



Bellevue Planning Commission

March 10, 2021

PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Study Session on a proposed Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA) for Sequence One of the Grand Connection Guidelines and Standards, creating a new section 20.25A.175 in the Land Use Code (LUC). File No. 20-114098-AD.

STAFF CONTACTS

Emil King, AICP, Assistant Director, 452-7223

Michael Austin, AICP, LEED AP-ND, Senior Planner/Urban Designer, 452-4637

Community Development Department

Nick Whipple, Senior Planner, 452-4578

Development Services Department

POLICY ISSUES

The proposed Grand Connection Sequence One Guidelines and Standards LUCA implements key elements of the vision illustrated in the Grand Connection Framework Plan and the 2018 Grand Connection Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA). This LUCA, and the overall Grand Connection Framework Plan and CPA, together referred to the Grand Connection Initiative, support improving livability, access, and placemaking along the Grand Connection route.

The City Council has identified the Grand Connection Initiative as a Council Priority. To further the vision, it will take advantage of private sector redevelopment along the route and City investment in new infrastructure, such as intersection improvements. This LUCA contains new guidelines and standards, referred to as the Grand Connection Sequence One Guidelines and Standards, in LUC 20.25A.175, and revises and replaces the existing Pedestrian Corridor and Major Public Open Space Design Guidelines. Sequence One addresses the area from the intersection of 100th Avenue NE and Main Street to the east end of the Transit Center (NE 6th Street and 110th Avenue NE).

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION

DIRECTION

INFORMATION ONLY

Staff will be presenting the proposed LUCA in two study sessions. as outlined below. The first study session will include background information and all topic areas (Topics 1 – 4) in the proposed LUCA, with staff seeking direction on the components of the LUCA that may be finalized for public hearing and those requiring additional information. For the second study session, staff will return with answers and follow-up responses to questions and issues raised during the first study session.

After the study sessions, the Planning Commission will be asked to hold a public hearing on the proposed LUCA. Following discussion and consideration of the testimony provided at the hearing, the Commission will be asked to recommend approval of the proposed LUCA.

	Topic Areas
<input type="checkbox"/>	Study Session 1 (March 10): LUCA Topic Areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic 1. General Requirements • Topic 2. Grand Connection Route, Room, and Major Public Open Space Locations

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic 3. Grand Connection Guidelines and Standards • Topic 4. Room Specific Guidelines and Standards
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>Study Session 2 (March 24): LUCA Topic Areas (cont.)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic 5. Questions and Answers from Study Session 1 • Outstanding Items
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>Public Hearing (April 28):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Public Hearing • Planning Commission Recommendation

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Background

The Grand Connection Initiative is a City Council Priority to implement a major place-making feature that connects Meydenbauer Bay Park, through Downtown Bellevue to the Wilburton Area. This vibrant, people-focused route builds upon the City’s existing Pedestrian Corridor and Major Public Open Space network, a hallmark of Downtown Bellevue that has been incrementally added to over the years. The location of the Grand Connection route is provided as Attachment A.

The City adopted the Grand Connection CPA through Ordinance No. 6449 in 2018 (Attachment B). The CPA changed the Urban Design and the Arts Element, and policies and maps in the City’s Comprehensive Plan Downtown Subarea Plan regarding the Grand Connection. Specifically, the CPA included policies to improve connectivity, establish cohesive design strategies, and create a vibrant cultural corridor that offers enjoyable and memorable experiences.

The Grand Connection route is separated into two sequences. Sequence One addresses the area from the intersection of 100th Avenue NE and Main Street to the east end of the Transit Center (NE 6th Street and 110th Avenue NE). Sequence Two addresses the area east of NE 6th Street and 110th Avenue NE and the crossing of Interstate 405 to the Wilburton Area and the Eastrail.

Last June, the Planning Commission was provided an overview of the Grand Connection Initiative scope and schedule, including this proposed LUCA for the Grand Connection Sequence One Guidelines and Standards.

Ongoing Public Outreach and Engagement

Extensive internal collaboration and public involvement informed development of the proposed LUCA. Staff was guided by a public engagement plan with three modes of outreach and engagement to ensure the public, stakeholders, and interested parties have access to up-to-date project information and the opportunity to provide comments.

1. Process IV Requirements. Process consistent with Chapter 20.35 LUC procedural requirements to provide opportunities for public comment, including:
 - Notice of Application of the proposed LUCA; and
 - Public hearing on the proposed LUCA anticipated in April.
2. Engagement and Feedback. Dialogue and sourcing previously documented comments with various stakeholders, including:

- Sourcing and referencing previously documented comments from the Grand Connection Framework Plan process;
 - Informational briefings with City boards and commissions and civic and business organizations in Bellevue;
 - Focus groups with landscape architects, architects, and developers with property along the Grand Connection route; and
 - Consultation and testing of the draft LUCA content with design teams working on active projects along the Grand Connection.
3. Online Presence. City webpage to provide opportunities for the public to stay informed, including:
- Staff contacts; and
 - Public information regarding LUCA progression.

Components of the Proposed LUCA

The proposed LUCA will revise and replace the existing Pedestrian Corridor and Major Public Open Space Design Guidelines and amend LUC 20.25A to create section 20.25A.175 Grand Connection and Major Public Open Spaces. The Grand Connection CPA policies have been reviewed and analyzed to inform the proposed LUCA. The new section streamlines provisions related to the Grand Connection and is intended to be clearer and more user-friendly for reviewers, project teams, and the general public. The new section is provided as Attachment C.

Topic 1. General Requirements

The proposed LUCA establishes provisions applicable to the full length of Sequence One of the Grand Connection, including Major Public Open Spaces. The provisions are based on the requirements of LUC 20.25A.090.C.1-2, which the proposed LUCA amends for conformance and clarity. Provisions include requirements for 24-hour public access, maintenance, rules on temporary furnishings for businesses along the corridor, and clarification on the development allowances above and beneath the Grand Connection and Major Public Open Spaces.

The Grand Connection includes a mix of publicly-owned properties and rights-of-way and private property. The general requirements of this LUCA ensure that the Grand Connection, including Major Public Open Spaces, remain accessible to the public every day, year-round. Maintenance and operation requirements are in place to ensure the Grand Connection remains clean, safe, and in a state of good repair for all members of the public to enjoy.

Topic 2. Grand Connection Route, Room, and Major Public Open Space Locations

The proposed LUCA establishes a “room” for each block along the Grand Connection route to encourage a variety of context-specific experiences. This context-specific approach will preserve the unique character-defining elements of different rooms within the Grand Connection, such as Old Bellevue and Downtown Park while encouraging strategies that create a sense of identity for the whole corridor.

Consistent with the current LUC, the proposed LUCA includes the applicable review process for Grand Connection improvements and provisions for an interim Grand Connection, an option that is potentially available to phased projects.

The proposed LUCA also establishes the location, design, and construction requirements for Major Public Open Spaces located along the Grand Connection. The provisions are based on the requirements of LUC 20.25A.090.C.2, with conformance and clarifying amendments. Major Public Open Spaces serve as focal points for pedestrian activity within the Grand Connection and are located at or near key intersections.

Topic 3. Grand Connection Guidelines and Standards

The proposed LUCA includes both guidelines and standards for the Grand Connection to shape private development. Guidelines provide direction to design teams on how a project should be designed and allow flexibility in how guidelines are applied to a project. Standards are strict requirements or criteria that a project must meet. The new guidelines and standards supplement the existing requirements, standards, criteria, and guidelines provided in Part 20.25A LUC. Common Grand Connection guidelines and standards include paving, furnishings and lighting, ecological framework, integrated artistic elements, and the use of the signature Grand Connection Gold color.

Guidelines use the words “should” or “consider,” and typically describe a general outcome that projects must produce. Projects are always required to comply with guidelines, though there may be flexibility to achieve such compliance. The Grand Connection guidelines represent “best practices” in place-making and are intended to help further shape the route as a vibrant cultural corridor that offers enjoyable and memorable experiences.

Standards typically use the word “shall” or a clear directive “is required,” and are specific mandates. Projects must comply with every standard, with little or no flexibility. The Grand Connection standards establish minimum requirements to ensure a cohesive design strategy for Sequence One while promoting equitable and quality design.

Sequence One has the following goals:

- Establish a vibrant cultural corridor that offers enjoyable and memorable experiences;
- Facilitate safe and accessible opportunities for people to move, explore, gather, and relax;
- Incorporate human-scaled design elements in paving, landscaping and fixtures; and
- Offer opportunity to highlight the benefits of a robust ecological framework in a creative, functional, and aesthetic manner.

To achieve these goals, the focus of the guidelines and standards range from the location of primary entries to active uses, relationship of architecture to the streetscape, material choices, plant selection, and artistic elements to emphasize livability and the creation of a vibrant, active pedestrian experience through the Grand Connection.

Topic 4. Room Specific Guidelines and Standards

The proposed LUCA establishes seven rooms along the Grand Connection Sequence One route, which serve as character zones to foster a unique and interesting pedestrian experience along each block. Projects in a “room” must comply with Room Specific Guidelines and Standards as well as requirements of LUC 20.25A.175 and the existing requirements, standards, criteria, and guidelines provided in Part 20.25A LUC. When applying the room-specific provisions, the City considers the room’s intent statement to ensure the project meets the overall intent of the room. The rooms and intent statements are as follows:

1. Transit Central

Intent. Transit Central is the largest mobility hub in Bellevue and a portal to Downtown. Human and vehicle activity converge here, with a transit island flanked by wide concourses that support a lively and interesting pedestrian environment.

2. Garden Hillclimb

Intent. The Garden Hillclimb is a relaxing space that includes cascading clusters of lush and colorful plantings that the public can enjoy up-close and through all their senses.

3. Compass Plaza

Intent. The Compass Plaza is a signature outdoor venue situated at the heart of Downtown. A civic space where events and activities bring people together, Compass Plaza is a large space that accommodates events and gatherings, complements the surrounding buildings, and is finely detailed and cohesive with a design that is integrated across the entire plaza.

4. Plaza as Street

Intent. Plaza as Street is a multipurpose, pedestrian-scaled room where culture and activity intersect, anchored by the Bellevue Arts Museum. Plaza as Street is designed as a curbsless environment with vehicles, yet every element of the design emphasizes a pedestrian orientation.

5. Bellevue Way

Intent. Bellevue Way is a hub of activity, where commerce and entertainment converge on a wide sidewalk corridor that is richly designed and furnished. Designated in the Comprehensive Plan as a “Grand Shopping Street”, the Bellevue Way room features bold and expressive landscaping that also buffers users from the street.

6. Downtown Park

Intent. The Downtown Park is a place where people pause and step away from the busy activity of Downtown. The park is a verdant sanctuary and community gathering space. Intermittent design elements embedded along the promenade and at prominent entries remind people that they are on the Grand Connection.

7. Old Bellevue

Intent. Old Bellevue is a human-scaled neighborhood in Downtown Bellevue, and a high degree of design detail applies to the walkway and to the adjacent buildings. Old Bellevue emphasizes interesting store fronts, welcoming entrances, abundant outdoor seating, vibrant color, and seasonal change. Sidewalk paving patterns and intersection design provide an exceptional level of detail that embed common elements of the Grand Connection.

Anticipated Schedule

The Planning Commission will be introduced to the proposed LUCA on March 10. The role of the Planning Commission is to review the proposed LUCA for consistency with policy direction in the Comprehensive Plan, noting policy implications for consideration, and may recommend changes to the proposed LUCA consistent with those findings. The anticipated timeline for processing the LUCA is as follows:

- Planning Commission Study Sessions: March 10 and 24
- Planning Commission Public Hearing and Recommendation: April 28 (tentative)
- City Council Study Session: May (tentative)
- City Council Action: June (tentative)

ATTACHMENT(S)

A. Grand Connection Route

- B. Grand Connection CPA (Ordinance No. 6449)
- C. Proposed LUCA