



Bellevue Planning Commission

November 29, 2023

PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Summary of Wilburton Vision Implementation, Phase 2 Engagement and discussion of community input to inform the Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA)

STAFF CONTACTS

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POLICY ISSUES

The Wilburton Vision Implementation planning initiative will amend the existing Wilburton/N.E. 8th Street Subarea Plan and BelRed Subarea Plan, the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map, and the Land Use Code. These amendments will consider how Wilburton's future is a key component in implementing the citywide growth strategy for housing and jobs for the next 20 years.

In this study session, staff will provide an update on Phase 2 engagement which occurred between January and September 2023. This phase included: 1) informing the public of opportunities to participate in the formal Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Environmental Review processes; and 2) gathering input to help craft and refine policies and land use map that guide successful implementation of the Wilburton Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) area vision. A community engagement report was published in October (Attachment A) that summarizes engagement activities and findings, which staff will reference during the study session.

The purpose for this study session is to share and discuss community engagement input on "key policy moves" that will be considered by the Planning Commission when developing a recommendation to the City Council for the Comprehensive Plan amendment (CPA), Land Use Code amendment (LUCA), and legislative rezone in 2024.

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION

DIRECTION

INFORMATION ONLY

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Planning Commission Direction

The Planning Commission has been guiding the development of Comprehensive Plan amendments for the Wilburton TOD area since early 2023. Staff asked for direction on the draft vision statement, policy goals, and policy guidance areas (March 22), and subsequently asked for direction on key policy moves and draft policies. Draft policies were organized into three focus areas: Open Space & Natural Systems (May 24), Cultural & Community Connections (July 12), and Future Land Use (July 26). Staff received feedback from the Planning Commission that affirmed the general direction of draft policies which will inform land use regulations and implementation tools to achieve the Wilburton TOD area vision.

Planning Commission guidance from each of the three study sessions included the following:

1. May 24: Open Space & Natural Systems
 - Ensuring the right incentives achieve the vision as staff looks ahead to implementation
 - Considering wildlife corridors as part of the connectivity network
 - Integrating wayfinding that is both sensitive to and celebratory of Bellevue’s cultural diversity
 - Promoting access to Eastrail and Lake Bellevue as community assets

2. July 12: Community & Cultural Connections
 - Fostering activity and vibrancy all throughout the year, including wetter and darker months
 - Treatment of edge conditions
 - Fostering cultural events and venue spaces
 - Emphasizing public safety (“eyes on the street”)
 - Emphasizing flexibility and reduction of barriers for business owners
 - Emphasizing safe access to Eastrail and Grand Connection for all ages and abilities

3. July 26: Future Land Use
 - Incorporating walkability in future land use pattern
 - Considering greatest densities in nodes around transit centers
 - Right-sizing parking to ensure access for those who are dependent on cars to get around
 - Considering stronger action language around green affordable housing opportunities
 - Exploring opportunities associated with different landowners, including Bellevue School District

Relationship to Environmental Review

The Planning Commission identified a Preferred Alternative for the Wilburton TOD area to be studied in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on June 28. The Planning Commission’s recommendation for the Wilburton TOD area was affirmed by the City Council on July 24. The analysis of the Preferred Alternative in the FEIS will expand on and refine the work to date to inform policies, land use designations, and affordable housing tools for the Wilburton TOD area. The FEIS is anticipated to be published in Q1 2024, and the analyses will provide additional inputs that will be considered by the Planning Commission when developing recommendations for the CPA, LUCA, and legislative rezoning in 2024.

POLICY UPDATE PROGRESS

The draft policies that the Planning Commission previously reviewed have been the basis for engaging the community in August and September around how they see key policy moves shaping future changes in the Wilburton TOD area. Staff are processing community feedback to better understand where refinements are needed so draft policies better articulate intended policy outcomes, as well as address community priorities and concerns. The Planning Commission’s discussion of community engagement findings during this study session will help guide and affirm where these refinements may be needed. Community input will also need to be reviewed and evaluated within the context of several other inputs expected to be delivered over the next few months, including:

- FEIS additional analyses on tree canopy, transportation, and affordable housing
- Urban design modeling and analyses of proposed design guidelines and standards
- Sustainable District Opportunities Assessment analysis
- Economic analyses on mandatory or incentive-based approaches to achieve public benefits, such as affordable housing open space, pedestrian connections, and green buildings

To reflect these additional inputs in staff's updated preliminary recommendation of draft policies, the full draft of proposed policy amendments is anticipated to be shared and discussed in Q1 2024 alongside relevant draft land use code amendments.

Community Engagement

During the Phase 2 engagement period, staff heard from over 350 people across different engagement activities, including people who attended multiple engagement activities throughout the year. Different areas of engagement included:

- 1) **Community Events.** The intent of these events has been to facilitate broad participation and input gathering across the community, including residents, employees, and property owners in the Wilburton TOD area and surrounding neighborhoods, visitors, and community organizations. These include in-person events such as the Wilburton Vision Implementation Open House in August, and virtual events such as online information sessions.
- 2) **Board Updates.** The intent of these updates has been to engage specific community subject matter experts on issues and priorities of the communities they are part of, including Youth Link, Bellevue Network on Aging (BNOA), and Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network (BDAN). Ongoing coordination with board members and staff led to follow-up events that expanded engagement opportunities beyond these meetings, including participation at the Youth Involvement Conference in April and Eastside Welcoming Week Resource Fair in September.
- 3) **Community Conversations, Presentations & Tabling.** The intent of these activities has been to facilitate more targeted conversations with specific groups, including those staff had not heard from as frequently during earlier phases of engagement. These groups include youth, seniors, employees, and communities of color.

Staff recognized the importance of having a variety of opportunities for the community to participate. Broader outreach activities, such as the in-person Open House and Engaging Bellevue online questionnaire, helped capture broad community sentiment around future changes in the Wilburton TOD area; yet there are other voices that are missing when considering the input received. This has highlighted the continued importance of more targeted outreach to help expand opportunities for community members that would like to learn more about and participate in the planning process.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: ANALYSIS

Engagement throughout the year culminated in an opportunity for the community to share their opinion on major policy moves (Attachment B) that will shape future changes in the area through an in-person Open House and online questionnaire. The policy moves shared during these activities build upon earlier work completed by a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) in 2018 which defined the vision, planned investments in Grand Connection and Eastrail, engagement from earlier project phases, and comments submitted through environment review – which included Wilburton-specific themes such as increasing density and flexibility, supporting access through active transportation connections rather than through a street grid, and recalibrating current incentive systems to achieve more affordable housing.

87 people attended the in-person Open House (45 of whom submitted written feedback to staff) and 169 people responded to the online questionnaire. Community were asked their opinion on what kinds of changes they expected to see occur in the Wilburton TOD area if policy moves were implemented. Based on community input from these engagement opportunities, respondents generally viewed these policies as bringing positive changes to the Wilburton TOD area. Changes that respondents expected to

see were generally well-aligned with the intended outcomes of these policies – such as more small business & gathering spaces, better parks connections, new park amenities, greater housing diversity and affordability, greater walking and cycling, and more pedestrian amenities.

Staff recognizes diverging opinions as an expected outcome of broad community engagement. People with different relationships to the Wilburton TOD area (as residents, employees, visitors, etc.) expressed a range of perspectives on how changes will affect them and their community. The Wilburton TOD area is also bordered by different contexts, with higher-density mixed use centers to the west and north (i.e. Downtown and BelRed), and lower-density residential areas and city parks to the east and southeast. As the Wilburton TOD area transitions into a dense, mixed-use, and walkable community, there are different perspectives on how the Wilburton TOD area can achieve compatibility with its diverse surroundings and maximize benefits for the community.

Some notable areas of divergence are described below, with staff discussion on how key priorities and concerns could be addressed through policy refinements. However, not every priority or issue will be appropriately addressed through policy. Effective policy balances clear direction with enough flexibility to respond to changing conditions or unforeseen events. Policies can be refined to better direct how the city intends to work with public and private development to secure public benefits and mitigate adverse environmental impacts.

- 1) Tree canopy: While respondents expect more trees to be planted and the prioritization of tree canopy in future development and open spaces, other respondents expect that future development will result in loss of tree canopy and wildlife.
 - *Staff could update policy language to articulate tree canopy and wildlife connectivity as important elements to incorporate through the development process.*
- 2) Success of small businesses: While respondents expect to see a greater variety of local businesses, such as food and beverage, in mixed-use development, other respondents expect small businesses not being able to afford these spaces and a loss of “mom & pop” shops.
 - *Staff could update policy language to ensure a wide variety of implementation strategies, including land use code updates and city programs, are considered toward small-retail affordability and retention.*
- 3) Public art: While respondents expect to see community-driven public art integrated into future development, other respondents expect public art to be unattractive or catered/representative only to specific communities.
 - *Staff could update policy language to ensure an inclusive approach is taken toward arts and cultural development.*
- 4) Future densities/building heights: While respondents expect to see greater opportunity for density, livability, and affordable housing around transit and Lake Bellevue, other respondents expect to see decreased livability and impacts to single-family residential areas because of traffic congestion and negative aesthetic impacts.
 - *Staff could update policy language to ensure that land use, transportation, and urban design strategies identified through policy provide appropriate mitigation to address the transition in scale and use between the Wilburton TOD area and adjacent areas.*
- 5) Housing affordability: While respondents expect to see housing affordable for different income levels particularly those who work in the area, other respondents expect that future affordable

housing will be unaffordable to people who work in sectors such as education, service industries, etc. and/or incompatible with single-family residential areas.

- *Through EIS analyses and economic analyses on incentive- and mandatory-based programs, staff can update policy language to support regulatory parameters that best result in affordable housing production in the Wilburton TOD area.*

DISCUSSION

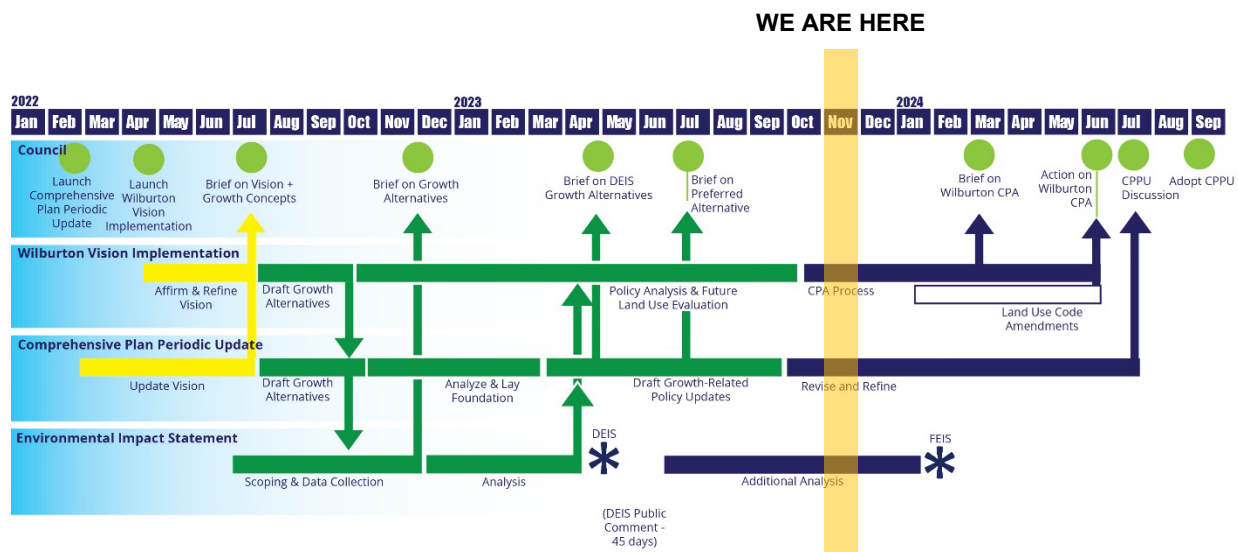
At the November 29 study session, staff requests that the Planning Commission consider the draft policies and policy moves they provided direction on in the late spring and summer, reflect on community engagement findings described in the Phase 2 Community Engagement Report – particularly around these areas of divergence -- and discuss:

- Are there any key findings or themes from recent engagement that surprise you?
- What do you think are causing these areas of divergence?
- How could policies be more successful in addressing community priorities or unintended consequences that have been identified during outreach?

SCHEDULE & NEXT STEPS

Staff plan to return to the Planning Commission starting in Q1 2024 with the following topics:

- **January 2024** – Introduction to Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA) framework and approach (anticipated)
- **February-April 2024** – Study sessions for proposed Wilburton CPA & LUCA (anticipated)



OPTIONS

This briefing is provided for Commission discussion on community engagement – no action is required.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Wilburton Vision Implementation Community Engagement Report, Phase 2: January 2023 – September 2023

Attachment B: Wilburton Vision Implementation Open House Boards