



# Bellevue Planning Commission

December 13, 2023

## PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION ITEM

### SUBJECT

BelRed Look Forward: Overview of Policy Changes Related to Land Use, Housing and Urban Form and Cultural and Community Connections including Transportation in the BelRed Subarea Plan.

### STAFF CONTACTS

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### POLICY ISSUES

As part of Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, the BelRed Look Forward planning initiative will amend the existing BelRed Subarea Plan and the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map. These amendments will consider how BelRed's future is a key component in implementing the citywide growth strategy for housing and jobs for the next 20 years.

In this study session, staff will share preliminary key policy moves related to *Land Use, Housing and Urban Form* and *Cultural and Community Connections* including Transportation within BelRed.

This study session is one of a series of Planning Commission study sessions intended to lead to a Planning Commission recommendation to the City Council for a Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA).

### DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

**ACTION**



**DIRECTION**



**INFORMATION ONLY**



### BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

#### *Planning Commission Questions and Feedback*

The first Planning Commission study session on key policy moves for BelRed held on September 27 focused on *Open Space and Natural Systems*. For each of the key policy moves discussed, staff received the following questions and direction from the Commission to consider:

#### *PARKS AND OPEN SPACE EXPANSION*

- Commissioners asked about the City's open space target for BelRed, and whether having more equitable access to parks across the city was a City goal.

The Parks and Open Space System Plan is a functional plan which implements the goals and policies contained within the Parks Element of the Comprehensive Plan. A primary goal of the City's [Parks and Open Space System Plan](#) is to create a geographically and equitably dispersed system of park and recreation facilities that are within walking distance of all Bellevue residents. This is a citywide goal and will be reflected in Volume 1 of the Comprehensive Plan. An analysis of "Walkable Access Service Area,"

measuring the percentage of households within 1/3 mile of a park or trail access point, found that the neighborhoods of Factoria (10 percent), BelRed (32 percent), Newport (39 percent), and Wilburton (40 percent) were ranked the lowest of all Bellevue Neighborhood Areas as they had the largest gaps in access. These neighborhood areas, plus six others, displayed deficiencies significant enough to prioritize the acquisition and development of new neighborhood park sites. An extensive new system of neighborhood and community parks, restored natural areas, and trail systems is envisioned for BelRed as shown in both the BelRed Subarea Plan Figure S-BR.3, Tables 2 and 3, and the [BelRed Park, Trail and Open Space System Plan](#).

Mechanisms for funding the acquisition and improvement of parks, trails and open space within BelRed need to be of sufficient strength to match the City's robust goals for BelRed and achieve the vision of a comprehensive and connected park, trail and open space system. To date, existing funding mechanisms have failed to keep pace with rising land values resulting in few park acquisitions and/or improvements. Exploring new funding mechanisms that remain robust over time could help close this gap resulting in greater funding support to achieve the City's park, trail and open space goals for BelRed and thereby increase the percentage of BelRed households within 1/3 mile of a park or trail access point.

- Commissioners also noted that collaboration and partnerships with private development are critical to achieving the City's park and environmental goals.

#### *SURFACE AND STORMWATER PLANNING*

- Commissioners requested more information about how the City's critical area buffers and building setback distances are determined.

Surface water, or streams, are regulated by the City's critical areas ordinance found in [Part 20.25H](#) of Bellevue's Land Use Code. Stream buffers and structure setbacks are established in section [20.25H.035](#). As noted in the Washington State Department of Commerce's [Critical Areas Handbook](#), [RCW 36.70A.172\(1\)](#) requires counties and cities to include the best available science in developing policies and development regulations to protect the functions and values of critical areas. During the City's 2005 Critical Areas Update, a review of Best Available Science (BAS) was conducted including a specific review of BAS related to streams.

Updates to Bellevue's Critical Areas Ordinance are not part of the Planning Commission's legislative work program in 2023 or 2024. However, updates to the BelRed Land Use Code, including regulations related to impervious surface and lot coverage calculations that exclude critical areas could be considered during the Land Use Code Amendment process.

- Commissioners also expressed a desire to see development preserve and protect natural features wherever possible versus pay a fee-in-lieu.

#### *CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE*

- Commissioners asked about the amount of existing tree canopy in BelRed.

The City of Bellevue's recent [2021 Tree Canopy Assessment](#) published in 2023 found that with 14 percent coverage, BelRed ranked 15 out of Bellevue's 16 neighborhood areas for having one of the lowest percentages of tree canopy coverage (only Downtown Bellevue was lower with 10 percent tree canopy coverage). It was also noted that between 2011 and 2021, BelRed witnessed a two acre decrease in tree canopy, while there was, however, an increase of three acres of tree canopy between 2019 and 2021.

Noting that trees can play a large role in improving public health by improving air quality, reducing temperatures, and addressing climate change, the most-recent Tree Canopy Assessment recommended

considering socio-economic factors and environmental justice considerations in addition to low canopy coverage when identifying areas with the greatest need for canopy expansion. The report also noted that the City could acquire parcels for public use as part of redeveloped neighborhoods to be used as carbon sinks to address community access to nature, climate, human health, and equity.

The Assessment report also analyzed tree canopy along stream corridors noting that trees planted in these areas can protect water quality by mitigating storm-water runoff that may otherwise carry unhealthy pollutants (such as nitrogen, phosphorous, and suspended sediment) into surface water bodies. Additionally, trees planted along streams provide shade, which in turn reduces water temperature to protect the aquatic ecosystem of endemic fish and reptile species. The Assessment report noted that to comply with the recommendations of the Shoreline Management Act, Bellevue should seek to increase its tree canopy coverage along water bodies to nearly 100 percent to protect its natural resources for future generations.

The Assessment report listed a suggested urban tree canopy goal for commercial and mixed use areas based on the best practice recommendation from the American Forests 2007 Tree Canopy Assessment report of 25 percent tree canopy coverage. However, it was noted that further analysis of goals is needed to determine relevance for Bellevue in terms of community character, feasibility, and desirability.

- Commissioners also noted that incentives must be large enough to motivate provision of amenities such as green building.

#### *HOLISTIC AND HIGH PERFORMANCE IMPLEMENTATION*

- Commissioners recommended the City look for ways to utilize new technologies to achieve more with less.
- Commissioners agreed the City must maximize multiple objectives; yet they also noted it is important to recognize tradeoffs and determine our priorities.

#### *Relationship to Environmental Review*

The Planning Commission recommended a Preferred Alternative for study in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) that was reviewed by City Council. The FEIS will expand on and refine the work to date to inform the Planning Commission's recommended growth strategy in the spring, including policies and land use designations for the BelRed Subarea.

#### **POLICY UPDATE PROGRESS**

This study session focuses on preliminary policy updates related to *Land Use, Housing and Urban Form* and *Cultural and Community Connections* within the BelRed Subarea Plan (Attachment A). This includes policy changes in support of Land Use, Housing, Urban Design, Arts and Culture and Transportation goals.

#### *LAND USE, HOUSING AND URBAN FORM*

##### ***Land Use***

The land use vision for BelRed articulated in the BelRed Subarea Plan includes:

- *A thriving economy: Bel-Red will be home to major employers, types of businesses and employment sectors unique to this part of Bellevue, and services that are important to the local community.*
- *Vibrant, diverse and walkable neighborhoods: Bel-Red will contain a broad range of housing types to meet the needs of a diverse population of varied income levels. Neighborhoods will have*

*a pedestrian friendly and walkable character, with convenient access to shopping, jobs, and community amenities, and will also be well connected to the larger city and region.*

Proposed policy amendments provide additional guidance to cultivate a unique economic niche for BelRed and to support development of creative mixed use districts. Proposed policy updates related to neighborhood districts call for supporting business clusters within different centers and remove specific language in the subarea plan related to height and floor area ratio (FAR).

Updates also support provision of a range of diverse residential and supportive uses within each neighborhood district to create welcoming and inclusive neighborhoods and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Finally, proposed policy updates create greater capacity for housing than what exists today, in addition to increased capacity for office, retail, and medical office development. Proposed updates to the BelRed Land Use Plan map extend the geographic extent of nodal land use designations, increase maximum heights and FAR in proximity to light rail, and increase the amount of area designated with a residential emphasis.

Reclassifying the relationship between land use designations and zoning districts is also being considered. Discussion on future land use designations and policies will continue after the FEIS publication. Policy moves being brought forward today are high-level policy guidance that could apply under any of the growth alternatives studied as part of the EIS. The intent of all policy updates is to support subsequent implementation including amendments to the BelRed Land Use Code found in [Part 20.25D](#).

### **Housing**

Housing affordability is a key component of the BelRed Subarea Plan. As indicated in the vision statement above, BelRed will include a range of housing options across unit types and affordability levels. Proposed housing policy updates provide additional guidance on supporting a diverse and growing population within BelRed, and contributing to a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable community.

The Planning Commission recommended for further citywide study in the FEIS of both mandatory and voluntary affordable housing approaches. The FEIS will provide an opportunity to examine, at a citywide policy level, how mandatory affordable housing requirements compare to voluntary provisions when development potential is increased. Further discussion on affordable housing within BelRed will occur after publication of the FEIS.

### **Urban Form**

In addition to *walkable, mixed use neighborhoods*, the BelRed Subarea Plan envisions BelRed as having a unique sense of place that is different from Downtown in terms of its historic context, scale, and focus on the arts. Proposed policy updates work to strengthen BelRed's identity and build a strong sense of belonging to ensure everyone feels invited and inspired within BelRed.

## **CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS**

### **Arts, Culture and Creativity**

Staff propose an expansion to the BelRed vision statement related to arts and culture, calling for BelRed to be a unique artistic and creative destination that provides a one-of-a-kind cultural experience, featuring a thriving arts and creative community. Proposed policy updates related to arts and culture include:

- Growing community capacity,
- Building greater recognition of the BelRed Arts District,

- Securing long-term affordable arts and cultural space; and
- Creating opportunities for diverse participation in arts, cultural, and creative experiences.

Growing community capacity to organize, lead, and mobilize resources would strengthen BelRed’s identity as a creative district and help achieve community objectives. Increasing the visibility of the arts would also help build regional recognition of the BelRed Arts District. Securing long-term affordable arts and cultural space would help maintain BelRed’s robust community of creative businesses and address displacement impacts from new development. Finally, creating opportunities for diverse participation in arts, cultural, and creative experiences would create a learning environment where everyone feels welcome and encouraged to convene, collaborate, and innovate.

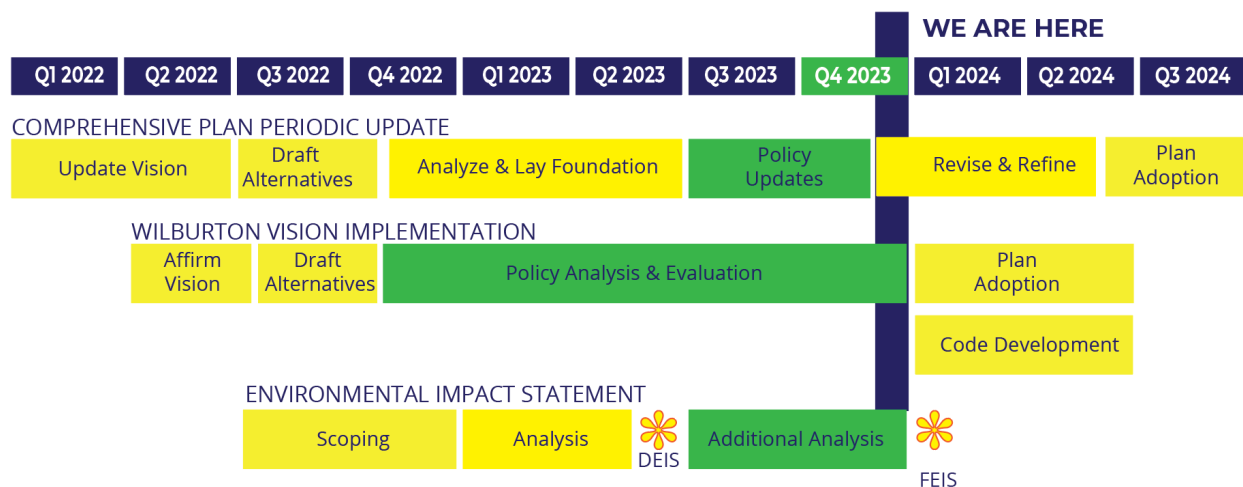
**Transportation**

The BelRed Subarea Plan envisions a multi-modal transportation system that provides convenient access and short travel times within and outside of the corridor. While several policies in the BelRed Subarea Plan will continue to provide support and direction for years to come, amendments to other policies are needed due to changed circumstances. Also, some policies are recommended to be repealed because the policy topic is covered elsewhere, or because the policy is no longer needed since the project or implementation strategy to which it refers is complete.

Attachments B and C contain the existing BelRed Subarea Plan transportation policies along with the staff recommendation to retain, to repeal, or to amend that policy, together with a brief explanation. On November 9, the Transportation Commission reviewed and provided input to draft transportation policy amendments that is reflected in the attachments. Their recommendation and transmittal will be shared with the Planning Commission in the spring.

**SCHEDULE & NEXT STEPS**

Following these study sessions, staff will provide opportunities for the community to learn about the work to date and provide feedback on key policy moves through Engaging Bellevue and an in-person Open House in January 2024. The full draft of BelRed Subarea Plan policy amendments that staff will bring to the Planning Commission in spring 2024 will be informed by several feedback streams, including board and commission direction, community input, and the FEIS analysis (the FEIS for the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update is targeted for release in Q1 2024).



**ATTACHMENTS**

- A. The BelRed Subarea Plan

- B. Preliminary Staff Recommendations for Transportation Policy Amendments in the BelRed Subarea Plan Informed by the Transportation Commission (Strike underline version)
- C. Preliminary Staff Recommendations for Transportation Policy Amendments in the BelRed Subarea Plan Informed by the Transportation Commission (Clean version)