

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES

November 6, 2024
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Goepple, Commissioners Bhargava, Ferris, Khanloo, Lu, Villaveces

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Commissioner Cálad

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

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

COUNCIL LIAISON: Deputy Mayor Malakoutian

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

(6:30 p.m.)

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Goepple who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

(6:30 p.m.)

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

(6:31 p.m.)

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

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None

(6:32 p.m.)

Chair Goepple took a moment to congratulate Thara Johnson on being appointed as the

Planning Director.

Deputy Mayor Malakoutian reported that at the most recent Council meeting the 2026-2030 Sustainable Bellevue Environmental Plan was introduced. Anyone interested can follow along as updates come out. The Council also received an update from the budget team regarding the feedback from the public and the Council. The Council is working to determine allocations for the contingency budget which is estimated to be roughly \$1.7 million, which is similar to last year.

5. STAFF REPORTS

(6:34 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Senior Planner 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

(6:35 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

(6:35 p.m.)

Dr. Kate Nesse informed the Commissioners that the written communications received were primarily concerning the Wilburton LUCA.

B. Oral Communications

(6:36 p.m.)

Brady Nordstrom, Associate Director of Government Relations and Policy at the Housing Development Consortium commented that in a letter submitted earlier in the week, the importance of the Wilburton affordable housing requirement was emphasized. Option A, as proposed by staff, aligns with goals of the Coalition for Bellevue's affordable housing.

Seghar Amini, Policy Manager at Habitat for Humanity Saghar Amini, said the affordable housing requirement is well calibrated and will help to create predictable affordable housing at scale in Wilburton. Option A, combined with cost-saving measures, supports affordable housing

development.

Brady Nordstrom said the calibrations in Option A can work, provided there are other pieces added to the puzzle. The whole code works together. City staff have been in conversation about additional code-based cost-saving measures. It is believed that the code can go further by making all development more feasible within the requirement structure, making affordable housing more feasible. The Multi Family Tax Exemption (MFTE) allows properties to stabilize. stacking affordability with the MFTE can reduce costs. The fee-in-lieu adds flexibility, helping the city to address lower income housing needs. Balancing commercial and residential provisions is also key. The importance of phasing in the implementation of the program was stressed.

Steve Kramer with KG Investment Properties, owners of properties along the Eastrail, including a key parcel at the Grand Connection to the trail, noted having had a collaborative process with the city, and while progress has been made, there are still critical areas the Commission should consider, notably cost-reducing measures to improve feasibility given current economic conditions. Reducing costs yields the best chance to achieve the desire outcomes of more housing, a vibrant ground plane, quality community space, and robust employment opportunities. Highlighted for the Commission to consider were reducing pedestrian corridors from 14 feet wide to 10 feet wide. The proposed 30-foot fire lanes should be reduced to 20 feet, which is sufficient to meet fire department requirements. With regard to active use frontage, the amount being proposed is too high and should be reduced to a maximum of 50 percent on the major streets like the Eastrail and the Grand Connection. Active uses along Eastrail and the Grand Connection should be incentivized, not mandated, minimizing risk for developers.

Jody Albert, VP of Government Affairs for the Bellevue Chamber, spoke representing the PLUSH Committee and thanked the staff for their work in making the process inclusive and collaborative. Wilburton will serve as a blueprint for future subarea plans, so getting it right is essential. HDC and Habitat for Humanity have raised valuable points on cost structure. However, layering requirements together can ultimately create barriers to housing production. Some of the proposed transportation requirements are particularly stringent. Some departures from the Transportation Design Manual might make sense in Wilburton. Also, the open space and active use requirements are higher than for the Downtown, which could lead to issues like vacant retail spaces. Aligning standards with the Downtown might create a more sustainable balance for activation goals. A thorough review of all cost-related elements is warranted to ensure a framework that promotes, rather than hinders, housing production in Wilburton.

Isaac Patterson thanked staff for their diligent work on the Wilburton zoning code, noting that the detail in the draft is clear. However, there is still significant work needed to make housing feasible in Wilburton. Bellevue faces a housing affordability and supply challenge, and the current code draft limits available housing areas. The focus should be on two areas to reduce costs. First, the proposed transportation corridors are too wide. The widths stem from non-transportation factors like light and air concerns. The pedestrian corridor in Wilburton is proposed at 14 feet, while in the Downtown it is only six feet. Reducing it to 10 feet would free up space for housing without compromising pedestrian needs. Similarly, the proposed fire lane

width is set at 30 feet, though 20 feet is adequate for emergency access. Second, the proposed ten percent open space requirement is greater than in the Downtown, which reduces the area available for housing. The requirement should either be eliminated or the code should allow for “double counting” of open space within transportation corridors to help maximize housing space. A transportation departure process should be included in the Wilburton Code. In BelRed, the lack of such a process has limited housing development, a mistake that should not be repeated in Wilburton.

Kevin Wallace concurred with the previous speaker’s comments and made reference to a letter previously sent to the Commission and noted having worked on projects in Downtown and on affordable housing projects in Seattle under the multifamily tax exemption program. The goal is to help Bellevue achieve its housing and job targets, especially in Wilburton, but that requires a viable code. The Commission should ask is why the proposed code is more expensive, burdensome, and less dense than those for Downtown or BelRed. Each time a sidewalk, planter, or street is widened unnecessarily, the footprint of a building is reduced and with it there is a reduction in potential housing. A six-foot sidewalk would suffice, but the code mandates 10 feet, applicable to all sites, large or small. There is still a long way to go to make the code workable.

Bill Finkbiner spoke on behalf of the Wilburton Property Owners Group and voiced appreciation for the collaborative process with staff. There are major issues still to be addressed, but by working together a foundation of trust has been built. Wilburton is critical for helping Bellevue meet its housing goals. However, achieving the goals will require a code that makes economic sense. Right now, with high interest rates and construction costs, the city’s economic analysis shows a 50 percent rent increase would be needed to make redevelopment feasible under the current code. That is a tough number for Wilburton property owners to accept. To make Wilburton an asset for Bellevue’s housing goals, it will be necessary to ensure the code aligns with market realities. The city recently stated meeting the housing goals will require adding 1500 units per year. Currently, that target is not being matched by the building permits issued, and each year city falls behind only increases the future shortfall. The issues that have been highlighted, including those in the letter handed to the Commissioners, need to be carefully considered in order to provide more housing. Steps have been taken to productively engage with the affordable housing advocates. It is understood that Wilburton will be asked to provide a level of affordable housing higher than has been done before. In order to do that, there will need to be a good code in place.

Anthony Hevia, a resident of downtown Bellevue, said it has been amazing to see the work done on the Wilburton plan. More housing is needed. Some of the proposed open space requirements will reduce the potential for housing. Ten-foot sidewalks and 20-foot fire lanes seems more than adequate. Not discussed to date along with street types is the issue of on-street parking, something that is not necessary in Wilburton given the proximity to the light rail and nearby park and ride facilities. More pedestrian corridors would be a great addition.

Neil Mulnick spoke representing the Port of Bellevue site and the Wilburton Property Owners Group. It is noteworthy that a wide variety of speakers, from residents to landowners and

affordable housing groups, are aligned in wanting to achieve Wilburton's goals for housing. Everyone is excited to see that happen. The city has set a clear priority on housing, and help is needed in prioritizing housing over other elements. Standards are good, but there needs to be a focus on what will help achieve the housing goals. City staff have been very deeply engaged since May, and great progress has been made, but there is still work to be done to push things to the next level. The economic analysis shows that for even basic construction, rents would need to rise by 50 percent to make projects feasible under the current code, and even more for high-rises. There is no desire to push rents higher; the goal is to deliver housing in a challenging market. To do that requires a code that allows Wilburton to take advantage of the infrastructure in place and foster dense, transit-oriented housing from day one.

Nicole Meyers voiced appreciation for the work of staff on the Wilburton plan, which is clear and lays out a beautiful vision. Elevated pedestrian connections that cross over pedestrian corridors might be a bit too wide at 30 to 75 feet; the result could be a tunnel effect. It would be better to allow the width of the pedestrian connections to be double or triple the corridor width, depending on the vertical clearance. Second, consideration should be given to allowing flexible outdoor dining spaces. A seating area that is open to the public in the mornings could become restaurant seating during meal hours, making the area feel more dynamic. Third, the 25 percent active use requirement on pedestrian corridors is great, but it could discourage the creation of more corridors. Pedestrian experiences are essential to reducing traffic, and a balance should be sought that will not sacrifice too much open space.

John Darvish spoke as the owner of a property in Wilburton and echo the comments made by Bill Finkbiner and Kevin Wallace. The staff were thanked for their work. In general, support was voiced for the densities and heights proposed, but there remains a need to balance the grand vision for the neighborhood with the economic realities. Developers have options on where to build, so there is a need to ensure that the Wilburton area will be attractive to them. The proposed transportation requirements will add significant costs and uncertainty, which can deter projects. Small sites are especially impacted by excessive requirements. There have been conversations with the staff in consideration of ways to make the development of smaller sites feasible, including being more flexible with amenities. There is a need to incentivize Wilburton development to capitalize on the infrastructure investments that have been made.

Valentina Vaneeva, a Bellevue resident, noted being thrilled to see Wilburton on track to become a vibrant part of the city. Support was voiced for the focus of the code on accessibility and prioritizing people over cars through wider sidewalks, connections to the Eastrail, and fewer oversized car lanes. It is hoped that Wilburton will develop into the pedestrian-friendly, urban area that residents have been hoping for. There are areas where improvements could be made. For example, parking lanes are still required on local streets and are also possible for flexible access corridors. That requirement should be removed entirely. Street parking should be limited to what is absolutely necessary for emergency vehicles and occasional small deliveries. On-street parking just is not a productive use of space. The minimum parking requirements should be eliminated. Since surface parking is largely prohibited in the proposal, which is a great improvement, developers will be pushed toward underground parking. Developers should have

discretion over how much parking they provide, given the cost implications. The concerns over insufficient parking are unwarranted, especially given Bellevue's location. Wilburton is already well connected through Eastrail and Spring Boulevard, and additional links to nearby areas and transit options are coming. The Grand Connection will also link Wilburton directly to the Downtown and the transit center, and light rail will offer connections to Seattle, Redmond, and other Bellevue neighborhoods. The aim should be to reduce driving to Wilburton rather than encourage it. Bellevue has a sustainability goal to reduce solo driving trips to below 45 percent, and with the Environmental Stewardship Plan under revision, there is an excellent opportunity to align policy with the goal.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None

(7:15 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION

(7:15 p.m.)

A. Wilburton Vision Implementation Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA): Site Organization

Assistant Director Nick Whipple briefly reviewed the major policy moves in the areas of cultural and community connections, future land use, and open space and natural systems. It was noted the code amendment had been divided it into three key categories, beginning with site organization, including block sizes, street typologies, activation, open space, and green factors. The focus at the December 11 meeting will be on topics like building heights, floor area ratios, and parking. Then in January, attention will be given to discussing the affordable housing approach and amenity incentive program.

The goal of LUCA is to implement the Wilburton vision. Key ordinances include the Wilburton/NE 8th Street Subarea Plan, adopted during the summer by the Council, and the updated Comprehensive Plan, which includes Wilburton's role in Bellevue's growth strategy. Between 2019 and 2044, Wilburton is expected to support 4,900 jobs and 4,000 housing units, with capacity for 12 million square feet of commercial development and an additional 14,800 housing units, accommodating 35,000 jobs.

The Comprehensive Plan policies provide flexible guidance for decision-making, while the LUCA code provides specific details. The code relies on the general section of the land use code, supplemented with Wilburton-specific requirements. The proposal is to house the highest density and intensity within the urban core around the Grand Connection. In that area there will be unlimited floor area ratio for residential development and 450-foot tall towers. The density will trail off out from the urban core. A new LUC section, Part 20.25R, will address the street typologies, the walkable blocks, and some specific design standards applicable only in Wilburton.

Senior Planner Josh Steiner said mixed-use zones aim to create districts that are attractive, engaging, safe, and accessible, with a strong sense of identity. Design elements, landscaping, and public art will help make the districts walkable and inviting spaces. With regard to block size requirements, the goal is to encourage walkable, compact mixed-use development that prioritizes vibrant and comfortable pedestrian spaces while accommodating access needs. Within the LUCA, blocks are generally bordered on all sides by public rights-of-way or access corridors, including pedestrian, flex access and active transportation corridors. The requirements for bordering a block on each side apply only to sites larger than 100,000 square feet, with a maximum perimeter of 1,200 feet and a maximum north-south dimension of 350 feet. The most recently LUCA version further clarifies the block requirements, including measurement specifics for Eastrail and the Grand Connection, and excluding the area between I-405 and 116th Avenue NE from block requirements except those specific to vehicular access based on stakeholder feedback.

The street typologies surround each block and include local streets, flex access corridors, active transportation corridors, and pedestrian corridors like Eastrail and the Grand Connection. Each of the typologies contributes to framing the blocks.

The cross-section of local streets shows a required corridor width of 67 feet, which includes a 20-foot travel lane segment, eight-foot parking lanes on each side, a five-foot amenity zone on each side, and 10-foot sidewalks on each side. The transportation department has requested flexibility on some elements, but the core concept is to foster an inviting, walkable environment in a transit-oriented district. Included is detailed guidance on various access corridors, like pedestrian and flex corridors, and active transportation corridors, which also frame the blocks. The changes and dimensions are specified within the LUCA, though some minor labeling discrepancies are still being discussed with Community Development.

Flexible access corridors are designed to provide essential access for active transportation as well as vehicular access for parking, drop-offs, maintenance, and emergency vehicles, which will be specified during the development review process. One major difference between flexible access corridors and local roadways is that flexible access corridors are technically private roadways and are not dedicated public roads. This diagram does not show any parking for flexible access corridors, which have an overall width of 51 feet. If a developer wants to add parking on these corridors, they would need to add an additional eight feet per parking lane on each side, increasing the width from 51 to 67 feet.

There are two types of active transportation access, referred to in the LUCA as Type 1 and Type 2. Type 1 has a 14-foot required width for pedestrian and bicycle paths, within a 30-foot overall corridor width. Type 2 has an added six feet for emergency vehicle access, effectively making it a hybrid corridor for both active transportation and emergency use. Both conditions aim to restrict general vehicular access, using bollards, either permanent or removable, to prevent cars from entering, while allowing fire access where needed. The corridors include pedestrian-

friendly design elements to enhance the user experience, such as adequate space for walking and potential plantings, making them more than just walkways but comfortable, vibrant spaces.

Ground level activation, another component found in the LUCA, promotes building designs that engage pedestrians, offer protection from the elements, and enhance safety and the urban experience. The LUCA encourages active use spaces at the ground level, with frontage requirements of 25 percent along pedestrian corridors, 50 percent along most other streets, and 75 percent along Eastrail and the Grand Connection. The frontage requirements were adjusted based on stakeholder feedback to provide flexibility, particularly along the Eastrail and the Grand Connection.

Regarding open space, Josh Steiner said the LUCA mandates that all developments dedicate at least 10 percent of the site area as publicly accessible open space, up to a one-acre maximum. The requirement does not apply to smaller sites under 40,000 square feet. The 10 percent open space requirement can be reduced by deducting areas such as dedicated emergency vehicle access or portions of access corridors providing vehicle access. Areas eligible for open space credits include children's play areas, child care spaces, landscaped sections, plazas, non-vehicular parts of access corridors, and improvements within the Eastrail corridor. The green factor in the LUCA introduces a scoring system for developments, encouraging green features like living walls, green roofs, and native plants. Minimum scores are set, with slight reductions for smaller sites, and all relevant guidelines are detailed in the LUCA.

Nick Whipple said there has been extensive engagement with stakeholders who have emphasized a need for flexibility, especially given current economic conditions. Following the feedback, several adjustments were made, including increasing the exemption threshold for perimeter block requirements to sites over 100,000 square feet; expanding the options for block framing to include pedestrian corridors; and reducing the required corridor widths. The local street width in the May draft was reduced from 70 to 67 feet, and the flexible access and active transportation corridors were narrowed as well. Additionally, the emergency access requirements to Eastrail were adjusted, and a departure option was added for numeric standards within the LUCA, with some exceptions. The flexible access corridors were reduced from 70 feet to 51 feet, and the active transportation corridors were reduced from 40 feet to 30 feet. Public feedback indicated that Eastrail access is difficult to achieve in some locations, so the emergency access requirements were amended to two locations in the code. The Eastrail connections are based on policy that calls for securing abundant transportation access to the facility and along and adjacent to the Eastrail corridor through development review.

For open space, the requirement was reduced from 15 percent to 10 percent, and landscaping requirement within open spaces from 50 percent to 20 percent, allowing for more flexibility while aiming to balance development costs with Wilburton's long-term goals.

The departures sections of the LUC allow for departures from any numeric standard within 20.25R, the Wilburton-specific section, with the exception that a LUC departure will not be allowed for access corridor widths, or for affordable housing. The multifamily play area

requirement was also removed, though if provided the developer can gain credit for it as open space. There is a focus on the net area the ten percent will be based off of. Driving surfaces that are required can be removed from the site area, leaving less square footage on which to base the ten percent requirement. Double counting is also allowed, though with some strings. The pedestrian spaces along access corridors and the landscaping can be counted toward open space, but it should be connected to a plaza or some other meaningful open space.

The Downtown approach to the green factor has been incorporated. A lower score needs to be achieved for small sites, which are defined as part of the code as being 40,000 square feet or smaller. Driving surfaces can also be removed in determining the net area off of which to build the green factor. The score for vegetative walls was increased to reflect the increased cost of developing them.

There was feedback received that the definition of active uses was too narrow. A decade ago active uses involved pedestrian-oriented frontages in the Downtown, with retail uses exempted. When the Downtown Livability Initiative code was updated in 2017, the use was broadened. The definition was further built on in regard to East Main. By way of allowing for more flexibility, things like residential and commercial building lobbies, and private indoor residential amenity spaces. Applied to frontages, the requirements were reduced across the board in line with policy support for prioritizing Eastrail and the Grand Connection. Flexibility to distribute active uses along frontages has also been included.

The build-to line requirements have been removed in line with interest expressed in setting buildings back to allow for things like outdoor dining opportunities. Only the ground floor of a parking structure must be occupiable space; in both the Downtown and East Main two floors must be occupiable space. The uses that can happen in those spaces have also been expanded.

Nick Whipple said a public information session is planned for November 21, followed by another study session with the Commission on December 11 that will be focused on building design. An additional session is slated for January 8 that will cover inclusive transit-oriented development, affordable housing, and the amenity incentive program. The study sessions will allow for finalizing the trade-offs and preparing for a potential public hearing, tentatively set for February 12. The aim is to engage with the Council in the first half of next year.

****BREAK****

(7:53 p.m. to 7:59 p.m.)

Commissioner Villaveces touched on the feedback received during the public comment period, especially the points on the open space requirements. It seems redundant to have wide access corridors combined with significant open space requirements; the definitions could be streamlined and tested on the plan. Many sites are not wider than 350 feet in the north-south direction, for example. Narrower spaces, like Chophouse Row in Seattle, often create more engaging pedestrian environments than overly wide corridors.

Commissioner Villaveces voiced understanding the intent of the ten percent open space requirement but suggested there is a risk of diluting the street as a primary gathering place. Impose extensive open space requirements may ultimately impact site development potential. One written letter received raised an interesting point about a small site where the maximum FAR limited the development potential despite the height allowances. That suggests the need to reconsider development limits and base them more on height rather than FAR in some cases.

Commissioner Bhargava praised the staff for all their great work, noting it was clear how much effort has gone into collaborating with stakeholders and evolving the code. More is needed with regard to the intent behind the open space requirement. It is not clear if the ten percent open space is supposed to create public gathering areas, or if it is more of an amenity for residents. If the intent is to enhance public space, the function could be achieved within the street and corridor design, making the open space requirement less necessary.

Commissioner Bhargava noted being curious about the rationale for on-street parking on local streets and asked if the vision is for it to serve the residential units directly, or if the expectation is that developers will provide on-site parking for their buildings. On-street parking might conflict with the vision for a high-density, transit-oriented neighborhood.

Commissioner Bhargava also touched on the allowable uses and the 50 percent requirement for active uses on parking structures in light of the fact that the structures only need to have active uses on one story with 20 feet of occupiable space. The question asked was what can realistically occupy the spaces along pedestrian corridors, especially if they are not high-traffic areas beyond local residents. Supposedly it might mean lobbies for residential towers or amenities like indoor gyms, which allow for visible activity and some activation but which might not fully meet the goal of active frontage. There may be a need for more flexibility and to think about other options that avoid diluting the activation to simply glass walls showing indoor spaces.

With regard to the purpose and function of the open space requirements, Nick Whipple said the policy discussions have centered around open space as a hierarchy, relying on Eastrail as a central spine for Wilburton that provides a linear park environment. Open spaces in Wilburton are intended to take on various forms, like urban plazas, and their size scales with the site, so larger developments provide more gathering space. The approach also supports eco-district goals of incorporating green space for environmental benefits. The 10 percent requirement is a flexible target to balance between public and private benefits, with streets playing a significant role in activating the spaces.

Turning to the rationale behind on-street parking, Nick Whipple said while it is expected that most parking needs will be met within the building, it is also anticipated that there will be a demand for visible, convenient parking options for visitors, those accessing ground-floor retail, and those stopping briefly. Wilburton is projected to house almost 5,000 jobs and 4,000 housing units, so on-street parking on local streets can help accommodate those needs. Additionally, on-street spaces provide options for drop-off and delivery services, which are increasingly essential in dense areas. On-street parking is only required on local streets, not on all access corridors.

Commissioner Bhargava recognized the demand for short-term parking and deliveries. However, more creative solutions might be considered to minimize space consumption, such as designated delivery spots rather than entire parking lanes. Similarly, some guest parking could occur within building structures, similar to how many downtown buildings allow for short-term parking within their garages. Options to maximize utility within limited space could be considered. Nick Whipple said the point was well made, adding that there is flexibility for developers to propose alternative designs for local street standards.

Nick Whipple welcomed the feedback to wrap the first floor with parking. It is good to think ahead to what might functions might best occupy that 20-foot depth of occupiable space. For example, a space that adds value without necessarily needing to be rented commercially could help fulfill the activation goal in a practical way. That will be reviewed further.

Commissioner Ferris agreed with the need to be flexible when it comes to parking requirements. It will be necessary to be forward-thinking to avoid wasteful use of space. Commissioner Ferris also agreed with the idea of not mandating retail or commercial uses along garage frontages, as often these spaces remain empty because they are costly to lease out. Flexibility there could help address that cost burden.

Commissioner Ferris asked staff to compile the written communications received from the public and come back with responses to them. If possible, it would be helpful to schedule an additional session to go over the recommendations based on the letters.

Commissioner Lu agreed with the sentiment that adding restrictive elements to the code could lead to significant cost burdens. Flexibility is needed, especially on corridor width requirements. For instance, the 30-foot minimum for Condition A active transportation access feels excessive. Narrowing it slightly could allow storefronts to play a more active role in the pedestrian experience, potentially inviting people to window-shop as they walk or bike by.

On the topic of active frontage, Commissioner Lu asked about the 75 percent requirement along Eastrail, specifically why it is higher than the 50 percent for other areas. Nick Whipple explained that the 75 percent requirement reflects policy goals to prioritize activation along Eastrail, creating an energy hub for Wilburton. Originally, it was set at 90 percent, but it was reduced it based on public feedback, and the types of uses allowed to meet the frontage requirement were expanded.

Commissioner Lu called for reducing on-street parking as much as possible. Having it can create a psychological expectation for parking, leading people to circle for spaces, which adds to traffic congestion.

Commissioner Khanloo asked about the Eastrail access requirement. Given the significant elevation differences along Wilburton, it may be unrealistic to require every building to connect directly to Eastrail. Even if mandated, there would likely be a lengthy process involving King

County approvals. It may be more practical to focus on specific access points, like Ashwood Street, and potentially offer incentives instead of strict requirements.

Commissioner Khanloo noted being a Downtown resident who walks five miles per day in that area and only rarely sitting in an open space. Open spaces are nice to walk through but they are not necessarily gathering spaces. The open space requirement may not achieve its intended outcome and may not justify the potential impact on development. If open spaces are not used, they could become wind tunnels, spaces that get rained on constantly and are unusable for most of the year; the result would be areas that only serve their purpose for a few months out of each year. It would be preferable to consider flexibility and incentivizing the creation of spaces that are genuinely usable and inviting. One example is the South Lincoln building which has a food court on the entire second floor where people gather, play chess, and socialize. That type of space becomes a true community hub. Rather than imposing strict open space requirements, it would be better to encourage designs that create functional indoor spaces that can be more inviting, especially during bad weather. The city should avoid creating open spaces that might inadvertently become places where people feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

Nick Whipple commented on being aware of the elevation differences in Wilburton, which is one reason the code has been designed with flexibility, allowing alternate access if necessary. The city is coordinating with King County to make the Eastrail vision a reality. The code as drafted includes credits for developers under the amenity incentive program to offset the effort required for building the connections. Additionally, work is under way to update the critical areas ordinance to clarify the status of man-made slopes, which should help with the approval process.

With regard to open spaces, Nick Whipple agreed that flexibility is key. The LUCA allows up to 50 percent of open spaces to be covered, provided they are double-height spaces, and staff are open to other ideas to avoid creating unusable spaces.

Vice Chair Cálad voiced the concern that the current requirements may be too rigid and could hinder the development of Wilburton into the vibrant, high-density neighborhood envisioned. Requirements like oversized sidewalks, strict access corridor standards, and expansive open space mandates could reduce the buildable area, which ultimately limits the number of housing units and commercial spaces that can be created. The approach might be counterproductive, especially given the city's goals for sustainable growth, economic vitality, and housing accessibility. Nick Whipple agreed with the importance of balancing the requirements to achieve both density and livability.

Chair Goepple stressed the need for the economic analysis. The staff memo mentions that the city contracted with Community Attributes and NBBJ for an analysis of financial and development feasibility, but it is not clear how the various requirements impact the overall project economics. If trade-offs are to be made, it would be helpful to have a better understanding of the costs and margins associated with the requirements. Nick Whipple said staff can provide some context on the economic analysis, though it is complex. Developers have been

clear about current market challenges, and there has been an attempt to minimize costs in the code. However, it is challenging to simplify the analysis, as it is not just about cutting costs here and there, it is about balancing long-term viability with the current market.

Chair Goepple commented that the 1200-foot block size makes sense in terms of walkability, but there should be more flexibility on corridor widths. The option for double counting where it applies is good.

With regard to parking, Chair Goepple commented that those coming to Wilburton from a plan that is not served by transit will be challenged. While reducing on-street parking makes sense in a transit-oriented neighborhood, the needs of those who do not have transit access should not be overlooked. Some European cities include shared public parking on the edge of dense areas, allowing visitors to park without congesting local streets. Similar options to balance the needs of all residents and visitors should be considered.

Commissioner Khanloo pointed out that the regulations being considered will not fully realized for many year. Nothing is going to happen right away with the possible exception of one or two parcels. There is a clear need to be openminded about the economy as well, which is not currently strong.

Commissioner Khanloo asked for clarification about the regulations concerning trash and recycling collection. Nick Whipple said stakeholders have commented about the trade-offs involved. The areas take up a lot of space, reducing the number of units in a building. The draft tries to address the feedback received and includes examples from projects that have been observed where there is a need for large trash rooms that can fit a truck to pick up and leave the area. The way the code currently applies, the collection and pickup areas are treated as the same, so the draft aims to distinguish between collection and pickup areas and provide more flexibility in trash collection. Flexible access corridors offer a good option for trash pickup. Specific rules have been set about staging for dumpsters and cans, allowing them to be out only one hour before and after pickup so they are kept off public spaces and concealed. Commissioner Khanloo commented that some areas, trash is not managed well and there is not enough accountability, leaving property management to do whatever they want.

With regard to parking, Commissioner Khanloo pointed out that ten years ago the vision was that the Downtown would be fully walkable, but that is not the case. If buildings do not have parking, people park on the streets for longer than two hours and get tickets. People come to downtown Bellevue from various areas, but a family with kids is not going to make a four-hour round trip on public transit to get from Renton or Ballard to Bellevue. Having minimal parking requirements can be tricky, and it might be regretted in ten years.

Commissioner Lu Could asked for a summary of the departure process. Nick Whipple said 20.25R includes an administrative director's departure process, allowing deviation from numeric standards, except for access corridors and affordable housing, which have separate processes. For access corridors, it is handled by the transportation design manual and reviewed by the

transportation director. Someone wanting to deviate from the TDM guidelines for Wilburton access will need formal approval from the transportation director. There are criteria, and it is not a simple process. The focus is on trying to make it the exception by setting standards in the TDM.

Commissioner Lu voiced an interest in using the Spring District as an example for the Wilburton vision relative to commercial space, noting having visited some businesses in the Spring District and seeing storefronts that do not seem very active. It would be helpful to see if the current approach in the Spring District has impacted the area economically.

With regard to parking, Commissioner Lu pointed out that there is already a lot of parking in Wilburton. The area will not get built out overnight. Banks and financing bodies will likely require some parking, so there is not much need to be worried about the next 20 years. It would be prudent to do an economic analysis of the Spring District, and to clarify the departure process, as well as to have more discussions about parking.

A motion to extend the meeting to 9:30 p.m. was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Villaveces and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Ferris agreed with the idea about having a parking structure, which could be topped with affordable housing.

Commissioner Ferris asked how the block size of a 1,200-foot perimeter and a length of 350 feet compares to downtown Bellevue, Seattle, and Portland, adding that Portland has small blocks that are easy to walk around. Nick Whipple said downtown Bellevue's block length is 600 feet, Portland's is 300 feet, and South Lake Union's blocks are around 200 feet.

Commissioner Ferris said the concerns voiced about open space are valid. The suggestion made was that developers should have the option of an in-lieu fee for open space if they cannot provide it on site. The fees could be used to develop neighborhood parks which would be heavily used and valuable to the community.

Commissioner Bhargava suggested proximity to local parks could be a factor for determining the open space requirements and the exemptions. Sites close enough to an existing park could possibly be exempted.

Commissioner Villaveces agreed with the need to look at parking examples from other areas. Those who travel by car should be able to find nearby parking and then walk to areas that are vibrant. There are good examples of mixed use parking lots to be found on Lincoln Road in Miami. The pedestrian street is 3,000 feet long and connects to a parking lot. One can park and then walk to locations and walk back to their car. The length of Eastrail between from the station to the Botanical Garden and Main Street is about 2,800 feet, which most people can easily walk. There could be city-provided or incentivized parking structures at both ends, one as a park-and-ride and the other anchored near the Bellevue Botanical Garden, effectively connecting

Wilburton to that beautiful park and bringing people into the area by car. There is a need to keep in mind the big picture. The area offers a perfect scale on which to develop a master plan, with locations laid out for pedestrian and connector streets. Wilburton does not have regular lot sizes, and Eastrail moves through a lot of topography. One thing is consistent, however, namely that all parcels connect to Eastrail. More connections to Eastrail should be encouraged. Creating an open space and right-of-way master plan should be done in connection with conducting a high-level economic analysis to estimate the development potential for each parcel. That would obviate the need to stack requirement upon requirement for open space. A master plan could define parcel and open space layouts as common ground. Nick Whipple welcomed the feedback and acknowledge that staff in Community Development also worked on the policy. Initially there was more of an extensive access concept map, with a grid laid out for Wilburton, but it drew concerns from stakeholders who felt it could limit flexibility for developers. Instead, the aim is now to provide some reliability in creating permeability along arterials to the trail, with 350-foot intervals for access, which can be modified. Intense guidelines have been set for flexibility, so 350 feet is not required everywhere, including for non-motorized access along Eastrail. It would be greater to master plan the 300-acre area, but it is also necessary to respect the desire of developers to have choices. The notion of parking at the edges has also come up in stakeholder discussions and it has garnered interest. Public-private partnerships could be opportunities for affordable housing with such a concept. It would be good to have more control through the land use code, but the aim is for a balance between flexibility and predictability in the outcomes.

Vice Chair Cálad noted being a resident of Wilburton and stressed the need to carefully and thoroughly review all of the public comments as well as the comments made by the Commissioners. The main concern is to ensure buildable space is not reduced. It may be misleading to think that strictly adhering to the requirements it will be possible to meet all of the housing goals. With thousands of high-paying jobs coming to Bellevue, demand for housing will increase. Limiting housing options contradicts the goal of making Wilburton a second downtown. Wilburton is critical to Bellevue's growth, especially since the downtown is already full with high density. Very few people walk on a weekly basis along NE 8th Street near Facebook, Meta, and the brewery. A surge in people walking instead of driving cannot be expected. Limiting parking could be a disaster. Parking is already tough in Wilburton and developers should not be restricted from adding parking.

Nick Whipple said the building design module that will be provided to the Commission on December 11 will start to address some of the questions and concerns that have been raised. Of great interest to stakeholders is floor plate sizes. Non-residential floor plates are proposed to be 30,000 square feet, and residential floor plates are proposed to be 16,000 square feet. Mid-rise buildings are proposed to be allowed unlimited floor plates sizes. The approach will accommodate more space for developer and is more generous than what is provided elsewhere in the city. The aim is to maximize development space while balancing the need for access corridors for light, air, and movement. Vice Chair Cálad said while that sounds positive, the city may still want to allow for even more growth.

Vice Chair Cálad asked for clarification about the 30-foot buffer along I-405. Nick Whipple said

the landscape buffer along the freeway is proposed to be no less than 30 feet. It is meant to provide a barrier for air quality and sound attenuation, and to add green space to reduce the urban heat island effect in that area. Vice Chair Cálad suggested 30 feet may be too much.

Chair Goepple voiced support for Commissioner Villaveces' suggestions regarding parking, and Commissioner Ferris' idea about a green space fee-in-lieu as a way to create valuable green spaces collectively. Also supported was the notion of incentives for providing access to Eastrail. Access will be crucial for walkable paths along Eastrail, but it should not be too much of a burden for property owners to provide the access.

With regard to the 14-foot-wide active transportation lane, Commissioner Villaveces pointed out for comparison that the paved area of the Green Lake Loop is only eight feet wide and it moves thousands of people. The width could possibly be trimmed down to help development.

Commissioner Bhargava cautioned against diluting the overall vision in working to maximize the development footprint. It should be clear about what is non-negotiable for creating the desired outcome.

Commissioner Khanloo stressed the need to keep in mind the goal of developing a mixed-use district that is livable, sustainable, and memorable. It would be helpful to understand what might be sacrificed in terms of affordable housing in exchange for access to Eastrail. Tangible examples of the trade-offs would help the Commission focus on livable, affordable housing. Nick Whipple suggested that finding clear examples could be challenging given the variables involved. Some have said that shaving off ten feet on one corridor or five feet on another could save square footage for housing units, but the truth is the assumptions vary a lot by site. Building height can also be leveraged, which is why flexibility has been provided. There is no clear trade-off.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None
(9:12 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None
(9:12 p.m.)

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(9:12 p.m.)

12. ADJOURNMENT
(9:12 p.m.)

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

Chair Goepple adjourned the meeting at 9:12 p.m.

Katherine Nese

Kate Nese
Staff to Planning Commission

December 12, 2024
DATE