

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

March 13, 2024
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Emil King, Kate Nesse, Justus Stewart, Department of Community Development;

COUNCIL LIAISON: Deputy Mayor Malakoutian

GUEST SPEAKERS: Paul Clark, Chair, Parks & Community Services Board

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 Bhargava who presided.

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

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Brown who arrived at 6:34 p.m.

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

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

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS
(6:33 p.m.)

Deputy Mayor Malakoutian reported that at the March 11 Council meeting there was a discussion about the cross cultural center without walls concept, which is aimed at bringing people together to share their intercultural experiences. There is an RFP out seeking a non-profit to do all the planning and programming.

The Council also received a positive quarterly update from the city's economic development team. The focus was on how well retail and other businesses are doing. The Council also discussed the selection of City Manager and voted to conduct a recruitment search. There was

also a vote taken between in-house recruitment or going outside, and the Council voted in favor of an outside executive recruiter.

Deputy Mayor Malakoutian noted having recently done police and fire ride-alongs and found that what they do is eye opening.

It was also reported that the work is underway to fill the vacancies on the Planning Commission.

5. STAFF REPORTS (6:35 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Comprehensive Planning Manager Thara Johnson took a few minutes to review the Commission's schedule of upcoming meeting dates and agenda items, including the additional meetings slated for April 3 and May 1.

6. WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

A. Written Communications (6:39 p.m.)

Thara Johnson noted the receipt of a number of communications focused on the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, the Wilburton LUCA and other topics.

B. Oral Communications (6:40 p.m.)

Chair Bhargava 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.

Alex Tsimerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners dirty garbage rats. There are 150,000 residents of Bellevue, 20 percent of whom voted for him. Over the last three times a public request was made three times to learn when Deputy Mayor Malakoutian became an American citizen. Each time no answer was given. How is it possible that the city does not know the answer. The Councilmembers are freaking fascists who do not give people a chance to speak for more than 30 minutes. In 2012 the Council made the rule to allow only 10 people to speak for a total of 30 minutes. They did it only to prevent Alex Tsimerman from speaking. Two years ago the Council made a change to not allow the public to speak at the end of Council meetings. It is confusing as to why the Commission does not seem to have an opinion about the rule or want to change it. The Commissioners must also be Nazi pigs and fascists.

Vice Chair Goeppelle noted for the record that the speaker's remarks were yet another flagrant violation of Ordinance 6752. The irrelevant rant had nothing to do with the scope of the

Commission's business.

Heidi Dean noted that there had been a number of comments made by Bellevue residents about their desire to have public gathering spaces. In many neighborhoods, the only gathering place is a park. The Newport Hills community is fortunate to have the Newport Hills Shopping Center, which is full of businesses that have gathering spaces. Some of those businesses did not survive the pandemic or have left for other reasons. The speaker noted that in 2014 along with Ron Sher a presentation was made on the importance of shopping centers as part of the Commission's discussion of the Neighborhoods Element. The city is at risk of losing its third places because of a push to upzone under the false narrative that businesses can only be successful if density is added. The Newport Hills Shopping Center suffers from having a slumlord. It was concerning to recently learn that a retail analysis was conducted regarding the shopping center. The apples-to-oranges comparison of the neighborhood center in Newport Hills was to the regional Downtown center and two mixed use centers in the Wilburton and BelRed growth corridors. No one doing the comparison actually stepped foot on site in Newport Hills. The report included talk about such things as a bank, which the shopping center has not had since 2011; the bank was listed as being eight percent of the retail. The report states that fuel sales constitute the largest percentage of retail sales, which is true, but also highlights retail electronics sales as the second largest category; there is no electronics store in Newport Hills, and no local businesses sell electronic goods. The block drawn around the neighborhood center for purposes of reporting density and average income is comprised largely of multifamily housing occupied by a large number of low-income residents. The Commission was urged to say no to the zoning umbrella for the various neighborhood centers. It will not help affordable housing and it will not help the businesses. It will only help the property owners.

Bill Finkbeiner thanked the Commissioners for the work to balance so many different interests in the city. At the Commission's previous meeting when the staff brought forward the Future Land Use Map, there were questions raised about infrastructure. The fact is Wilburton has more multimodal infrastructure than just about anywhere else. It is proximal to I-405, it is served by light rail, and it has existing bike lanes and is served by bus rapid transit. The Commissioners were urged to consider following the staff recommendation for the zoning change from the FEIS.

Alexis Chartouni, development manager for Legacy Partners project at 132nd Avenue NE and Spring Boulevard, allowed that there is a circular iterative process by which lived experiences help to inform the policy documents which in turn inform the Land Use Code. As a builder of multifamily residential developments, incentives to push green infrastructure in buildings are hugely valuable for actually making a change in the approach of developers and investors. Absent some benefit, green infrastructure just adds cost to projects. Under the current code, there is an FAR incentive for going LEED Gold. The Legacy Partners project is pushing LEED platinum and is close to it, but the incentives do not really come into play given that everything is consumed by affordable housing and parks and recreation. Something should be done to help juggle that around. Typically built green and LEED do not think a lot about embodied carbon emissions, which is really driving climate change. It is not necessary to be tied to LEED and corporate branding groups that greenwash buildings given that other aspects can drive environmental benefits. With regard to parks and open space, there is a push in BelRed

specifically for family play areas. Most rental projects are not in fact allowed to collect demographic data under FHA rules, but anecdotally there are almost never families in the buildings. Fifty percent of the units turn over annually. Rather than forcing a forlorn play swing in a multifamily development, there should be a fee in-lieu to be used for great facilities in a nearby park.

Lee Sargent, 16246 NE 24th Street, spoke representing Trees for Livability and commended the Commission for the tolerance it shows and the way in which it responds to those whose comments are offensive. Referring to policies CL-19 and EN-71, it was noted that both talk about significant trees. The definitions come from the Land Use Code. Significant trees should be significant and described in the Comprehensive Plan, and they should be identified as more than just trees. They are the kind of thing for which there is no coming back once lost through development activities. Some soils will not support the growing of trees. The significant trees are needed as they will help when climate change hits everyone more personally and dries up water sources.

Nicole Meyers thanked the Commission for talking about the climate and future neighborhoods. Trees are very important to the community. Page 501 of the Comprehensive Plan PDF says that some townhomes are expected to have about 14 percent tree canopy. That is much less than the tree canopy that is currently around some of the older houses that will be torn down to make way for new townhomes. Many neighborhoods could lose the benefit of shade trees to make room for air conditioning exhaust, which is hot. The city should be looking at all incentives for building green and to LEED standards so that new buildings will still be appropriate and responsible in 50 years. New buildings should have lots of windows and skylights, with plenty of space around them for trees.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(7:02 p.m.)

A motion to amend the agenda to allow time to acknowledge Commissioner Brown’s final meeting was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Khanloo and the motion carried unanimously.

8. RECOGNITION OF COMMISSIONER BROWN

Chair Bhargava shared that the meeting was Commissioner Brown’s last as a member of the Commission. Commissioner Brown was appointed to the Commission in October 2020 and in the time sense has been involved in a number of key issues: the land use amendments to advance affordable housing, including unit lot subdivisions and microapartments; Affordable Housing Strategy Action C-1; accessory dwelling units; the emergency housing Land Use Code amendments; the Great Neighborhood plans for Northwest and Northeast Bellevue; the Comprehensive Plan Transportation Element changes to incorporate multimodal concurrency policies and curb management; the tree code amendment; the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update work that is underway; and the Wilburton Vision Implementation. Commissioner Brown was thanked for providing so many tremendous insights and for bringing to the table a unique perspective and many values. Commissioner Brown will be missed.

Commissioner Ferris echoed those comments and noted how wicked smart Commissioner

Brown is, evident by the unique perspectives and passion brought to the discussions. It is evident that Commissioner Brown cares about the people the Commission represents. Commissioner Brown will be missed.

Vice Chair Goepple agreed that Commissioner Brown will be missed as someone who has brought both head and heart to the Commission and its work. Commissioner Brown was wished all the best for the future.

Commissioner Cálad thanked Commissioner Brown for being kind when expressing views. Much has been learned from Commissioner Brown and the diversity of thought brought to the discussions.

Commissioner Khanloo noted greatly admiring Commissioner Brown's work on the Commission. As an immigration attorney, Commissioner Brown has made it possible for many to live in a free country, including Commissioner Khanloo.

Commissioner Brown thanked the Commissioners for their kind remarks. The work of the Commission and Bellevue as a community will be missed. In the Netherlands, however, there is public transit that runs every five minutes, and there are protected bike lanes everywhere.

Deputy Mayor Malakoutian suggested Commissioner Brown should return to Bellevue to finish the remaining time left on the Commission term. Deputy Mayor Malakoutian voiced appreciation for Commissioner Brown's compassion, integrity and commitment to the city, and for always bringing to the table a lens of inclusivity and sustainability.

On behalf of the staff, Assistant Director Emil King thanked Commissioner Brown for choosing to serve as a member of the Commission. Serving the public and working on behalf of the community is part of Commissioner Brown's DNA. It has been great having someone with experience in the Eastgate area. As a great listener, Commissioner Brown always had thoughtful questions and feedback, and always brought humor to every discussion.

Thara Johnson agreed with the previous speakers and noted that Commissioner Brown was the first Planning Commissioner she had the privilege of being part of the process to interview and onboard to the Commission. Much has been learned over the years through interacting with Commissioner Brown. Bringing integrity to the discussions, and showing thoughtfulness regardless of how controversial the issue, has been a hallmark.

9. STUDY SESSION (7:13 p.m.)

A. Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update: Volume 1 Policy Changes in the Neighborhoods, Climate and Environment, and Parks, Recreation & Open Space Elements

Emil King briefly reviewed the process to date and introduced Parks & Community Services Board Chair Paul Clark to help with the review of the draft parks, recreation and open space policies.

Parks & Community Services Board Chair Paul Clark noted that body is responsible for reviewing updates to the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Element of the Comprehensive Plan. Soon after the Council launched the periodic update section, the Parks & Community Services

Board began its work. Four meetings over the past year or so have been dedicated the review of the staff's recommended updates. The Board did not require any major rewrites to the existing or proposed language, but it did refocus the wording and emphasis in a few respects. With regard to policy PA-2, the Board wanted to highlight the need to expand the parks system to keep pace with the growth of the city. The Board wanted to accentuate the density situation for those living in the growth corridors, specifically the Downtown where there is an order of magnitude less park space per resident. For policy PA-25, the Board approved language that focuses on the full local history as opposed to the previous reference to the generalized regional history when it comes to signage and parks. For policy PA-32, the Board wanted the inclusive outreach and programming detail to include intercultural exchange in addition to culturally specific programming.

At its February meeting, the Parks & Community Services Board unanimously voted to approve the document shown as Attachment B in the Commission's packet on the belief that the proposed updates reflect Bellevue's city in a park ideal and the notion that all communities should have access to world class parks, recreational opportunities, and the change to regularly and organically connect with the natural environment.

Senior Planner Dr. Kate Nesse said the community identified the need for some changes. All of them are being vetted internally before any changes are made to the staff recommendations. In terms of the parks element, the community voiced a lot of support for the ecological function of parks; for increasing access to parks facilities geographically; and for increasing equitable access. What the community found missing is a focus on the details of parks planning, and an emphasis on safety in the parks.

Dr. Kate Nesse said the Parks, Recreation and Open Space element policies had the most changes in the Parks and Open Space subsection. The changes focus on increasing access to parks for a variety of users. PA-2 references the need to keep parks facilities in pace with growth. PA-3 calls out giving consideration to underserved areas; and PA-5 adds the notion of safe access to parks. PA-14 was updated to add an emphasis on the safety of the linkages between parks facilities. PA-16 addresses emerging needs as recreational trends evolve. PA-20 is new and calls for supporting the development of facilities along the Grand Connection.

The updates to the recreation and community services policies focus mostly on responding to the community. The stewardship policies update center primarily on supporting the ecological function of parks, and the updates to the maintenance, renovation and redevelopment policies call for the city to lead by example in responding to climate change by taking actions relative to parks facilities.

Commissioner Khanloo referred to PA-1 and asked what adding the reference to "scenic character" adds to the policy. Dr. Kate Nesse said the Parks & Community Services Board wanted to have a definition of scenic character, which was added to the glossary. One thing scenic gets to the visual value of parks.

Commissioner Ferris asked what the financial tools referenced in PA-11 are intended to accomplish. Dr. Kate Nesse said the tools listed in the policy are internal to the city and are those that could be used to fund parks infrastructure. Commissioner Ferris suggested that financial tools are relatively dynamic subject to change over time and as such specifically listing them in the Comprehensive Plan may not be appropriate. Dr. Kate Nesse said that is a good point and allowed that the language could be given additional consideration.

Vice Chair Goepple voiced support for the content of PA-39 relative to streetscape and arterial landscaping, but suggested the language stricken from the policy is important, especially as the city embarks on a lot of redevelopment of neighborhoods that will be much denser. Dr. Kate Nesse said the policy was originally in the Land Use Element and it was moved to reside with the other parks, recreation and open space policies. PA-2 is also about acquiring and maintaining parks and expanding the system to meet the needs of the population.

Vice Chair Goepple referenced PA-45 which calls for eliminating and preventing the uses of lands and facilities that impact or that are not in alignment with the intended use, or planned for them, and suggested that the “planned for them” part seems to weaken the first part of the policy. Dr. Kate Nesse said the Parks & Community Services Board had a lot of conversation about the policy for the exact same reason. The language that was in the public review copy and which was first brought to the Parks & Community Services Board referenced non-park uses, which was deemed to be confusing.

Chair Paul Clark said the language specifically referred to non-recreational use of parks. The Board pushed back on the idea that not all park space is recreational. The language seemed too confining. What the Board wanted to avoid was the worst case scenario of park land disappearing and being used for something unrelated to parks and open spaces. At the same time, the Board did not want language that would prevent the city from moving forward with projects. Dr. Kate Nesse agreed to take another look at the language.

Chair Bhargava referred to PA-2 and the notion of providing park land concurrent with growth and density of urban neighborhoods in alignment with the parks and open space systems and said while the intent is clear, it is not clear how it will be carried out. Land is going to be very limited as more housing is added, especially in areas close to transit. Also asked was how the policy would be implemented in underserved areas. Dr. Kate Nesse said there are a number of ways to address the need to expand the park system. As places redevelop, the city can look into dedicating land to parks. The city also works with private parkland owners to make more park and recreation space available. There are opportunities that arise periodically to acquire more land, and where possible those acquisitions are focused on the areas that need parkland the most. Chair Bhargava urged giving consideration to more creative solutions beyond just the acquisition of land, particularly as land gets developed and land prices go up.

Emil King noted the policy specifically mentions urban neighborhoods. As the BelRed area has built out, park investments in that area have lagged behind. It will require innovative solutions to keep up with density and growth in all urban areas.

Chair Bhargava turned to PA-33 and the importance of the ecological function of parks and suggested that the aspect is a little underplayed in the policy set. The question asked was if there is policy language that talks about native planting programs within parks, or the retention of trees and vegetation species that are highly important when it comes to ecological functions. Dr. Kate Nesse said the plan does not include specifics; those issues are addressed more in the Parks and Open Space System Plan.

Chair Paul Clark said the Parks & Community Services Board saw the Comprehensive Plan as the higher altitude document. The policy language that talks about preserving the ecology of natural systems encompasses the priorities described by Chair Bhargava. There will be considerably more detail contained in the Parks and Open Space System Plan.

Chair Bhargava asked about culturally sensitive programming and enabling cultural exchange as

noted in PA-32. Chair Paul Clark said the Parks & Community Services Board had discussions about the policy where there was a welcoming of the initial text and the update about meeting the needs of a diverse population and ensuring cultural representation in terms of programming and events. The Board went on to ask about taking the policy text even further toward ensuring cultural fusion and making sure actions taken are not so limiting as to create cultural silos. Chair Bhargava suggested the policy language could be made a bit clearer.

Commissioner Cálad called attention to PA-45 and asked why the reference to requiring a public review process was stricken from the language of the policy. Dr. Kate Nesse said first and foremost the intent is to make sure that parklands primarily serve parks purposes. On some lands there are things, such as ecological functions, where two things can be accomplished simultaneously, but the parks functions should always be given priority. It was agreed, however, that the language was not as clear as it could be. Commissioner Cálad suggested that where major decisions regarding parklands are made, the public should be involved. Dr. Kate Nesse noted that there are policies around involving the public in the park planning process, and the policy is not intended to exclude the public in making such decisions.

Chair Paul Clark said the concern of the Parks & Community Services Board was that the stronger language could prevent the conversion of parklands.

Commissioner Ferris agreed with the need to be creative in trying to add park space. There are likely solutions that do not necessarily require the purchase of additional land. Commissioner Ferris added that while the parks are for humans, they also serve wildlife.

Commissioner Khanloo also voiced concerns about the proposed change to PA-45 and eliminating the public review process. If that is not the intent, the policy language should be clarified.

With regard to PA-2, Commissioner Khanloo suggested the language has too much emphasis on the density of urban neighborhoods. The emphasis should simply be on providing park land everywhere. Chair Paul Clark said the language came about in part due to some public feedback. The concern voiced was in regard to the dramatic reduction in available park land per resident in the Downtown, and that a similar situation would exist in BelRed if the city did not get out in front of it. Eastgate is an example of a place that was underserved due to a lack of parks owing to annexation issues and the history of the area. The same result can be achieved by maintaining a certain amount of park space while dramatically increasing the density of an area, creating an underserved situation and crowded parks. The Parks & Community Services Board saw the issue as being neighborhood specific and chose to call out the fact that rapidly densifying neighborhoods need intervention of a different sort. Commissioner Khanloo agreed with the underlying concept but voiced concern that the policy as drafted will not achieve the desired outcome.

Emil King agreed to take another look at the policy language.

Commissioner Brown noted that as a resident of a part of Eastgate that was annexed later than other parts of Bellevue, Eastgate has a dearth of park facilities. It is true that simply maintaining what is there as the area grows will not be the right solution. Access to parks for every community should be stressed, even those communities that were late to join the party.

Vice Chair Goeppelle commented the Parks & Community Services Board for doing an excellent job overall on the policies. Chair Bhargava concurred.

Chair Bhargava commented that underserved areas also use parks, with underserved defined in terms of proximity to parks and parks square footage per head. Sports facilities and recreational uses are a core element of how parks can be used by families and everyone. Consideration should be given to conducting an evaluation that goes beyond just park space and includes the need for recreational programming.

Chair Bhargava said PA-19 is great in its call for developing additional public gathering spaces that can accommodate large events. However, in doing so wayfinding, evacuation routes, sheltering in place and other safety elements should be included in an accompanying policy that cannot be ignored. Dr. Kate Nesse said the point was well taken. There is a section in the Neighborhoods Element on safety, including planning for emergencies. The subject matter experts will be asked to consider adding a policy that is specific to parks, and where to house it.

With regard to providing recreational opportunities equitably across the city, Dr. Kate Nesse said because recreational community services are not always tied to a specific place in the way that a park is, there is less emphasis given to it. Even so, staff could look through the policies to see if there is a place to add equitable access for recreational programs.

Emil King summarized the direction given to staff to look at policies PA-2, PA-11, PA-16, PA-19, PA-31, PA-33, PA-39 and PA-45.

With regard to PA-33, Chair Bhargava commented that “seek opportunities” is stronger than “promote,” but suggested the policy could be even stronger in terms of sustainability now and into the future.

Commissioner Cálad commented that words like “explore” and “encourage,” and phrases like “seek opportunities,” are not strong enough. Policies should be clear as to the desired result.

Deputy Mayor Malakoutian acknowledged Chair Paul Clark for all of the efforts of the Parks & Community Services Board, and also the work of the staff.

Chair Paul Clark thanked the Commission for its thoughtful consideration of the policies and the reasoned feedback.

****BREAK****

(8:00 p.m. – 8:08 p.m.)

Dr. Kate Nesse said the Neighborhoods Element is relatively short in terms of the number of policies, though in the community feedback it was one of the elements that was most commented on. A lot of support was voiced for increasing the types of housing available in neighborhoods, and for the updates that celebrate the diversity of people in the city. There was also support for the updates around safety in the Neighborhoods Element. Pointed out by the public as missing from the element were crime prevention and walkability. Also noted as missing was a clear definition of equity, which could be addressed in the narrative section.

The main thrust of the policies in the Neighborhood Core Needs section of the Neighborhoods Element is on expanding access to daily needs in the neighborhoods, and around building community within the neighborhoods. Two policies addressing safety in the existing Comprehensive Plan were moved to the newly created Community Safety section to make them easier to find, and two new policies were added, one addressing gun safety and one about

detering racially motivated hate crimes. The Inclusive Neighborhood Identity section represents a new section name to emphasize inclusivity. The definition of neighborhood character was also updated to be more specific. The Neighborhood Area Planning section has policies around neighborhood area planning. Volume 2 of the Comprehensive Plan houses all of the subarea plans, and the Neighborhood Area Planning policies guide the updates to the subarea/neighborhood area plans.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Cálad, Dr. Kate Nesse said the first policy in the Community Safety section, NH-10, addresses supporting fire and police. Commissioner Cálad commented that the work done by fire and police is amazing and as such there is a need to include clear language calling for supporting both. Dr. Kate Nesse said the policies were reviewed by both fire and police, and both departments offered their support for the safety policies, especially NH-10.

Commissioner Ferris voiced support for NH-2 and the support it outlines for a range of housing types. Part of a thriving neighborhood includes facilities for the care of children and the question asked was if daycares are automatically allowed in neighborhoods, and if policy language was needed to actually encourage them. Dr. Kate Nesse said there is a policy in the land use section regarding daycare facilities. Daycare uses are allowed in residential areas. Staff can look into the notion of encouraging them.

Commissioner Ferris also voiced support for NH-12, the policy supporting gun safety, but questioned why the policy was focused only on the Neighborhoods element. Pertinent information should be provided broadly throughout the city. Emil King said staff looked closely at the issue in deciding the appropriate element for housing the policy. While the proposal has the policy housed in the Neighborhoods Element, the entire city is divided into neighborhoods; even the Downtown is defined as a neighborhood, thus any policy in the Neighborhoods Element applies citywide.

Commissioner Brown noted appreciation for adding NH-11, which relates to climate-related hazards from the vulnerability study. Continued climate change will trigger a number of consequences that will impact everyone. The policy is important as an overall approach.

Commissioner Khanloo referred to NH-5 and the removal of the references to homeowner's associations and asked if the policy can be interpreted differently by different people. Dr. Kate Nesse said there are a number of organizations that promote community within the neighborhoods. Bellevue has historically had neighborhood associations, but some neighborhoods rely on other types of organizations. The policy seeks to avoid being exclusive when it comes to developing community within the neighborhoods.

Commissioner Khanloo voiced support for changing "character" to "identity" in the title of the subsection.

Vice Chair Goepple applauded the enhancements to the Community Safety policies. With regard to NH-17, which relates to neighborhood area plans, Vice Chair Goepple said the policy can be read as subordinating the neighborhood area plans to the citywide policies and asked if that is the right way of looking at it. Dr. Kate Nesse commented that neighborhood area plans must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. There are specific functions delegated to the neighborhood area plans, including looking at future neighborhood centers through the neighborhood area planning process. Vice Chair Goepple remarked that if the neighborhood area policies are made too subordinate, the uniqueness and character of the neighborhoods might

cease to exist. Consistency is good, but subordination could be taken too far.

Chair Bhargava referred to NH-1 and the phrase “and accessible environments for all to enjoy” and asked what was meant by “accessible.” Dr. Kate Nesse said one way to interpret it is in regard to physical accessibility; the other is in terms of community and welcoming. The policy is not intended to be exclusive to either interpretation. Chair Bhargava suggested the language could be clearer.

Chair Bhargava asked if the intent of NH-2 is to have all of the specifically listed items in every neighborhood. Dr. Kate Nesse said that is in fact the intent. Chair Bhargava agreed with the focus on essential services but proposed moving away from some of the more specificity in favor of flexibility.

Chair Bhargava referred to NH-3 and voiced the understanding that disaster and hazard mitigation go beyond just climate change and the related issues. As drafted, the two bulleted items are specific to climate change.

Turning to NH-4, Chair Bhargava said it took reading the explanation in the righthand column to determine what was meant by “equitable access to healthy food.” Adding an explanatory sentence would add clarity. Dr. Kate Nesse said the policy was included in an attempt to make sure that all of the Countywide Planning Policies are addressed. Easily accessible food options rose to the top of the list of comments made by the public when talking about things they want to have in their neighborhoods. Chair Bhargava suggested that “easily accessible food options” and “accessibility to healthy food” are not the same thing, and urged caution to avoid making a value statement as to what constitutes healthy food.

Commissioner Khanloo asked if NH-2 could be read to mean that grocery stores and pharmacies should be constructed in the neighborhoods. Dr. Kate Nesse said determining locations for those uses would be handled through the neighborhood area planning process. The community certainly needs to be involved in those conversations. Commissioner Khanloo added that what constitutes accessibility is also subjective; while being within a walkable mile of a service can be considered accessible for someone in their 20s, by the time they are in their 80s that may not be the case.

Vice Chair Goepple agreed with the need to include NH-4, but echoed Chair Bhargava’s comment in regard to the need to have it more clearly worded.

Commissioner Cálad referred to NH-14 and suggested it might be the right place to make reference to accessibility for people with disabilities.

Emil King summarized the Commission’s call to take another look at the language of NH-1, NH-2, NH-3, NH-4, NH-14, and NH-17.

Turning to the Climate and Environment policies, Dr. Kate Nesse noted that there had been strong support by the public in regard to the tree canopy, reducing greenhouse gases, and responding to climate change. The public identified as missing from the section more specifics and targets, transportation-related policies, and requirements for Puget Sound Energy.

Dr. Kate Nesse noted that the policies in the Environmental Stewardship section were updated to address climate change and environmental disparities. The Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction policies were expanded. Urban Forestry was added as a new section with policies that support

tree canopy and forest health. Climate Resiliency is also a new section. The existing policies in support of climate resiliency were pulled into the new section, and some additional language was added to support the response to climate change. The Waste and Materials Management section policies were updated to support the responsible disposal of waste. The Water Resources policies received some minor updates. The policies in the Geo Hazards section were primarily updated to be consistent with the Growth Management Act. The Sustainable Development section policies are in support of and encourage green building practices. The Air Quality section policies are largely unchanged except for giving consideration to climate change. The policies in the Fish and Wildlife Habitat section address support for wildlife and their habitats in parks and throughout the city. The Critical Areas policies were updated to align with the Growth Management Act and to recognize the ecosystem services of critical areas. The policies in the Noise section include additional consideration of air quality and working with partners.

****BREAK****

(8:43 p.m. to 8:48 p.m.)

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

Commissioner Brown acknowledged all the work that has gone into the environmental policies and voiced appreciation for the emphasis on climate change, greenhouse gases emissions, maintaining the tree canopy and the character of the neighborhoods. It is amazing how much the conversation has shifted over the last decade. Bellevue has embraced rather than resisted the changing conversation.

Commissioner Khanloo noted that many of the policies use soft words such as “consider,” “encourage” and “promote.” There was a time when 2020 was the year held up as the time to meet all the environmental goals, but now policies like CL-121 call for 50 percent by 2030, 75 percent by 2040, 95 percent by 2050. The city is going to need to be more aggressive if it really wants to have a city for the next generation to inhabit. CL-9 should not call for considering, it should call for implementing. CL-19 should not call for considering climate impacts, it should call for analyzing and acting based on the cost benefits. It is too late for considering, encouraging and supporting. CL-15 is a good policy regarding the tree canopy. CL-18 is also a good policy as it regards protecting trees during development.

Commissioner Cálad referred to CL-15 and voiced support for the tree canopy target but pointed out that there is no strong language about protecting the canopy. CL-22 addresses the tree canopy in the neighborhoods but says nothing about how. The policies are on the right track, but they are not all the way there yet.

Commissioner Ferris asked for an example of the partnerships mentioned in CL-8. Sustainability Program Manager Justus Stewart said there are privately owned areas such as wetlands for which there may or may not be opportunity for the city to acquire and bring them into the park system. For as long as they are privately owned and managed, the city does have resources, including expertise in terms of management, that can be shared. Commissioner Ferris suggested making the policy language somewhat stronger along the lines of actively seeking out privately held parcels of land that could benefit from having such a partnership.

With regard to CL-11 and the notion of accelerating the transition to all-electric buildings, Commissioner Ferris stressed the need to keep the policy language broad enough to include things like natural air conditioning. The change in CL-15 from “work towards” to “achieve” is

great and the same should be done everywhere possible. CL-15 calls for minimizing the loss of tree canopy from development and mitigating tree removal, but there should also be something said in policy about maintaining the existing tree canopy, such as through trimming to avoid trees coming down in wind storms, and having the right ecosystem to support the trees. With regard to CL-24, Commissioner Ferris asked if city vendors could be encouraged to employ fleets that use renewable fuels.

Vice Chair Goepple asked about EN-1, proposed to be eliminated, which called for balancing the immediate and long-range impacts of policy and regulatory decisions in the context of the city's commitment to provide for public safety infrastructure, economic development and other obligations, stating that the language spells out reality and something that should be acknowledged by retaining the policy. Dr. Kate Nesse said the policy was removed owing to the language being overly broad, calling for balance without specifying how to go about that. The policy could be taken into consideration with an eye on seeking to add language indicating how the balance should be achieved. Vice Chair Goepple allowed that the city should do all it can in terms of environmental preservation, but the fact is the city is not a nature preserve.

Vice Chair Goepple highlighted CL-12 and voiced support for having specific targets for greenhouse gases emission reductions, but asked if the focus is on a per-capita basis or for the city as a whole. Dr. Kate Nesse said the focus is citywide. The Environmental Stewardship Initiative dashboard tracks progress toward meeting the targets in the Comprehensive Plan around sustainability.

In response to a question from Vice Chair Goepple about how to address individual choice in these policies, Justus Stewart acknowledged that the city has no direct control over the choices made by individuals, but pointed out that the state has passed legislation that sets an end date after which internal combustion engines will no longer be available for sale, as an example of how individual choice is always being made within a context of what is available and what is allowed. There are some things over which the city does have control, such as certain building regulations.

Chair Bhargava concurred with the statement made by Vice Chair Goepple regarding EN-1. There is no need to have a specific "how" for every policy. The policy language calling for balance could possibly be tied to targets to be achieved. Vice Chair Goepple also agreed with the comments made about Bellevue taking an aggressive stand and being a leader with regard to sustainability.

With regard to CL-6, Vice Chair Goepple did not favor the tone of the language. Policies like CL-10 take a better tone in calling for incorporating environmental education.

Chair Bhargava suggested CL-11 needs to set forth a higher standard. CL-14 is good as drafted. The language of CL-24 is too soft in looking at ways to mitigate peak load and improve flexibility instead of taking a much more aggressive stance.

Commissioner Khanloo suggested the language of policies CL-21, CL-22, CL-24 and CL-25 is too soft. For CL-51, the question asked was why the slope between 15 and 40 percent was removed. Dr. Kate Nesse said the policy is drafted in line with the Growth Management Act and how it defines geologically hazardous areas. A definition could also be added to the glossary.

Commissioner Cálad commented on being conflicted about CL-24. During the winter months residents were asked to turn the heat off so the grid would not explode. If CL-24 were to be

applied, it would do nothing. Stronger language is needed.

Going to CL-43, Commissioner Cálad highlighted the fact that there are no consequences for the people who simply remove trees. Policies CL-49, CL-50 and CL-42 use words such as “prohibit,” “require” and “regulate.” CL-43 needs stronger language.

Commissioner Ferris focused on CL-48 and the wording around promoting soil stability through the use of natural drainage systems and retaining critical areas of native vegetation and asked if something could be added about enhancing native vegetation. CL-56 deals with coal mine hazard areas and Commissioner Cálad voiced the assumption that the reference is to existing coal mines. The question asked was if the policy could be widened to include development adjacent to coal mine areas. Similar language should be used in reference to any landfills that exist in the city.

Vice Chair Goepple voiced support for the language of CL-24 which addresses grid reliability. A number of circumstances brought the city close to losing power during the winter months. The same thing happens when there is a heat dome. The challenge, of course, is that power grid resources are not under the control of the city. The city should be advocating for strengthening the grid.

With regard to CL-26, Vice Chair Goepple noted being all for achieving zero waste but questioned whether that goal will ever actually be attained, making the zero goal language unrealistic. Justus Stewart explained that zero waste is a defined term, similar to “net zero” when talking about greenhouse gas emissions. In both cases the term refers to close to 100 percent but not actually 100 percent until 100 percent actually becomes feasible.

Vice Chair Goepple asked what a “circular economy program” is as mentioned in CL-27, and what is meant by support. Justus Stewart said the term refers to products going through a process of being recycled or disassembled before reentering the supply chain, often as some other kind of product. In practice, this most often happens within the control of a single company or organization.

Vice Chair Goepple asked if are targets for landfill diversion that could be more specifically listed in CL-30.

Vice Chair Goepple liked the wording of CL-33 but noted wanting to see more aggressive plans to create natural open water systems, such as bioswales, and more inventive ways to manage surface water runoff. With regard to CL-42, it was stated that the phrase “substantially impacted” is not completely clear. Justus Stewart said the term is defined and has a threshold associated with it, but agreed the language of the policy could be clearer.

Commissioner Cálad referred to the word “encourage” as used in CL-61 and pointed out that in other policies the language used calls for identifying opportunities or other things in order to do something or other. The same should be done in CL-61. With regard to CL-64 and the notion of supporting the use of emerging best practices, it would be better to simply call for implementing best practices.

Commissioner Cálad suggested the language of CL-65 and the following policies needs to be worked on. Dr. Kate Nesse explained that there are limits as to what the city can do for private properties. The city can require certain things when it comes to new development, but the city cannot require existing buildings to be retrofitted. The words “support” and “encourage” are used to move the city forward to the extent possible where it cannot require or mandate.

Turning to CL-78 and suggested the phrase “recognize and support” is beautiful but weak. Dr. Kate Nesse said it has been observed that when people are in contact with nature they appreciate it more. At the same time, it has also been seen that where a lot of people using a facility such as a trail can actually degrade it. The intent is to give people access in order to support people using natural areas while making sure those natural areas are protected. Commissioner Cálad suggested the language should be reviewed.

Commissioner Cálad called attention to CL-83 and asked what is meant by “give special consideration.” Justus Stewart said in the context where the city as decisions to make about prioritizing city resources, the areas where salmon populations exist (or existed recently) should be given special consideration for conservation and restoration in order to protect the species.

Commissioner Ferris asked why “does not encourage cut-through” from CL-72. Dr. Kate Nesse said there are things beyond just cut-through traffic that need to be balanced. Neighbors are often aware of cut-through traffic in their neighborhoods, but there are other community needs that must be taken into consideration in attempting to spread traffic off of the main arterials. Commissioner Ferris suggested the language could be tweaked to make it clear the policy does not support cut-through traffic.

Commissioner Ferris voiced support for the policy language around daylighting creeks.

Commissioner Khanloo asked staff to switch the language of CL-65 relative to new development. Commissioner Khanloo also asked about including policy language in support of placing electric car chargers in buildings, especially in new buildings. Dr. Kate Nesse said there are electric vehicle policies in the Transportation Element.

Commissioner Khanloo indicated support for CL-73. With regard to CL-88, Commissioner Khanloo said the policy language should be supported with implementation language.

Vice Chair Goeppelle stressed the important of maintaining public access to wild spaces as one way to help build a sustainable constituency. Obviously access must be balanced against the impacts, but the notion of access should be built up more in policy language.

Chair Bhargava noted that CL-60 calls for implementing low-impact development techniques and green building practices and asked where beyond the policy will additional detail be seen. For a city like Bellevue, there needs to be a call for Bellevue to be a leader locally and nationally in green building practices. Justus Stewart allowed that there are policies in the mix that speak to some of the specifics of what the city would like to see in terms of green building, though not necessarily by using the phrase “green building” (for example, policies calling for all-electric buildings). The specifics of green buildings practices are defined in the Land Use Code, the building code and other development regulations.

Commissioner Brown echoed the comments made about being bold. The Comprehensive Plan contains policies that focus on the decades ahead and it will shape the city, the communities and the lives of everyone who lives in the city. It is a good thing for the city to be thoughtful and forthright in its policies, especially with regard to climate change and the environment.

Commissioner Khanloo agreed that the city needs to pioneer the way by being aggressive. There is support from the public and from the Council. Absent solid and bold policies, things will not move in the right direction.

Commissioner Cálad said the feedback received is evidence that the Commission is being heard.

Commissioner Ferris thanked the staff for work that has obviously taken many months to complete.

Emil King summarized the policies staff had been directed to review as being CL-60, CL-61, CL-64, CL-65, CL-66, CL-72, CL-77, CL-78, CL-83, CL-30, CL-33, CL-42, CL-43, CL-48, CL-51, CL-56, EN-1, CL-5, CL-6, CL-8, CL-9, CL-11, CL-13, CL-17, CL-18, CL-21, CL-22, CL-24, and CL-25.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None
(9:45 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
(9:45 p.m.)

A. February 14, 2024

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brown.

Vice Chair Goepple pointed out that the minutes reflect the meeting was adjourned at 11:27 p.m. when in fact it was adjourned at 9:27 p.m.

The motion, including the proposed correction, carried unanimously.

11. ADJOURNMENT
(9:46 p.m.)

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

Chair Bhargava adjourned the meeting at 9:46 p.m.