

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES

April 22, 2026
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Khanloo, Commissioners Goepple, Kennedy, Nilchian, Villaveces

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Commissioner Ferris

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Vice Chair Lu

STAFF PRESENT: Kate Nesse, Thara Johnson, Community Development Department; Kristina Gallant, Nick Whipple, Development Services Department; Linda Abe, Hannah Bahnmler, Office of Housing; Matt McFarland, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Bhargava

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 Khanloo who presided.

2. ROLL CALL
(6:31 p.m.)

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

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
(6:31 p.m.)

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

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS
(6:32 p.m.)

Councilmember Bhargava reported that the City Council at its meeting on April 21 engaged in a working session focused on the city's biennial budget. Particular emphasis was given to transportation planning. Staff presented strategic target areas, identified funding gaps, and outlined potential mechanisms such as a transportation benefit district. The Council offered preliminary guidance on budgeting priorities while recognizing that the process will undergo multiple revisions before the anticipated adoption later in the year.

5. STAFF REPORTS

(6:33 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Staff Liaison 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

(6:34 p.m.)

A. Written Communications

(6:34 p.m.)

Dr. Kate Nesse noted the receipt of nine written comments since the packet was published, six of which had been forwarded to the Commissioners; the remaining three came in too late to pass along prior to the meeting.

B. Oral Communications

(6:35 p.m.)

Chair Khanloo reviewed the procedural rules, including the three-minute time limit per speaker, the total 30-minute allotment for oral communication, and the requirement under Ordinance 6752 that comments relate to matters within the Planning Commission's authority.

Layla Khademi, a land use attorney, commended aspects of the draft BelRed Look Forward Land Use Code amendment but urged the Commission to reassess the requirements that diverge from the successful standards used in the Wilburton area. The mandated street grid represents an outdated and unnecessary constraint that hinders development and imposes excessive roadway widths. What is needed instead is a flexible framework emphasizing pedestrian and bicycle connectivity. Concerns were also raised about the proposed dimensions of shared-use paths and the treatment of existing industrial properties. A request was made to permit modernization and operational changes of ongoing industrial uses without triggering disproportionate compliance requirements.

Diana Leo, representing the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce, echoed the previous concerns and asserted that the proposed transportation framework lacks a clear mobility purpose; conflicts

with transit-oriented development principles; reduces developable land; and fails to create a cohesive network. The speaker urged prioritizing pedestrian infrastructure and removing requirements that are unsupported by the transportation demand.

Derek Bottles noted family ownership of the property at 1732 132nd Avenue NE in the heart of BelRed neighborhood and highlighted the practical challenges posed by imposing a new street grid over established parcels. Environmental constraints and the proposed roadway placement will significantly reduce usable land the site, potentially rendering redevelopment infeasible and undermining the broader objectives of the land use update. The Commission was encouraged to continue seeking workable solutions. The proposals from the Chamber of Commerce should serve as a constructive starting point.

Paul O'Sullivan, a representative of Albertsons/Safeway responsible for redevelopment initiatives nationally, spoke in regard to a 20-acre property at the northern end of the Spring District that is owned by the company. The site's proximity to light rail presents a rare and valuable opportunity to create a comprehensive mixed-use development centered on pedestrian activity. While expressing appreciation for prior planning efforts, a concern was voiced about a proposed unnecessary and detrimental roadway that will bisect the property. The roadway would undermine pedestrian connectivity and fragment the site, thereby compromising the potential to create a cohesive and vibrant environment. The speaker respectfully requested that the roadway be removed from the plan so the property can be developed in a manner consistent with the broader vision for transit-oriented growth.

Cody Lodi, architect working on multiple projects in the Wilburton and BelRed neighborhoods, acknowledged the progress made by city staff and expressed support for the overall adoption of the Land Use Code amendment. However, there are complex physical conditions present in the BelRed area, including varied topography, waterways, and fragmented land ownership patterns. The constraints make rigid street grid requirements difficult to implement effectively. The Commission was encouraged to grant staff greater flexibility to approve alternative street configurations through the master development plan process. Block size and connectivity standards are appropriate but should be satisfied through site-specific design solutions. Staff were commended for adjusting the maximum floor plate sizes to allow for mass timber residential buildings. However, a clarification is needed in the language of 20.25B.040.(3)(b) regarding floor plate sizes given that it conflicts with the following Part C. The speaker also urged reconsideration of the minimum floor-to-ceiling height requirements for above-grade parking structures associated with mixed use developments, explaining that such requirements increase costs and reduce available building height that could otherwise be used for housing, particularly in areas affected by groundwater conditions.

Jessie Clawson spoke representing the O'Brien Auto Group, owner of a 7.72 acre parcel within the BelRed district that is directly impacted by the proposed street grid network. The district has not achieved the level of development originally anticipated and that can be attributed in part to the imposition of a rigid street network that fails to account for existing site conditions. The necessity of mandated vehicular streets in a transit-oriented development area was questioned. If

required, such road construction will impose substantial financial burdens on private property owners without corresponding transportation benefits or compensation. Particular concern was expressed regarding existing easements on the O'Brien property that further constrain redevelopment, and the speaker argued that the current approach diverts valuable land toward roadway infrastructure rather than supporting residential and commercial growth. The Commission was urged to eliminate the street grid, or to provide flexibility based on site-specific conditions, and to align the BelRed planning standards more closely with those applied in the Wilburton area.

Jeremy Febus, a licensed civil engineer consulting on the redevelopment of the 20-acre Albertsons/Safeway property in BelRed, provided technical testimony regarding the physical feasibility of constructing a proposed street corridor through the site. There are significant elevation differences and steep grades involved that would require extensive retaining walls and consume a substantial portion of the developable land, resulting in infrastructure that will be technically compliant but functionally impractical for everyday use. Drawing on experience with multiple projects in the district, the speaker noted that once roadway alignments are shown on planning maps, they are typically enforced despite site-specific constraints. The Commission was urged to focus on establishing planning goals and performance standards while allowing design professionals and property owners to determine the most appropriate solutions to achieve those objectives in the best interests of the public.

Kassandra Cortney spoke representing Heidelberg Materials at 1701 130th Avenue NE, the ready-mix concrete plant operating in the BelRed corridor. Although the company intends to remain in the community for the foreseeable future, long-term planning decisions will significantly affect the property's future redevelopment potential. The existing planning requirements have made projects financially infeasible, contributing to stalled development across the district. Specific attention was given to the impact of the street grid and the challenging topography, as well as to the presence of light rail infrastructure and existing roadways that already divide the property into multiple sections. A concern was expressed that predetermined roadway alignments limit flexibility for future development. The Commission was requested to remove the grid requirements in order to preserve the ability to attract new investment and support the city's growth objectives once industrial operations eventually relocate.

Mark Craig with Henbart Real Estate, a family-owned real estate firm with longstanding property holdings in the Bellevue area, particularly near the 130th station, acknowledged that the street grid framework adopted in 2009 had been well intentioned, but asserted that, after more than a decade of experience, the rigid, vehicle-oriented alignment no longer reflects the realities of neighborhood development or the evolving market preferences. Emphasis was given to the shift toward walkable, mixed-use environments supported by multimodal transit, and the speaker explained that mapped vehicular street alignments have created feasibility challenges for the firm's own project. The company supports the goal of achieving connectivity but believes the grid should be defined as something more flexible, accommodating a multimodal network prioritizing pedestrian and bicycle access. The Commission was encouraged to grant staff the

authority to approve alternate street configurations, including substitution of vehicular streets with other approved typologies, particularly where master development plans satisfy the block size and connectivity standards. What is needed is a practical and forward-looking planning approach that will allow development potential to be realized rather than to be constrained by unnecessary roadway requirements.

Joe Cantrell with Columbia Pacific Advisors noted involvement in planning for a large nine-acre development site adjacent to the light rail corridor in BelRed just south of Spring Boulevard. Appreciation was expressed for the efforts of city staff regarding the Land Use Code amendment process, but several concerns were raised regarding the continued requirement for a full vehicular street grid within a transit-oriented district. Such a grid lacks a clear transportation rationale and reflects automobile-focused design assumptions that are inconsistent with the area's intended transit-oriented character. Pedestrian and bicycle connectivity can be achieved through smaller-scale pathways and shared streets without constructing wide vehicular roadways. Uniform street standards fail to account for site-specific conditions and can undermine development feasibility, particularly when additional public benefits are required in exchange for flexibility from oversized street requirements. The Commission was urged to refocus the planning standards on transit-oriented development principles, including walkability, safety, and housing feasibility, rather than on vehicle circulation.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(7:05 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION

A. BelRed Look Forward Land Use Code Amendment
(7:05 p.m.)

Assistant Director Nick Whipple noted that an initial draft of the code had been published at the end of 2025 and it generated substantial public feedback through various engagement efforts, including a code-focused workshop. A revised version of the draft was released on April 16. It was stated that the various elements of the proposed LUCA will be discussed in two separate study sessions, with the second occurring on May 27.

Code and Policy Planning Manager Kristina Gallant explained that the code framework is organized into progressively more specialized tiers of standards. The general provisions address topics applicable across the city, while a new section 20.25B establishes standards common to mixed-use districts in both Wilburton and BelRed, particularly in regard to building design and development form. The more specialized overlay provisions address issues unique to each district, including amenity incentive systems and approaches to local street connectivity.

The housing goals established for BelRed in 2009 were aimed at promoting diverse housing options, including workforce housing. By 2017 some 1,817 units were built in BelRed, of which only 4.8 percent were affordable at 80 percent of area median income. Additionally, some

\$900,000 was generated through fees in-lieu. By 2026 the total units built reached around 3,000 across the district.

The 2024 adopted housing goal was focused on accommodating residents at all stages of life by meeting the needs of diverse housing types, sizes, and income levels within the BelRed district. The proposed updates to the land use districts are intended to significantly expand the development capacity, enabling approximately 7900 additional housing units and 14,200 jobs by 2044. The projected growth represents roughly one quarter of the city's anticipated housing expansion and one fifth of projected job growth during the planning period. Under the updated affordable housing strategy, nearly 1300 of the approximately 3100 units expected to be needed in the district over the next decade will have to be affordable to households earning 80 percent of area median income. To meet that demand, the city is proposing substantial increases in buildable capacity across the district through zoning changes aligned directly with the Future Land Use Map adopted in the 2024 as part of the Comprehensive Plan update.

Kristina Gallant explained that the revised zoning framework will classify most mixed-use areas into consistent categories of high-rise, mid-rise, and low-rise districts, each with standardized height allowances. The high-rise districts located primarily in the central core of BelRed will permit building heights up to 250 feet; that represents a significant increase from the current limits of approximately 125 to 150 feet in limited areas near transit stations. The mid-rise districts will maintain a maximum height of 100 feet, while the low-rise districts will allow heights of 60 feet. The General Commercial will be capped at 45 feet. The increases are intended not only to expand capacity but also to better align the permitted heights with realistic building typologies that are capable of supporting true high-rise development. While the public discussion has focused heavily on the street grid issues, the magnitude of the proposed capacity increases constitute one of the most consequential elements of the update for supporting future development.

Pivoting to the elements of the regulatory framework that are proposed to carry forward from the Wilburton model and apply to the BelRed district, particular attention was given to the citywide non-conforming use code adopted earlier in the year. Non-conforming uses, structures, and sites are developments that were lawful when established but which are no longer permitted under the updated regulations. The intent is to allow such uses to continue operating and to undertake repairs or improvements without immediate displacement, while gradually encouraging transition toward compliance with the district's long-term vision. Significant upgrades measured in terms of value trigger the proportional compliance requirements, thereby serving as an incremental mechanism to guide redevelopment over time while preventing the creation of new non-conforming conditions.

Kristina Gallant explained that under the existing system, the code relies on detailed lists that categorize uses as permitted, conditional, or prohibited. The proposed revision adopts the more flexible approach that was introduced in Wilburton under which all uses are considered permitted unless specifically restricted or conditioned. The limits are focused on the uses that are deemed potentially hazardous, incompatible with transit-oriented development, or likely to create

significant impacts on neighboring properties. A “craft-friendly” approach to manufacturing uses applies that allows manufacturing operations of up to 20,000 square feet to be permitted across the district. An expanded allowance of up to 25,000 square feet is permitted when combined with educational facilities. At the same time, the proposal retains flexibility within the BelRed General Commercial district by continuing to allow outright car dealerships, warehousing, and storage uses.

Kristina Gallant elaborated on the standards for automobile dealerships by clarifying that the objective is not to prohibit dealerships but to ensure compatibility with a pedestrian-oriented urban environment. The proposed standards require buildings to be oriented toward public rights-of-way. The restrict outdoor vehicle storage between a building and the street while limiting such storage to a defined percentage of the site unless an administrative departure is approved. Modern dealership designs can be successfully integrated into dense, mixed-use environments; there are examples of urban dealerships incorporated into multistory structures with structured parking. Traditional dealership configurations will continue to be permitted in the BelRed General Commercial district, while areas transitioning to mixed-use designations will emphasize pedestrian-friendly formats.

The proposal reallocates the land use designations across the district. The areas currently designated as BelRed General Commercial will remain unchanged, preserving the permitted uses such as dealerships and warehousing. Other areas, particularly those near transit stations, will be rezoned to higher-intensity mixed-use districts to support increased housing and employment capacity. Although certain industrial or commercial uses will no longer be permitted in the higher-density zones, existing operations will be allowed to continue under the non-conforming use provisions. The proposed changes involve tradeoffs between retaining existing uses and enabling substantial increases in development capacity near transit infrastructure.

The proposal includes applying additional standards related to access and connectivity that have been developed in the Wilburton framework. The standards include provisions allowing buildings to extend over private access corridors and requirements that will ensure public access through easements and design features. The connectivity provisions are intended to support flexible site design while maintaining public accessibility and urban integration as redevelopment progresses. The standards address landscaping requirements, including street tree planting, implementation of the green and sustainability factor applicable to all development, and a range of public realm design elements such as controls on blank walls, exterior lighting, weather protection, bicycle parking, and landscape buffering along freeway corridors. The building design provisions that will be retained include flexibility for floor plate sizes for medical, life science, and mass timber buildings; updated tower connection and separation standards; requirements for active use spaces; and design criteria for parking garages. Limited façade modulation requirements will remain in place, with additional exceptions to align with state law, along with continued requirements for screening mechanical equipment.

Kristina Gallant briefly addressed the foundational aspects of the amenity incentive system applicable across districts. It was explained that developers seeking to exceed the base floor area

ratio limits will be required to participate in the incentive program, while projects built within the base density can still utilize the full permitted building height. Additional provisions establish that certain uses, including active use space up to one FAR and qualifying affordable commercial or housing units, will be exempt from the total floor area calculations. Recording and documentation requirements are also established in the proposal. The detailed provisions of the incentive system will be addressed in a subsequent presentation focused on the district-specific overlays.

With regard to the street network, Kristina Gallant acknowledged that the topic has been raised repeatedly during public testimony. Staff recognize the complexity of balancing planning objectives with on-the-ground development constraints. There are positive aspects of the existing grid system. It produces approximately 300-foot block sizes that support walkability, predictable access patterns, and consistent street alignment. However, staff also acknowledges that the system has been developed with the expectation of large-scale parcel assembly and coordinated master planning, conditions that have not materialized in practice. Instead, most development has occurred on individual sites, creating situations in which certain street segments consume disproportionate portions of developable land or conflict with existing parcel configurations.

The planning team has conducted a detailed review of the grid in coordination with transportation officials to identify opportunities to reduce or modify street requirements while preserving essential connectivity. The revised approach retains designated green streets as core elements of the district's vision; and emphasizes their role as linear parks and east-west connections supporting drainage, natural systems, and pedestrian movement. Staff proposes increasing the allowable block lengths in certain areas to as much as 600 feet, thereby providing greater flexibility for site design. In some cases, specific street segments have been removed entirely where the impact on development feasibility has been determined to outweigh the transportation benefits. At the same time, while the grid might not be necessary to meet systemwide traffic capacity needs, local access requirements remain a critical function of the network, particularly in areas lacking established public streets and relying instead on private easements or informal access arrangements.

The policy constraints on major corridors, including limits on driveway access along designated shopping streets, reinforce the need for internal street connections to ensure that properties can develop without becoming landlocked. In certain cases, the proposed grid supports development by providing access routes that avoid environmentally constrained areas such as streams. The revised framework is intended to address the most pressing access challenges while maintaining sufficient flexibility to accommodate varied development patterns across the district.

The defined street segments shown on the planning maps will be required to be constructed as public streets – either local streets or green streets – when triggered by development, although their precise alignment could be adjusted during project review subject to transportation analysis. For parcels located within designated block areas, development that creates large blocks exceeding approximately 105,000 square feet will be required to introduce additional internal circulation through new streets or private access corridors. Where streets are aligned along

property boundaries, initial development could construct interim street sections rather than the full width, reducing the burden on early projects while preserving the ability to complete the roadways in the future.

With regard to the principal street typologies proposed for the district, Kristina Gallant said the most common type, the local street, will serve as a publicly dedicated access route designed to support neighborhood safety and livability. Typical sections will include a central travel lane approximately 25 wide flanked by sidewalks and an amenity zone between the curb and sidewalk, with on-street parking generally required but subject to flexibility. The second typology, designated as green streets, will function as pedestrian-priority corridors designed as urban trails and linear parks. The streets will feature curb-less elements, expanded planting areas, and integrated parking within landscaped zones, reflecting a vision of multimodal connectivity and enhanced public space.

The amenity zone concept is a central component of the district's urban design strategy. Located between the curb and sidewalk, the zones will accommodate street trees, landscaping, and pedestrian-supportive features such as seating and lighting. Given the district's historically low tree canopy resulting from its industrial past, the amenity zones will play a critical role in expanding urban greenery and improving the pedestrian environment as redevelopment proceeds.

Kristina Gallant said the proposal includes additional connections options for internal circulation. Sites larger than 105,000 square feet, either individual lots or an assemblage of lots, will be required to break up into smaller blocks. Projects will have to option of using a range of private access corridor typologies rather than traditional public streets. The proposed options include the Flex Access Corridor, Active Transportation Access Corridor, Enhanced Shared Use Path, and Service Corridor, each of which is designed to provide varying levels of vehicular, pedestrian, and service access depending on project needs and site constraints. Developers will be permitted to select among the corridor types within the defined limitations to ensure adequate connectivity and functionality.

The Flex Access Corridor closely resembles a local street in overall configuration but includes a single four-foot amenity zone instead of two five-foot zones. The typology is carried forward from the Wilburton model and allows optional on-street parking and provides for flexibility in design while maintaining essential pedestrian and vehicle circulation. The Active Transportation Access Corridor, another typology brought over from Wilburton, is a pedestrian-focused route consisting of a shared pathway capable of accommodating emergency vehicles when necessary. It includes a 12-foot amenity zone with lighting and bollards to restrict routine vehicular use. The design supports pedestrian movement while still meeting the safety and emergency access requirements.

The Enhanced Shared Use Path option is the same as the Active Transportation Access Corridor except that it features a 14-foot path intended exclusively for pedestrian and non-vehicular travel where emergency vehicle access can be provided elsewhere on the site. The configuration can

also qualify as an outdoor plaza under the amenity incentive system if enhanced design features are incorporated, thereby offering potential benefits for public space creation. The Service Corridor typology involves narrow, alley-like routes designed primarily for back-of-house operations and emergency access. Service Corridors cannot serve as primary vehicle or pedestrian access routes and can only be used in limited circumstances to provide supplemental connectivity.

Kristina Gallant called attention to a broader policy issue that emerged from stakeholder feedback, namely whether private streets or corridors can replace required public street segments when equivalent public benefits are demonstrated through master planning. The concept is under consideration because it could allow for innovative design solutions, including pedestrian-only streets and more flexible layouts that might improve development feasibility and encourage creative urban design. However, expanding such flexibility could also carry risks, including the potential loss of designated green streets; reduced tree planting opportunities; inconsistent long-term maintenance standards; diminished public access; and more complicated utility servicing. While the advantages of increased flexibility primarily benefit project feasibility, the potential disadvantages could impact the broader public realm, necessitating careful evaluation of any policy change.

To address the concerns, minimum conditions will need to be required before a private corridor can replace a designated public street segment. The conditions will include a mandatory review by relevant city departments; a demonstration of adequate emergency vehicle access and safety measures; avoidance of adverse impacts on surrounding circulation or neighboring properties; and compliance with accessibility standards applicable to public rights-of-way. The potential conflicts affecting adjacent parcels could be resolved through formal legal agreements between property owners when appropriate.

The proposed additional safeguards are intended to ensure that replacement corridors will produce high-quality public realm outcomes. Among the suggestions are a prohibition against using service corridors as substitutes for public streets, and a requirement that active uses be provided along a substantial portion of corridor frontages to maintain vibrancy and pedestrian activity. Limited flexibility should be allowed in cases involving environmental restoration projects, such as daylighting streams, where the strict frontage activation requirements might be impractical.

Kristina Gallant said that two phases of public engagement have already been completed, including the release of an initial draft at the end of 2025, a public open house, a technical workshop, and multiple stakeholder meetings. Future milestones include a second Commission study session on May 27; a potential public hearing in mid-summer; and subsequent review by the City Council in early fall.

Commissioner Ferris acknowledged that increased development capacity might represent one form of compensation but observed that other parcels will also receive additional capacity without bearing the burden of building new infrastructure. Clarification was sought regarding the

benefit provided to landowners who will be required to construct new public streets or green streets on their properties. Kristina Gallant explained that the street grid requirement was established in 2009 and is not a new obligation created by the current amendment. The proposed code will reduce the total number of required street segments while simultaneously increasing development capacity across the district, representing a significant overall expansion of development potential. Nick Whipple added that property owners required to dedicate land for public streets will receive development credit for that land when calculating floor area ratio, thereby ensuring that the dedication does not reduce the overall development potential of the site. The street segments in question are not newly imposed obligations but longstanding requirements established under prior planning policies. The proposed amendments will reduce the number of required segments while simultaneously increasing the allowable building heights and density across the district, thereby creating substantial new development capacity. The language addressing the legal standards such as nexus and proportionality was developed through earlier planning processes and is being carried forward into the current proposal to address concerns raised by stakeholders.

Commissioner Ferris acknowledged that although the street grid requirement has existed for many years, the physical construction of those streets has not yet occurred in many locations given that development in the BelRed district has not reached the levels originally anticipated. The suggestion was made that the roadway requirements might have contributed to slower growth alongside broader economic factors. A concern was expressed about fairness among property owners given that some parcels will receive significant increases in development capacity without being required to construct new infrastructure, while others will bear the responsibility of building public streets. Clarification was sought regarding whether additional compensation or incentives will be available for landowners obligated to construct such infrastructure on behalf of the public. Nick Whipple confirmed that the principal form of compensation will consist of substantial increases in permitted density and building height across the district, which is intended to enhance development feasibility. Future discussions regarding the amenity incentive system could explore additional mechanisms, such as bonus floor area ratio, to recognize the provision of required public improvements. Past underperformance in development activity cannot be attributed to a single factor, noting that earlier zoning limits on height and density had been misaligned with viable building types and had constrained redevelopment potential. The proposed amendments represent a significant shift toward unlocking housing and employment growth while retaining only those street segments deemed essential for access and circulation.

Commissioner Goepple thanked staff for the clear and thoughtful evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages associated with the different alternatives. A leaning toward the public streets option was voiced rather than expanding reliance on private corridors, citing concerns about long-term public access, maintenance reliability, and the importance of securing enduring public benefits as density increases in the district. Having acknowledged the challenges posed by site-specific physical conditions, including topography and grade differences described in earlier testimony, the question asked was whether the code could incorporate additional flexibility within the public street framework to address those unique circumstances without sacrificing

public access. Kristina Gallant explained that the existing code already provides flexibility in adjusting street alignment within a development site, but less flexibility in regard to intersection connections. The proposed amendments expand that flexibility. Under the revised approach, developers are granted greater discretion to modify the location of street segments within their property boundaries, including potential adjustments to intersection placement, subject to transportation analysis and safety considerations. The degree of flexibility must remain responsive to site-specific conditions, as impacts on traffic flow and neighboring properties can vary significantly depending on project scale and context.

Nick Whipple added that a key change in the proposed code shifts the decision-making authority toward developer-driven design solutions, which allows project teams to propose alternative configurations that achieve improved outcomes while preserving essential public connectivity.

Commissioner Nilchian echoed the earlier remarks favoring public street infrastructure to ensure long-term public benefits and mitigate the risks identified in the presentation, then sought additional clarification regarding the circumstances under which developers will be permitted to modify roadway layouts, specifically when such variations could be approved and when requirements will remain fixed. Kristina Gallant provided a hypothetical example illustrating how the flexibility provisions will function under the proposed code. When a defined public street segment is designated on the map, that connection must ultimately be provided. However, flexibility may allow for adjustments to the precise alignment within a property boundary. For example, a developer might propose relocating the alignment closer to a property line to better accommodate site design. Such a proposal would then undergo technical review to assess the potential impacts, including proximity to neighboring driveways, spacing between intersections, and overall circulation performance. Agreements between adjacent property owners could also facilitate interim street configurations when neighboring parcels have not yet been developed. Nevertheless, all adjustments will remain subject to case-by-case evaluation, particularly regarding fire access and safety considerations, which makes it difficult to establish universal guarantees applicable to every site. While the code allows for alignment adjustments, certain technical standards, such as the required width of vehicle travel lanes on public streets, will remain fixed and cannot be reduced. Some private street typologies offer greater design flexibility, including options limited to emergency vehicle access, that are not available under the standard public street requirements. The distinction highlights the tradeoff between flexibility and consistency inherent in the proposed framework.

Commissioner Kennedy posed a two-part question focused on infrastructure reliability and coordination with external service providers. The Commissioner asked whether utility companies and waste management services have been consulted to ensure that both public and private street options will provide adequate access for maintenance and emergency operations; and sought clarification regarding whether the various corridor typologies can function as either public or private streets. Kristina Gallant said the private corridor designs do not meet the existing standards for dedication as public streets and are therefore intended to remain private facilities. While both public and private configurations can accommodate utility access through easements and design standards, public streets offer a higher level of certainty and long-term reliability for

service delivery. The replacement of public street segments with private corridors will only be permitted when access issues are fully addressed, particularly on larger master-planned sites where multiple blocks can be coordinated effectively.

Commissioner Villaveces expressed concern about the emphasis of automobile dealerships within the transit-oriented development district. Having acknowledged the importance of allowing existing businesses to transition over time, it was questioned whether the planning framework should actively encourage dealership uses given that such developments typically generate limited pedestrian activity compared to retail or mixed-use environments. Also asked was if the current street grid remains the appropriate foundation for long-term planning, adding that the district's growth and infrastructure changes warrant reconsideration of the original framework with a fresh perspective. Kristina Gallant affirmed that the original street grid remains relevant because it was designed to support connectivity and walkability in areas with strong transit access while breaking up large industrial parcels into smaller, more accessible blocks. The current proposal has been developed through a comprehensive review by transportation and planning professionals who evaluated both connectivity needs and development feasibility, resulting in a revised grid that seeks to balance accessibility with flexibility. The proposed street and green street typologies are not ad hoc concepts but established design standards developed through prior planning and streetscape processes within the city.

Chair Khanloo emphasized that city planning decisions must ultimately serve the public interest while remaining feasible for private development. The importance of maintaining a clear focus on public benefit in infrastructure planning was stressed along with the collaborative nature of partnerships among public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Staff was asked to consider if the development model used in the Spring District, where certain internal streets are privately owned but still support publicly accessible spaces, can be replicated in other areas of the BelRed district. The Spring District appears to function successfully as a mixed-use environment with privately maintained streets and publicly accessible amenities. Kristina Gallant explained that the Spring District represents a unique circumstance shaped by a comprehensive development agreement and master planning process. The district was developed under negotiated terms that balanced public and private benefits across a large unified site, allowing for coordinated infrastructure planning and flexible design solutions that would be difficult to replicate in areas characterized by fragmented property ownership. The district benefited from special provisions established in 2009 to catalyze early investment in the BelRed area in recognition of the willingness of the developer to proceed before transit service was fully operational. While the Spring District is widely regarded as a successful example of transit-oriented development, the extensive negotiations and scale of the project make it an exception rather than a model that can easily be duplicated elsewhere.

Nick Whipple further clarified that the Spring District encompassed approximately 30 acres and achieved its outcomes through coordinated planning at a district-wide scale. Because the developer committed early on to implement the long-term vision for the area, the city provided additional flexibility as part of the partnership. Regardless of whether streets within the Spring

District are publicly or privately owned, the physical design of the corridors remain comparable in width and configuration to the public street typologies proposed for BelRed, which reinforces the principle that the functional design standards will remain consistent across all ownership models.

Commissioner Ferris stressed the difficulty associating with finding the right balance of walkability, transportation access, and development feasibility. A general inclination was expressed toward allowing for increased flexibility, provided that clear goals remain in place to preserve a pedestrian-friendly environment and to enable development to proceed efficiently. Stressed was the importance of achieving a compromise that will advance both the district's vision and practical development outcomes.

Commissioner Goeppele agreed with the need to incorporate flexibility within the public street framework and suggested that the street typologies themselves could serve as a mechanism for accommodating site-specific conditions. Design elements such as sidewalk widths, planting areas and parking requirements might be adjusted in certain circumstances without undermining the long-term public benefits. The staff were encouraged to continue evaluating the design parameters as potential tools for balancing development feasibility with durable public infrastructure.

Commissioner Nilchian emphasized the urgency of accelerating development in the BelRed district, observing that recent housing production had been modest relative to the ambitious growth targets established for the area. Support was expressed for introducing additional incentives and flexibility measures to encourage timely construction of new housing and mixed-use projects. While economic conditions have influenced the development patterns, regulatory flexibility could play a meaningful role in unlocking future growth and the achieving housing objectives.

Commissioner Kennedy observed that the central issue appears to be less about whether streets are publicly or privately owned and more about the degree of flexibility available in determining their location and configuration. Strong support was voiced for maintaining public ownership of key infrastructure to ensure long-term public access and safety, while also encouraging the city to consider expanding the range of street typologies to provide developers with greater design flexibility. The suggestion was made that redefining what constitutes a street within the planning framework could help reconcile the public benefit goals with practical development constraints.

Commissioner Villaveces agreed with the comment made by Commissioner Kennedy and asked staff to explain why the proposed street planning approach appears to diverge from the model used in Wilburton, emphasizing the importance of understanding the rationale for any deviation from established precedents. Kristina Gallant explained that the BelRed district presents distinct physical and functional challenges, including a larger geographic area, limited existing public street connections, and safety concerns related to pedestrian and bicycle mobility. Nick Whipple added that BelRed's scale, which is approximately three times the size of Wilburton, requires a more extensive network of connections to support transit-oriented development. The

Commission was reminded that a local street network had originally been recommended for Wilburton as well, though the final policy decision adopted by the City Council differed from the recommendation. The majority of the planning principles applied in Wilburton are also proposed to be applied in BelRed, and that the current proposal seeks to build upon those shared standards while responding to the unique conditions of the larger district.

Chair Khanloo acknowledged the fiscal importance of automobile dealerships to the city's budget while encouraging staff to explore innovative planning tools, such as smaller-scale or "mini" master planning approaches, to help coordinate development across larger parcels. The Chair stressed the importance of protecting natural features, particularly streams, while also advancing housing production targets. Housing growth in the district has increased significantly in recent years and the future targets can be achieved if development feasibility is maintained through flexible design tools such as bonus floor area incentives and increased building heights. Concentrating development near transit infrastructure is important, particularly in the corridor surrounding the light rail station areas, which were identified as a priority focus during the Comprehensive Planning process.

Chair Khanloo emphasized that the ultimate measure of success should be the quality and safety of the public environment rather than the ownership status of streets, noting personal experience with privately owned streets that nonetheless function effectively as safe and welcoming public spaces. The staff were encouraged to prioritize outcomes that support public safety, accessibility, and overall community benefit regardless of whether infrastructure is publicly or privately owned.

Nick Whipple acknowledged the value of the Commission's feedback and clarified that discussions regarding new street typologies remain constrained by fiscal and operational considerations within the transportation department. Limited maintenance budgets and staffing capacity make the department cautious about adopting additional publicly maintained street designs. As a result, private street options were introduced as a potential mechanism to provide greater flexibility, although such options carry associated risks related to maintenance responsibilities and long-term public access.

Nick Whipple outlined the next steps in the planning process, stating that the team would continue collecting stakeholder feedback while advancing the project timeline. A new set of code topics will be presented to the Commission on May 27, and that will be followed by a subsequent meeting focused on resolving any outstanding policy questions.

****BREAK****

(8:36 p.m.)

B. 2026-2032 Affordable Housing Strategy

(8:41 p.m.)

Senior Affordable Housing Planner Hannah Bahnmiller explained that the Affordable Housing

Strategy was first adopted in 2017. Since then a lot of good implementation work has been accomplished. In November 2024 the City Council launched an update for the plan. While the Affordable Housing Strategy serves as an overarching housing strategy for the city, it focuses heavily on income restricted affordable housing. Each spectrum of affordable housing has different needs and different solutions. The update offers an opportunity to build on the successes of implementing the 2017 strategy. All of the actions in the 2017 strategy were implemented, which was followed by implementation of the Next Right Work program. In launching the current work, the Council recognized the continued need for affordable housing in the community and wanted to set an explicit target of 5700 units for the Affordable Housing Strategy update to move towards in terms of affordable housing growth. The goal is to develop those affordable units over 10 years but also to meet sub-targets for the different income bands below 80 percent area median income. One key piece of the work will involve going back to the substantial effort in the Comprehensive Plan process both to build on the engagement done there but also to implement the policies, goals and changes that were instituted with that update.

The Comprehensive Plan update engaged with the public and heard a lot about housing. The citywide statistically valid survey uncovered that housing affordability and availability is the number one issue in the community. The current work build on the Comprehensive Plan outreach and involved engagement across different stakeholder groups, organizational partners, residents in general, and folks who are dealing with lived experience of housing issues. There are a lot of different varied perspectives on housing and so a concerted attempt was made to drill down in search of the key themes that resonate across the different groups and where there are tensions to facilitate drafting specific actions.

Hannah Bahnmitter said the Affordable Housing Strategy is organized around five overarching policy goals, each of which is supported by a series of targeted strategies designed to achieve measurable outcomes. The plan identifies 24 strategies and more than 80 specific implementation tasks to be carried out over the next seven years by multiple departments across the city; the Office of Housing is not the only implementer of the plan. To guide the execution of the plan, the strategies will be accompanied by a detailed action plan outlining timelines, resource considerations, anticipated impacts, and phased implementation schedules. There are 20 high-priority actions identified that are intended to be emphasized during the implementation period. The action plan will include performance metrics to track progress and evaluate effectiveness in meeting the strategy's long-term goals. Although 20 priority actions have been identified, the initiatives will be phased over time rather than launched simultaneously. The action plan is intentionally designed to remain adaptable so that priorities, timelines, and specific actions can be adjusted in response to evolving economic conditions, funding availability, and community needs. It is anticipated that there will continue to be a gap between what the plan is expected to achieve and the affordable housing targets, but when compared to what can be achieved without the plan, it is clear the plan will shift the trajectory toward greater unit production overall and particularly toward deeper levels of affordability. The city expects to meet if not exceed the target for higher affordability levels, but understands that getting to the deeper affordability levels will require more resources and more effort to achieve.

Hannah Bahnmitter outlined for the Commissioners several near-term initiatives. One of the first actions scheduled for the coming year involves establishing permanent Land Use Code standards for safe parking programs that serve individuals experiencing housing instability. While temporary measures currently allow the city to operate a pilot program, formal definitions and regulatory standards are necessary to ensure long-term implementation and consistency across jurisdictions.

Another initiative for future consideration involves expanding the city's existing C-1 program, which offers density bonuses for properties owned by religious organizations in low-density residential zones. The program has generated strong interest and has demonstrated potential to produce affordable housing, but the current eligibility requirements mandate that participating projects provide 100 percent affordable units. The proposed update explores allowing mixed-income developments with a combination of market-rate and affordable housing while still qualifying for density bonuses, thereby improving financial feasibility and accelerating project delivery. The city will evaluate whether similar incentives could be extended to nonprofit-owned properties in comparable zones. Implementation of the changes will require both a Comprehensive Plan amendment and revisions to the Land Use Code.

Streamlining project approvals and reducing development timelines for affordable housing projects is another priority of the Affordable Housing Strategy. There are two related actions aimed at improving process efficiency: removing certain affordable housing developments from the formal design review process to expedite approvals; and establishing a dedicated staff liaison to guide projects continuously from early planning through completion. The approach is intended to provide consistent coordination and reduce administrative delays that can increase project costs and slow the delivery of housing units.

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

Hannah Bahnmitter said expansions of land use-based affordability requirements are part of the proposal. One action involves implementing recent state legislation requiring mandatory affordable housing in areas located near frequent transit service, often referred to as transit-oriented development requirements. Because the city has already initiated related planning efforts, confidence is high that implementation can proceed efficiently. A related initiative involves evaluating whether existing affordable housing programs, currently applied primarily to mixed-use districts, can be extended to additional residential zones where similar requirements may be appropriate. The evaluation work will likely occur in conjunction with forthcoming updates to the high-density residential land use regulations.

With regard to housing equity, there are ongoing efforts to review the municipal codes and planning policies for unintended barriers to fair housing, including potential restrictions affecting group homes or residential facilities serving individuals with disabilities. Affordable homeownership is a key priority area given the strong community interest in expanding

ownership opportunities through incentives such as increased density allowances or other regulatory tools. An existing provision within the city’s multifamily tax exemption program limits rent increases for existing tenants to three percent annually. The city will evaluate whether similar protections could be extended to other housing programs to enhance long-term housing stability for residents.

Hannah Bahnmitter said there are additional policy initiatives under the strategy’s goal of addressing housing for residents with unique needs. One recommended action involves reviewing existing building codes and development standards to identify opportunities to improve accessibility, particularly through the concept of “visitability,” which promotes housing designs that can be accessed and used by people with varying physical abilities. Relatively small adjustments to baseline standards could significantly expand accessibility, enabling individuals to both visit and reside in housing regardless of mobility limitations. There is also a need to encourage the production of family-sized housing units. Many existing affordable housing developments are concentrated in smaller unit types. Accordingly, the proposal includes evaluating whether the current incentive programs could be modified to better support larger units suitable for families.

Hannah Bahnmitter described several additional longer-term policy initiatives intended to expand housing supply through regulatory and technological innovation. One proposed action was noted to involve evaluating the feasibility of reducing the minimum lot size requirements following the implementation of the recent middle housing and lot-splitting code updates. The sequencing will allow the city to monitor the effects of current reforms before considering further adjustments designed to promote smaller-scale development opportunities. Another long-term initiative focuses on exploring innovative construction methods, including the expanded use of wood-frame building technologies and other emerging techniques that could increase efficiency, reduce costs, and maximize building capacity. Some related changes are already being incorporated into current code updates, such as adjustments to the floor plate dimensions and building height allowances, but additional opportunities will require future refinement.

Hannah Bahnmitter said the Affordable Housing Strategy establishes a substantial body of work for the Planning Commission and other governing bodies to address over the coming years. While not all the initiatives are scheduled for immediate implementation, the Commissioners were encouraged to begin considering the policy directions outlined in the strategy. Some actions could advance more quickly depending on evolving conditions. Many of the highlighted actions will return to the Planning Commission through the Land Use Code amendment work program, and other initiatives will be addressed through separate processes such as the legislative agenda, budget deliberations, or broader Council initiatives. To support transparency and accountability, the staff are committed to providing regular progress reports to the City Council and to developing a publicly accessible housing dashboard designed to display real-time data on housing production and program outcomes.

Commissioner Ferris expressed appreciation for the substantial progress achieved by housing staff and emphasized the importance of distinguishing between preserved affordable housing

units and newly constructed units in the performance reporting. The suggestion was made that tracking the categories separately will strengthen accountability and provide a clearer understanding of the city's progress toward expanding housing supply.

Commissioner Ferris also highlighted the success of the city's density bonus program for faith-based properties and recommended developing outreach and education initiatives to assist property owners who may lack development expertise. Many faith-based organizations face significant procedural complexity when pursuing housing projects. Having dedicated guidance or liaison services could help them navigate the process more effectively. The proposed public dashboard was highlighted as a valuable accountability tool.

Another Commissioner echoed appreciation for the presentation and commended staff for establishing measurable performance indicators to track implementation progress. The Commissioner expressed particular interest in the strategy's emphasis on expanding housing supply and asked for additional information regarding efforts to secure new funding sources for affordable housing initiatives. The Commissioner also welcomed the commitment to provide periodic progress updates and inquired whether the Planning Commission will receive regular briefings beyond formal requests for code amendments or policy changes.

Commissioner Kennedy expressed support for expanding incentives that allow for a mix of affordable and market-rate housing on faith-based properties. Such flexibility could accelerate development and broaden housing opportunities. Hannah Bahnmler confirmed that identifying new funding mechanisms represents a central component of the strategy and noted that projected housing production targets assume the availability of additional financial resources. Research into potential revenue sources is already underway in preparation for upcoming budget discussions. The importance of partnerships with other organizations to leverage funding opportunities was stressed. Staff will be offering the Commission regular updates as things progress.

Commissioner Nilchian voiced support for incentives and bonuses aimed at yielding a mix of affordable and market-rate housing on faith-based properties before seeking clarification regarding the city's safe parking program. Hannah Bahnmler explained that the program provides safe designated locations for individuals living in vehicles, offering them access to hygiene facilities and supportive services in a safer and more stable environment. The city currently operates a pilot program at the Lincoln Center under temporary emergency regulations and is exploring a replacement location, but permanent land use definitions and standards are necessary to sustain or expand the program in the future.

Commissioner Goepple expressed strong support for the city's ongoing affordable housing efforts. With regard to a theme raised during public testimony regarding the lack of downsizing options for long-term residents, particularly seniors and emphasized that cooperative ownership structures can help preserve affordability, maintain community cohesion, and protect residents from financial pressures associated with investor-driven housing models. Staff was asked to describe the city's current efforts to encourage the development of similar cooperative housing

opportunities in Bellevue. Hannah Bahnmitter answered that the city has conducted direct engagement with residents and leadership at the Silver Glen cooperative community to better understand both the success of their model and the barriers to replicating it. One primary challenge involves securing financing for cooperative housing developments, as lenders in the Pacific Northwest have limited experience with the ownership structure and therefore demonstrate greater caution when evaluating such projects. Cooperative housing models are more common in other regions of the country where financial institutions have developed greater familiarity and confidence in the approach. One near-term strategy involves promoting successful local examples, such as Silver Glen, to demonstrate viability to lenders, policymakers, and development partners. Expanding partnerships with financial institutions could help build long-term support for cooperative housing initiatives.

Commissioner Goepple encouraged the city to consider more proactive measures beyond just public outreach and demonstration efforts. Additional financial or programmatic support could help scale cooperative housing development more effectively and provide broader community benefits. Hannah Bahnmitter agreed that further support mechanisms will be valuable and noted that emerging middle housing policies may create new opportunities for smaller-scale cooperative developments, which could gradually build confidence in the model and encourage broader adoption. Affordable Housing Manager Linda Abe added that innovative development concepts are already being explored, including proposals in which a homeowner could transfer property to a developer in exchange for construction of multiple units, with the original homeowner retaining ownership of one unit. Such approaches could preserve ownership opportunities while increasing housing supply.

Commissioner Villaveces suggested it might make sense to consider mixed use as well as mixed markets for the redevelopment of faith-based properties. The suggestion was made to explore the integration of mixed-use components, such as commercial or retail spaces, to enhance community vitality and financial sustainability.

Commissioner Villaveces raised a technical question regarding the building code provisions that allow mid-rise residential buildings to be constructed with a single staircase rather than the traditional dual-stair configuration. Jurisdictions such as Seattle and New York have implemented such standards and the suggestion was made that similar reforms could significantly reduce development costs and enable more efficient use of smaller lots, thereby expanding the housing supply. Hannah Bahnmitter clarified that the city of Bellevue operates under statewide building code requirements and therefore lacks the authority to independently adopt single-stair building standards. It was confirmed that discussions are underway at the state level to evaluate potential reforms related to building access and elevator requirements. The Affordable Housing Strategy has an action to participate in advocacy efforts in support of such reforms and implement any changes once adopted at the state level.

Chair Khanloo suggested developing educational materials such as recorded presentations or online resources to help faith-based and nonprofit organizations better understand housing development opportunities and how to navigate the application process. Emphasized was the

importance of providing accessible information without placing undue administrative burdens on city staff. The chair also expressed a concern about youth experiencing housing instability and recalled testimony from students during the Comprehensive Plan process who described challenges associated with homelessness and the risk of losing access to school due to unstable housing conditions. The staff were asked if the affordable housing strategy includes specific provisions addressing housing needs for youth with very low incomes. Hannah Bahnmiller explained that the affordable housing strategy focuses primarily on permanent housing solutions and does not directly address the broader system of homelessness services, which involves multiple agencies and support programs beyond housing development alone. The strategy supports homelessness prevention indirectly by increasing the supply of deeply affordable housing, particularly for households with incomes below 30 percent of area median income. While the plan does not establish a dedicated target specifically for youth housing, ongoing community initiatives, including youth-led housing advocacy efforts, are contributing valuable research and recommendations that may inform future policy development.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None
(9:26 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
(9:26 p.m.)

A. March 25, 2026

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Commissioner Nilchian. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Goeppele and the motion carried unanimously.

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(9:27 p.m.)

12. ADJOURNMENT
(9:27 p.m.)

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

Chair Khanloo adjourned the meeting at 9:27 p.m.