livability considerations was included in the memo and the Commissioners were encouraged to review it thoroughly before making final recommendations.

Commissioner Villaveces used the 160-unit target for Wilburton, a cost of \$314 per square foot, and an average cost of \$900 per square foot, to assume that the cost of developing the 160 units will come out at \$45 million. To collect that amount from the fee in-lieu at \$13 per square foot will require 4.5 million square feet of development. To get to 160 units will require developing 430,000 square feet of land at an FAR of 8.0. Nick Whipple clarified that there is no established target of 160 affordable units in Wilburton. The 160 units was drawn from a percentage of the citywide goal. Commissioner Villaveces said there should be an actual target so it can be known



whether or not the fee in-lieu is reasonable. The fact is, 430,000 square feet of land is only a fraction of the land in Wilburton, and achieving 160 affordable units is feasible. Having a clear target would help determine appropriate fees. Excessive costs should not be imposed on developers given that the costs also impact affordable housing projects. Large-scale development should be incentivized while ensuring fees remain reasonable and achievable.

Vice Chair Cálad sought clarification on whether staff will provide an alternative fee structure, while recognizing that extensive analysis has already been conducted. Nick Whipple reiterated that the current fee proposal is based on significant consideration, though leadership may review it further. Vice Chair Cálad said the available options for the Commission are to accept the city's proposal, adopt the Roundtable's recommendation, or conduct further independent analysis to propose a new number. A preference was expressed for following the Roundtable's recommendation given concerns that the existing fee structure makes development unfeasible.

Chair Goepple proposed structuring the next meeting around four key areas: access corridors, parking, small sites, and affordable housing. Time should be allowed for discussing miscellaneous topics as well at the end to ensure a comprehensive discussion. Emphasized was the importance of crafting a well-thought-out vision for Wilburton by allowing sufficient time for deliberation.

A motion to extend the meeting to 10:15 p.m. was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Cálad and the motion carried unanimously.

## 8. STUDY SESSION

### A. Land Use Code Amendment to Expand Housing Opportunities in Mixed-Use Areas as Part of the City's "Next Right Work" Initiative to Boost Housing Production and Affordable Housing in the City

(9:46 p.m.)

Nick Whipple sought input from the Commission before sharing the draft code with the broader public. It was stated that the HOMA project is part of the city's "Next Right Work" initiative, which seeks to boost housing production and affordability. The initiative is divided into two phases. During the first phase, a temporary interim official control (IOC) was focused on downtown; it has since expired after two extensions. The second phase aims to establish permanent regulations with a broader scope. The goal is to encourage residential development and leverage increased development capacity to meet affordable housing needs. A thorough review of zoning standards to identify barriers and explore solutions was conducted.

There were two approaches proposed: a voluntary option and a mandatory option. The initiative aligns with the recently updated Comprehensive Plan, which prioritizes diverse housing opportunities, affordability, and the transformation of auto-centric areas into walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods. The urgent need for affordable housing and the importance of enabling residents to live closer to jobs and essential services, reducing reliance on cars, was stressed.

Senior Planner Mathieu Menard explained that the proposed Land Use Code Amendment will apply to most mixed-use zones in the city, except for Wilburton, BelRed, and East Main given that separate planning efforts are underway for those areas. The LUCA will also rezone specific districts that are currently inconsistent with the future land-use map, including Crossroads Mall, Kelsey Creek Shopping Center, and Lakemont Shopping Center. Those areas will be rezoned to align with the updated Comprehensive Plan, and affected neighborhoods will be notified as the

process moves forward.

The proposed amendments aim to encourage housing development while balancing the needs of the development community and public concerns. The proposed changes include reducing setbacks, requiring pedestrian-oriented commercial uses on the ground floor, and modifying retail requirements to prevent excessive retail mandates that constrain housing production. The approach will remove structure limits for lot coverage and increase the Floor Area Ratios to encourage denser development and reduce reliance on surface parking lots in favor of structured parking. Additionally, a modest reduction in residential parking requirements is being considered, though commercial parking reductions are not within the scope of the LUCA. The LUCA will also look at reworking transition areas, removing height restrictions while maintaining setbacks and landscaping requirements to create a smoother transition between different zoning districts.

The LUCA will introduce FAR exemptions for key community priorities, including affordable housing, child care facilities, grocery stores, nonprofit organizations, and affordable commercial spaces to mitigate displacement. There will also be limited FAR exemptions for additional open space. Specific amendments will target downtown Bellevue's perimeter overlay, where the city aims to facilitate the development of seven-story five-over-two buildings, which are currently constrained by height limits. To maximize development potential, projects will be allowed to shift unused FAR from within the perimeter overlay to outside the perimeter overlay on a single development, but not across the downtown. Affordable housing incentives will be integrated into the amenity incentive system. The city's commitment to preserving the "wedding cake" design philosophy will continue in which building heights step down from the center of the Downtown to the periphery.

Mathieu Menard said two approaches will be proposed: a mandatory program (Option A) and a voluntary program (Option B), both of which will include a fee-in-lieu option. The LUCA will also make substantial zoning form changes to better align with the new Comprehensive Plan. Current zoning in some mixed-use areas limits residential development due to height restrictions, FAR caps, and dwelling unit per acre constraints, which will be modified to promote more housing.

There are five distinct scales in the Comprehensive Plan that apply to the areas. The "low scale" applies to areas like Newport Hills and Northtowne, allowing three- to six-stories depending on location. The "moderate scale" will support seven-story buildings in specific zones, including Kelsey Creek and Lakemont. The "middle scale" will allow for 10-story buildings in designated mixed-use districts. The "high scale" will permit up to 16 stories in targeted areas such as Factoria and portions of Crossroads. The "highest scale" is limited to downtown Bellevue, where buildings can reach up to 60 stories while maintaining the wedding cake transition.

An economic analysis was conducted along with extensive outreach to assess the viability of the proposed changes. The analysis confirmed that current economic conditions, including high interest rates and development costs, make new projects challenging. Feedback from developers identified key barriers such as restrictive building heights, site requirements, and parking mandates.

Public engagement sessions were conducted to gather input from residents; five meetings were held across the city, including virtual sessions and events at schools. The community feedback revealed concerns about traffic, parking, and potential over-densification, particularly in Newport. Parking requirements received mixed reactions, with some arguing that proposed

reductions are too high and others stating they are too low. Some residents expressed concerns about the aesthetics of new developments, describing modern designs as lacking character. There was, however, broad support for the proposed FAR exemptions, the affordable housing initiatives, and for maintaining retail spaces in neighborhood centers to preserve community hubs. The proposed LUCA reflects the findings by striving to balance housing growth with community needs while ensuring Bellevue's mixed-use districts evolve into vibrant, walkable neighborhoods that accommodate both residents and businesses.

Mathieu Menard explained that in Phase One of the LUCA process involved the economic analysis and information gathering, and that has been completed. Phase Two, which began in December, included reaffirmation of the scope by the Council and will involve public information sessions and study sessions with the Commission. During Phase Three, the Commission will hold a public hearing and formulate a recommendation to be forwarded to the Council. The city aims for adoption by summer or early fall. A draft of the proposed code amendments will be released for public input soon, and the Commission will review it in an upcoming study session.

Commissioner Bhargava acknowledged the comprehensive nature of the proposal and suggested incorporating considerations for public safety, wayfinding, sheltering in place, and placemaking into the planning process.

Commissioner Khanloo emphasized the importance of preserving neighborhood identity and architectural design while ensuring development does not negatively impact property values. Appreciation was voiced for the focus on affordable commercial spaces and small neighborhood grocery stores.

Commissioner Villaveces highlighted the potential role of mass timber in construction, noting that building height regulations could be adjusted to align with mass timber fire safety standards, which allow for nine, twelve, or eighteen stories. Support was expressed for removing the multifamily play area requirements, and it was suggested that strategies for expediting the permitting process should be explored. A concern was raised about barriers to separate ownership of accessory dwelling units, and to condominium development due to legal constraints. The need for a thoughtful approach to commercial frontage requirements to ensure retail viability was stressed.

Commissioner Ferris underscored the importance of maintaining livability as a guiding principle, and highlighted the need for flexibility in parking requirements, particularly in areas with limited transit options. Visual representations of the affected neighborhoods were requested to help the Commissioners and the public better understand the potential impacts of the proposed changes.

Vice Chair Cálad said when options for the fee-in-lieu are presented they should anticipate the same types of questions raised during the Wilburton discussion to streamline the decision-making process. The importance of presenting clear distinctions between options A and B was highlighted to ensure Commissioners can fairly evaluate them without being steered toward a predetermined choice.

Chair Goepple expressed support for replacing dwelling unit per acre restrictions with Floor Area Ratio, arguing that it better supports residential development. A more detailed financial analysis regarding affordable housing requirements to ensure proportionality was requested. Concern was also voiced about completely removing the transition area design overlay, and it was questioned why the Downtown will maintain a gradual height transition while the

neighborhoods do not receive similar consideration.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None  
(10:13 p.m.)

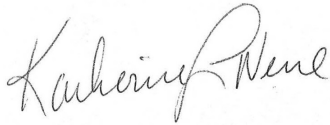
10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None  
(10:13 p.m.)

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None  
(10:13 p.m.)

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

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

Chair Goeppeler adjourned the meeting at 10:14 p.m.



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Kate Nesse  
Staff to the Planning Commission

04/15/2025

Date