

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
ANNUAL RETREAT MINUTES

November 8, 2023
6:30 p.m.

Steve Ballmer Building
12280 NE District Way, Bellevue, WA

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

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Emil King, Nick Whipple, Rebecca Horner, Department of Community Development; Matt McFarland, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Robertson

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER
(6:33 p.m.)

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. by Chair Bhargava who presided and who noted that the annual retreat provides the Commission the opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments of the past year.

2. ROLL CALL
(6:34 p.m.)

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

3. WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

A. Oral Communications
(6:35 p.m.)

Alex Tsimerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners Hitler jugen and not quite a hundred percent Nazi pigs. In 2023 nothing changed because the democrat mafia controls everything. Twenty thousand people voted democrat, only three thousand for Alex Tsimerman in the recent election. The mafia pre-selects democrats. The mafia has absolute power. The same was true in many years past. The same percentage voted for the German Nazis. Nothing will change and the problems will continue. Nothing can be done about it and the topics discussed will continue to be the same every year. The Commissioners were all dirty crooks and slaves who are not working for the people.

4. RETREAT DISCUSSIONS

A. Introductions/Welcoming Remarks/Accomplishments

Chair Bhargava welcomed all who were in attendance.

Chair Bhargava commented on not having been a member of the Commission for as long as some others, but remarked that during that time has found it amazing how many people have chosen to take their personal time to help Bellevue be a better place. For that a big thank-you is due to all the Commissioners and to the staff.

Councilmember Robertson noted having been appointed to the Planning Commission 21 years ago. The Commission works amazingly as a body, which is a testament to the professionalism and commitment each Commissioner brings to the table. It is also a testament to the staff. The work will continue and it will be intense at times, but it will always be important and it matters. The Commission gives the public the opportunity to be heard, and brings to the Council solid advice.

Over the past year a number of issues have been tackled by the Commission, among them the Wilburton plan. The Commission really dug into the topics and asked the difficult questions. The outcome will reverberate for decades to come. The Commission has been addressing and will continue to address the tree code in the coming year, a topic that is near and dear to the public and the Council.

The Commission has super successful in meeting the challenge of going from an in-person-only meeting format to virtual meetings and now to hybrid meetings. That has been a challenge for all of the city's boards and commissions, but the Planning Commission has done incredibly well in adjusting.

Chair Bhargava said the list of issues the Commission worked on over the last year is long. It includes microapartments, attached accessory dwelling units, increased development opportunities for affordable housing through C1 Phase 2, Wilburton, the tree code, and the Commission's role relative to the decision criteria and Comprehensive Plan amendments.

Assistant Director Emil King took a moment to reflect on the year, beginning with recognition of the great work done by Council liaison Robertson. The Commission put hours and careful consideration into its work over the year. Community Development Director Mike Kattermann, who was unable to attend the meeting, also wanted to commend the Commission on its great work.

Comprehensive Planning Manager Thara Johnson allowed that 2023 was a very intense year for the Commission and noted that there is a lot more work ahead in 2024. There was during the year a significant amount of public engagement, particularly around the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and the Wilburton Study Area. Through it all, the Commission welcomed the public comments.

Chair Bhargava noted having welcomed Commissioner Khanloo to the Commission during the past year. Additionally, Commissioner Malakoutian was successful in a bid to serve as a member of the City Council.

Speaking about Councilmember Robertson, Chair Bhargava recognized the Councilmember's 20 years of service to the city, including 14 years on the Council six years as a member of the

Planning Commission. Councilmember Robertson has served as the liaison to the Commission and has represented the city regionally on a number of important planning bodies.

Commissioner Cálad took a moment to express appreciation to Councilmember Robertson for the appointment to the Commission, and to the residents of the city for helping the Commission to understand the issues. It is a privilege to be a member of the Commission.

Commissioner Malakoutian also thanked Councilmember Robertson who always serves as a role model for all Councilmembers in terms of knowledge and experience.

Vice Chair Goepple thanked Commissioner Malakoutian for evoking a spirit of generosity in welcoming new members to the Commission. Councilmember Robertson's selfless service to the city was also acknowledged.

Commissioner Ferris noted appreciation for the knowledge and wisdom shared by Councilmember Robertson with the Commission.

Commissioner Khanloo thanked the Commissioners and the staff for the experience of being part of the Commission. Councilmember Robertson was thanked for being the north star and for always inspiring.

Commissioner Brown thanked Councilmember Robertson for untiring service to Bellevue which has truly shaped the city for the better.

B. Commission Recognition

Chair Bhargava congratulated Commissioner Malakoutian on being elected to the City Council. Appointed to the Commission in 2017, and having served as Chair from 2021-2022, Commissioner Malakoutian was involved in a number of important initiatives, including the Grand Connection, transit oriented development mixed use, East Main, the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, Wilburton vision implementation, annual Comprehensive Plan amendments, neighborhood plans for Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue, affordable housing initiatives, the Downtown code amendments, the multimodal transportation policies, curb management, and many others.

Commissioner Cálad commented that Commissioner Malakoutian has the capacity to truly understand the perspectives raised by others. That will be a great benefit in the role of Councilmember. Politics is a tough game, and it can either divide or unite. There is a clear need to keep the community united despite the challenges to come.

Commissioner Ferris said Commissioner Malakoutian was a great teacher relative to how to serve as chair of the Commission. Commissioner Malakoutian deals with people in a very respectful manner, always seeking to deeply understand where they are coming from.

Councilmember Robertson said running for elected office is quite an undertaking. Commissioner Malakoutian will be a great Councilmember. There is a large adjustment required in going from the Commission, where the work is focused on deep dives, to becoming a Councilmember where the focus turns to the viewpoint of everyone.

Commissioner Brown said the city's future could not be in better hands than Commissioner Malakoutian's, who is bright, curious, compassionate and empathetic.

Commissioner Khanloo noted wanting to be a member of the Commission after graduating from Bellevue Essentials. In conversations with Commissioner Malakoutian, much was learned about how the Commission operates. It is a good thing that Commissioner Malakoutian will go forward in having an impact on the city.

Emil King said it has been great having Commissioner Malakoutian on the Commission. It is always a good thing when someone from the Planning Commission is elected to the City Council because of the insights they bring to the table.

Vice Chair Goeppelle voiced appreciation for the passion Commissioner Malakoutian brings to the issues faced by the Commission. There are no doubts that Commissioner Malakoutian will do great things on the Council.

Chair Bhargava agreed with the previous statements and called on Commissioner Malakoutian to truly represent the Planning Commission as a member of the Council.

Commissioner Malakoutian thanked everyone for their comments and encouragement.

C. Icebreaker

Thara Johnson noted that prior to the meeting each Commissioner and staff member had been asked to write down five interesting facts about themselves. The facts were read aloud and the Commissioners were instructed to determine who the facts belong to and to mark their bingo cards accordingly.

****BREAK****
(7:48 p.m.)

D. Commission Perspectives – Not Discussed

E. Bellevue's History and Key Planning Milestones (7:54 p.m.)

Emil King noted that the area occupied by the city of Bellevue was part of the ancestral lands of the Coast Salish people, a territory that spanned from Renton to Seattle and across the Eastside. The 1880s and 1890 saw a lot of mining and homesteading in the area. Places like Coal Creek had a lot of mines, and in fact development of those areas requires knowing where the mines were. At the time the Wilburton area was heavily forested and saw a lot of logging activity. The Wilburton trestle was built to facilitate that activity. The alien land law that was put into effect prevented immigrants from China and Japan from owning land in the area.

In the Meydenbauer Bay area there was a school built in the late 1800s. The Meydenbauer Bay dock was built around 1913 and the bay was home to whaling ships. In 1917 construction of the locks and the ship canal in Seattle necessitated the lowering of the water level in Lake Washington by nine feet. What is now the Richards Road area and Mercer Slough was at the time all under water. Lowering the lake level created a lot more land, but some of the historic water issues in the area are still evident.

Bellevue has a strong Japanese American history that traces back to farming that stretched from the early 1900s into the 1940s. The pre-WWII farms were located in the points communities and

in parts of Wilburton, BelRed and the Downtown. The families worked on fruit and produce farms and they were prominent members of the community.

The Lacey V. Murrow/I-90 floating bridge opened in 1940, linking the Eastside to Seattle and other parts without having to travel by boat or by going the long way around the lake. The bombing of Pearl Harbor brought America into WWII, and more than 300 local Japanese American families were sent to internment camps. Bellevue Square opened in 1946, about the same time the Chamber of Commerce was formed. The first arts and crafts fair was held in 1947.

At the time of incorporation in 1953, the city had a population of less than 6000. Currently there are close to 155,000 residents and roughly the same number of jobs. Bellevue began as a bedroom community with far more residents than jobs, but in the late 1980s and into the 1990s the number of jobs passed the population and the city became a job center for the Eastside. Over the years as the population grew, a large contributing factor was annexation. The incorporated part of the city in 1953 covered only 4.5 square miles; now in 2023 it covers 33.4 square miles owing to a total of 147 annexations. Factoria and Eastgate are relatively new parts of the city.

Councilmember Robertson said when the Eastgate area was annexed it was a hundred percent residential. There were some 5200 residents and the cost to the city budget was a negative of about a million dollars annually because residential areas do not pay for public services. It is the commercial areas that pay more, which is why having a mix of uses in the city is so important. Twenty percent of the city's total sale tax revenues comes from the sale of autos.

Emil King noted that following incorporation in 1953, the first ordinance approved by the City Council established the Planning Commission. Highway 2A, the precursor to I-405, opened in 1956. Also in the 1950s, the city's first Comprehensive Plan was approved; landscaping was required in commercial districts, which set the foundation for the city's park-like setting; Safeway build its distribution center in the Midlakes area; and the Lake Hills area was developed and marketed as gracious living just over the lake.

In the 1960s, Overlake hospital opened, as did the Crossroads Shopping Center and Bellevue Community College. The SR-520 Evergreen Point floating bridge opened, and Coca Cola built a bottling plant in the Midlakes area. The PACCAR building in the Downtown was the tallest building at the time at 13 stories. The countywide Forward Thrust and local bond funds set the stage for the notion of Bellevue as a city in a park.

There were some major revisions made to the Comprehensive Plan in the 1970s. Growth was focused in commercial and multifamily areas. Factoria Mall opened during the decade, as did the Bellevue Art Museum, which was first located in Bellevue Square. The Central Business District subarea plan was adopted in 1979.

During the 1980s land was donated for the development of the Bellevue Botanical Garden. The first Downtown zoning was established in 1981 and it was very forward-looking. The Bellevue School District sold the Downtown Park site to the city, and the Lake to Lake trail system was established. Also in the 1980s, new programs were developed, including transportation demand management, the Neighborhood Enhancement Program, and the Neighborhood Traffic Control Program. The city's role in human services also expanded.

The region started getting involved in more planning in the 1990s. The Countywide Planning Policies concentrated growth in Urban Centers. Bellevue raised the height cap in the Downtown to 450 feet. The new Bellevue Regional Library opened in the Downtown, and the city's first

Diversity Action Plan was adopted. Additionally, A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH) was formed, and Mini-City Hall opened in Crossroads.

The 2000s saw advances in planning that influenced the work of the Commission. Things like the Critical Areas Ordinance was developed based on the best available science standard. The Downtown Implementation Plan was adopted, and the city launched the first Environmental Stewardship Initiative. The BelRed subarea plan was adopted, and planning began for East Link light rail.

During the 2010s the Meydenbauer Bay Park plan was adopted. The Lake Hills shopping center redevelopment occurred which included a new library. The East Link light rail funding and collaborative design agreement was signed. The original Spring District master plan was adopted in 2012, and the Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2015. The Affordable Housing Strategy was adopted in 2017, as was the Downtown Livability code. The Downtown Park and Inspiration Playground was completed in 2018.

Three years into the 2020s, the Grand Connection code has been adopted, and Eastrail is moving forward with implementation. There has been a focus on the Affordable Housing Strategy, adoption of the Economic Development Plan, and the Environmental Stewardship Plan. Bellevue population and employment levels have each passed the 150,000 mark, and a permanent men's shelter has been opened. The opening of Eastrail is imminent, and work is underway on the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update.

F. Looking Forward – Strategy Initiatives & Development Trends and Major Project Updates
(8:21 p.m.)

Thara Johnson informed the Commissioners that the Puget Sound Regional Council will be working towards implementation of Vision 2050. There has been and will continue to be a focus on affordable housing as part of the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update. The city has received funding from the Department of Commerce for more work on the missing middle housing, specifically implementation of HB-1110 and HB-1337. Staff and the city's lobbyist are also working on upcoming legislation on the issues of affordable housing and homelessness.

With regard to upcoming Land Use Code amendments to be addressed in 2024, Thara Johnson mentioned implementation of the ADU requirements under HB-1337 and the requirements of HB-1110. Development Services staff are working on affordable housing opportunities, including FAR increases. There is additional ongoing work relative to affordable housing, including the Housing Stability Program. A lot of progress has been made relative to the multifamily tax exemption program, and there is continued interest in it. Affordable housing at the regional level will also be discussed in the coming year. A number of NextRight work actions are in the queue for 2024, including strengthening existing and creating new partnerships and relationships. Work on the Wilburton Vision Implementation will continue with the intent of having both the policies and Land Use Code changes adopted by mid 2024. The work will include working with consultants on evaluating the opportunities for sustainability, and looking at the Economic and Urban Design analysis that is part of the code amendment work.

BelRed is part of the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and the work on policy changes will continue to move forward, including land use map density increases. The Environmental Stewardship Initiative program has been beefed up with a lot of staff to facilitate moving ahead with implementation efforts. There will be a focus on the Wilburton sustainable district

opportunity assessment and planning; electric vehicle roadmap and infrastructure; and climate resilience, the Energy Smart Eastside program. The city continues to be active in applying for federal and state grants to implement various climate actions.

Development Services director Rebecca Horner noted having worked with local governments for the last 25 years and stressed how important the work of the Planning Commission is to the effectiveness of elected officials. The Code and Policy division of Development Services was recently restructured to include an assistant director, and the position was awarded to Nick Whipple. The division is critical to the department and works closely with the Commission and helps to facilitate the work of the City Council.

Continuing, Rebecca Horner noted that the city has been blessed with a strong development cycle over the last ten years. That has made it challenging for the department to process all of the permits. A reduction in the permitting has recently been observed, which will help the department focus on process improvements. Given all the projects in the queue, there are strong demands for inspections. The field is competitive and it is challenging to maintain the needed staffing levels.

Major projects in terms of square footage account for a large percentage of the department's budget. As an enterprise fund, the monies collected are used to operate the services. A slowdown of major projects is anticipated in the immediate future, due to factors such as current interest rates.

Commissioner Malakoutian asked about the process improvements. Rebecca Horner one of the things identified was meeting with customers individually rather than as a group. The Bellevue Development Committee was formed and is open to anyone wanting to attend. The committee focuses specifically on identifying improvements identified by working directly with contractors, architects and contracting associations. Processing improvements were already being given focus in terms of how permits are processed, and making sure to have appropriate staffing contracts with consultants to manage the workload flows. The goal is to meet the timelines that are set by identifying process changes that can help reduce the review timelines. Consolidated permitting will help a lot. The Bellevue Development Committee also provides an avenue for providing training for customers to help them help themselves. The development activity page on the city's website lists all of the major projects.

G. Summary and Closing Remarks (8:42 p.m.)

Chair Bhargava thanked the Commissioners for their input and the staff for their presentations.

5. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS (8:43 p.m.)

Betsi Hummer, 14541 SE 26th Street, thanked Rebecca Horner for the invitation to become a part of the Bellevue Development Committee. The Commissioners were urged to pay close attention to the community to make sure the decisions made will work for everyone. Councilmember Robertson was thanked for a consistent, unwavering example of how to be a public servant, for always being completely engaged in the process, for never giving up or giving in, for always taking the historic, current and future views, and for always remembering the neighborhoods.

6. ADJOURNMENT
(8:47 p.m.)

Chair Bhargava adjourned the meeting at 8:47 p.m.