

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES

February 11, 2026
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Khanloo, Vice Chair Lu, Commissioners Ferris, Goepple, Kennedy, Nilchian

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Villaveces

STAFF PRESENT: Kate Nesse, Thara Johnson, Teun Deuling, Community Development Department; Matt McFarland, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Bhargava

GUEST SPEAKERS: Liz Underwood-Bultmann, Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC)

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 Commissioner Villaveces.

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

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

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

Councilmember Bhargava reported that the Council at its February 10 meeting received an informational update on the economic development strategy and the vision. The roadmap for the strategy contains more than 60 economic development strategies and action items to be executed over the course of the next year or two. OpenAI, Databricks and other companies have come to Bellevue and they will be taking over office space the size of Lincoln Square South.

Councilmember Bhargava stated that the Council also reviewed the Human Services Commission's budget allocation proposals. The approach to be taken by the Commission will differ from past years in that the allocations will be made by category using specific percentages. The Council zeroed in on use of the term "linguistically and culturally sensitive services" to which about 24 percent of the total budget is to be allocated. The focus was on whether the allocations should be to for and by agencies within the city that have the same cultural and linguistic heritage.

Also discussed was the Interim Official Control (IOC) for Old Main in Downtown Bellevue. The Council did approve adoption of an IOC which means that for the next six months it will be mandatory for new development to maintain the character, look and feel of the area. Certain new design guidelines were included in the adopted IOC.

Councilmember Bhargava said the Council also received from staff a presentation focused on land use issues to be addressed over the next two years.

5. STAFF REPORTS
(6:35 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

A. Written Communications
(6:38 p.m.)

Dr. Kate Nesse indicated that all written communications received since publication of the packet had been forwarded to the Commissioners.

B. Oral Communications – None
(6:39 p.m.)

7. PUBLIC HEARING
(6:39 p.m.)

A. Threshold Review Public Hearing: 2026 Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendment – Evans Plaza

A motion to open the public hearing was made by Commissioner Kennedy. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ferris and the motion carried unanimously.

Planning Director Thara Johnson said the Comprehensive Plan is the city's guiding policy and foundational document that looks over a 20-year planning horizon. Under the Growth Management Act, the Comprehensive Plan can only be amended once per year. The proposed Evans Plaza Comprehensive Plan amendment was privately submitted as part of the 2026 cycle. The Commission was asked to conduct a public hearing on the proposal to receive public testimony, and then to make a recommendation to City Council to include the application as part of the 2026 work program.

Senior Planner Teun Deuling stated that the annual amendment process for privately initiated amendments consists of two steps, beginning with Threshold Review where the role of the Planning Commission is to determine whether a proposed amendment should be included in the annual work program. The second step involves a more detailed review (Final Review) of the proposal, but only if the Commission recommends inclusion and the City Council subsequently concurs. Following the Commission's public hearing and recommendation, the City Council holds a study session to review and act upon the recommendation.

The Threshold Review criteria are established in the Land Use Code. The criteria guide whether a proposed amendment should be included in the annual Comprehensive Plan amendment work program. The criteria include determining whether the proposal is appropriately addressed through the Comprehensive Plan; confirming that a similar application has not been submitted within the previous three years; ensuring that the proposal does not raise policy issues better addressed outside the Comprehensive Plan amendment process; and confirming that sufficient staff time and resources are available to study the proposal. Additional criteria include whether the amendment addresses significantly changed conditions as defined in the Land Use Code; whether the geographic scope appropriately includes similar or adjacent properties as previously discussed by the Commission; whether the proposal is consistent with Comprehensive Plan policies and the Growth Management Act; and whether the amendment is required by state law or court order, which in the case of the proposed Evans Plaza proposal it is not. It was noted that a full analysis of the criteria had been provided in the staff report which was distributed in advance of the public hearing.

Teun Deuling said the proposal is the only privately initiated Comprehensive Plan amendment submitted before the September 15, 2025 deadline for the 2026 cycle. Located in the Bridle Trails neighborhood area, the approximately ten-acre Evans Plaza site currently carries a General Commercial designation and is occupied by various commercial uses, including retail, restaurants, and services. The application proposes a Future Land Use Map amendment changing the designation from General Commercial to Lowrise 2 Mixed Use, which would allow for residential uses in addition to commercial activity, and permit development at a somewhat higher density within a low-scale mixed-use framework. One additional adjacent parcel of approximately one-half acre was added to the geographic scope at the Commission's direction during the January meeting. The proposed land use designation differs from the current designation not only in density but also by allowing housing as a permitted use. The Lowrise 2 Mixed Use land use designation was introduced as part of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan update and is already mapped at other Neighborhood Centers. The application concerns a Comprehensive Plan map change rather than a zoning change. Any implementing zoning classification is still under development through the Housing Opportunities in Mixed Use Areas Land Use Code amendment process, and therefore the proposal does not include a concurrent rezone; any zoning changes will occur separately if the Comprehensive Plan amendment is ultimately adopted.

Teun Deuling said the staff recommendation was to incorporate the Evans Plaza proposal into the 2026 Comprehensive Plan amendment work program, with the previously discussed expansion of the geographic scope. The proposal does not conflict with other ongoing work programs. Although the Great Neighborhoods program addresses neighborhood planning, Bridle Trails has not been scheduled for inclusion in that program and therefore the proposed amendment would not be addressed through that work program in a timely manner.

The proposal responds to significantly changed conditions affecting the site. Specifically,

changes in the Comprehensive Plan and the city's long-term growth strategy have created constraints on achieving the intended vision for neighborhood centers, including Pineview, within which the site is located. The existing Comprehensive Plan policies support the evolution of Neighborhood Centers into mixed-use areas with residential development alongside commercial uses to accommodate housing and employment growth. Because the current General Commercial designation does not allow residential use, the proposed amendment would better align the Future Land Use Map with the city's growth strategy and policy direction by enabling mixed-use development and higher-density residential opportunities in this Neighborhood Center.

The expanded geographic scope was previously discussed. The proposed amendment is consistent with general Comprehensive Plan policies, the Countywide Planning Policies, and the Growth Management Act.

Teun Deuling summarized the public engagement and the comments received to date. It was stated that the Notice of Application was published at the end of 2025, and notice of the public hearing was issued at least fourteen days in advance of the scheduled hearing. Staff attended a Bridle Trails Community Club meeting in late January at which there were approximately 50 participants who were provided with an overview of the amendment process and who engaged in a question-and-answer session. A subsequent follow-up meeting with several community club members was held to address additional inquiries.

As of the start of the public hearing, nine written comments had been received, including submissions from the applicant, the Bridle Trails Community Club, several Bridle Trails residents, and the King County Wastewater Treatment Division. King County indicated that its concerns would be more appropriately addressed at a later stage when building permit applications are filed but requested to remain informed due to wastewater infrastructure near the site. The comments from the Bridle Trails Community Club and several individual residents generally opposed advancing the proposal beyond Threshold Review, citing concerns about consistency with Comprehensive Plan goals and the Threshold Review criteria.

Teun Deuling explained that following the public hearing and the Commission's recommendation, the City Council would review the recommendation at a study session that is tentatively scheduled for April. Any subsequent detailed review will occur later in the year if the proposal proceeds to the final review phase.

Chair Khanloo invited Jessie Clawson with McCullough Hill, Steve Malsam and Makenzie Blackburn with Evans Wakefield to the table to present the applicant's proposal.

Steve Malsam explained that the Evans Plaza property has been owned by the same family for more than 60 years and has operated as a retail center since the late 1960s. Evans Wakefield has over the last three decades completed numerous mid-rise mixed-use developments in the region, including projects in Mill Creek, Alderwood, and Marysville. While there are currently no immediate plans to redevelop Evans Plaza into a mixed-use project, the purpose of the proposed Comprehensive Plan amendment is to allow for long-term planning flexibility as the surrounding BelRed corridor continues to change. There has been significant development activity, including an increase in the number of mixed-use projects, in nearby areas. Evans Plaza shares characteristics with other properties that are currently being redeveloped. The requested amendment would allow for consideration of a residential component in the future to complement the existing commercial uses and to better align with evolving conditions in the area.

Makenzie Blackburn noted that there have been changes in the area since the most recent Comprehensive Plan update in 2024, and those significantly changed conditions justify consideration of the amendment. The property functions as an aging commercial center that is facing an increasingly challenging retail environment, with competition from large regional retail centers, online commerce, and shifting consumer patterns. Many leases at the site are expected to expire in the coming years, and a mixed-use designation offers a way to sustain commercial activity while allowing for residential development to support the overall economic viability. The recent completion of nearby light rail stations is a major change relative to accessibility that enhances the site's suitability for mixed-use development. Increased access to transit, housing demand within Bellevue, and proximity to existing commercial services are factors that together strengthen the case for a mixed-use future. Although technically included within the Bridle Trails neighborhood boundary, the site sits at the southern edge and is physically separated from most single-family residential areas by surrounding commercial development and proximity to the BelRed corridor. The site's context is more closely aligned with nearby commercial and mixed-use areas than with the residential core of Bridle Trails. Any potential impacts will be evaluated in detail if the amendment advances to the next stage.

Jessie Clawson emphasized that the Commission's decision in the Threshold Review phase concerns only whether the proposal meets the Threshold Review criteria for further study, not whether the amendment should ultimately be adopted. Substantive issues such as traffic, infrastructure capacity, and broader policy consistency will be addressed if the proposal proceeds to the next phase. Outreach to the Bridle Trails community has begun and the applicant remains committed to continued dialogue with residents and stakeholders should the amendment advance.

Chair Khanloo invited the public to comment.

Marcia Murray expressed appreciation for the staff outreach and acknowledged support for the existence of a process allowing property owners to request exceptions to the Comprehensive Plan. General support was voiced for increased housing density in Bellevue, but concerns were raised about granting exceptions to a recently adopted Comprehensive Plan that was developed through a detailed and thoughtful process. Approving an exception for the Evans Plaza site could encourage similar requests from other property owners, potentially creating broader implications for planning consistency and infrastructure capacity. Particular concern was expressed regarding traffic conditions on nearby streets, which were described as already congested. The Commission was urged to give careful consideration to cumulative impacts and infrastructure planning before allowing additional density. While affirming support for affordable housing and thoughtful growth, the importance of maintaining a coherent long-range plan and ensuring that infrastructure improvements keep pace with development was emphasized.

Ingrid Ensing, long-term Bridle Trails resident, offered comments that were intended to address redevelopment in a broader sense rather than the technical Threshold Review criteria. The speaker stressed the importance of stable, trust-based communities and described the Comprehensive Plan as a public-facing agreement between the city and residents regarding where and how development will occur. From that perspective, a site-specific amendment for Evans Plaza undermines that trust as a departure from the expectations set through the city's adopted planning work. Approving a change for Evans Plaza could establish precedent for similar nearby properties, especially the multiple parcels of comparable size that exist in the vicinity, and the residential neighborhoods that are immediately adjacent. Concern was expressed that such a change could effectively shift the boundary between the BelRed corridor

and Bridle Trails despite the substantial development capacity already planned within BelRed, including thousands of units that will be built or that are in progress. The speaker noted that Bridle Trails is not currently included in the Great Neighborhoods program and conveyed a sense that the neighborhood lacks sufficient planning attention or advocacy within that framework. While acknowledging that the property owner has a right to develop the site, the speaker urged that any development should remain consistent with the surrounding context.

Pamela Johnston, a Bridle Trails resident, emphasized the role Evans Plaza plays as a key commercial center serving the neighborhood. The site provides essential services, including the only grocery option within Bridle Trails, as well as affordable retail space. Bridle Trails already includes a mix of housing types, including condominiums and multifamily housing, and the needs of the neighborhood should be evaluated comprehensively before changing the land use designation for the Evans Plaza site. A concern was expressed that General Commercial designations have become increasingly limited due to prior conversions to mixed-use, and the suggestion was made that preserving commercial capacity, particularly along the SR-520 corridor, remains important. Time should be allowed for the recently adopted Comprehensive Plan to be implemented and for the Neighborhood Center planning effort associated with PineView to proceed in a more deliberate, plan-based manner. It is questionable that conditions have materially changed since adoption of the Comprehensive Plan to justify the amendment. A routine lease turnover is not a sufficient basis for altering the Comprehensive Plan. There are perceived limitations in transit access for the area, and walking distances to transportation are substantial.

Norm Hansen, a long-time resident who previously served as a member of a Community Advisory Committee associated with BelRed, described the long-standing General Commercial zoning pattern north of SR-520 and near NE 20th Street for which the historic community expectations have included limiting development to a two-story scale in that area. With regard to the Threshold Review criteria, it was argued that the proposal does not demonstrate significantly changed conditions because the surrounding properties to the north, south, east, and west have largely remained unchanged for many years. Adjacent areas remain as General Commercial and they are generally limited in height. Concern was expressed about the uncertainty regarding the potential building heights, per the HOMA LUCA, given that prior community discussions referenced a lower number of stories. The more recent references have suggested greater heights, which the speaker characterized as fluid and unclear. It was asserted that the recently approved Comprehensive Plan did not change the land use designation for Evans Plaza, and the Bridle Trails subarea plan has not been updated since the early 1990s. The city therefore lacks a current basis for determining neighborhood preferences. On that basis, the Commission should deny advancing the proposal beyond Threshold Review. City resources are limited and concerns have been expressed that allowing taller mixed-use development at Evans Plaza would effectively leapfrog the planned scale and sequence of development intended for BelRed where there is capacity for additional growth.

Loretta Lopez, also a Bridle Trails resident, focused on the community's difficulty in assessing the proposal due to the uncertainty regarding the scale of development that could result from the requested land use designation. While acknowledging staff's outreach and prior community presentations, key questions remain, particularly about how tall future buildings could be under zoning. Answering those questions is central to informed community engagement. Residents cannot meaningfully evaluate even the Threshold Review decision without a clearer explanation. The distinction between Threshold Review and the later merits review is confusing for many members of the public. It was argued that adequate notice and clarity are essential to building trust and ensuring participation. Notice is insufficient if residents are unaware that the potential

outcomes could include buildings of a substantially taller scale. The speaker questioned the practical meaning of the Lowrise 2 Mixed-Use designation as presented, stating that the terminology is not readily understandable to residents without a deeper familiarity with planning processes. The Commission was urged to pause the process and provide clearer notice and explanations before proceeding. Surrounding conditions have not materially changed, and the BelRed corridor retains significant planned capacity for higher-density development; the focus should remain there. The speaker allowed having reviewed the prior environmental documentation related to earlier planning efforts for the area.

Barbara Hughes referenced having submitted written comments. The Bridle Trails resident and nonprofit board member involved in a local weekly market described the importance of small commercial spaces such as Evans Plaza for emerging entrepreneurs seeking affordable storefront opportunities. Bellevue has few remaining locations where small businesses can transition from informal market settings to permanent retail space. Redevelopment into larger-scale mixed-use or residential structures could eliminate entry points for local enterprise. Drawing on personal family history with small business ownership, the speaker urged the Commission to consider the long-term economic ecosystems of small businesses in Bellevue and warned that redevelopment could reduce opportunities for new and modest-scale commercial ventures.

Warren Halverson, a long-time Bridle Trails resident with deep family ties to the neighborhood, described the area's character, including its semi-rural qualities, extensive trail systems, and proximity to regional employment centers, and emphasized that there is existing traffic congestion on key streets near Evans Plaza. The Comprehensive Plan was only recently completed, and the speaker questioned why a site-specific amendment of potentially precedent-setting significance was being considered so soon thereafter. Concern was expressed that allowing a Lowrise 2 Mixed-Use designation could introduce buildings of substantially greater height than the surrounding area and could establish a precedent for additional amendments affecting nearby parcels. The Commission was urged to carefully evaluate the Threshold Review criteria relative to appropriateness, neighborhood character, and available resources. The proposal does not meet those standards. There are comparable developments elsewhere in Bellevue where taller buildings are perceived as being out of scale with the surrounding areas. The Commissioners were encouraged to consider how the proposal would feel if applied within their own neighborhoods.

Patricia Hansen, a Bridle Trails resident for many years, spoke about the neighborhood's existing mix of housing types and described Evans Plaza as a valued commercial resource serving local needs. Concern was expressed that high-rise residential development could generate traffic volumes that exceed the capacity of nearby roads and intersections, particularly given the existing congestion and limited opportunity for roadway expansion. Also referenced were nearby properties that have been cleared for development but which remain vacant, and frustration was expressed that prior commercial services have been removed without replacement. The Commission was urged to deliberate carefully and to avoid abrupt decision-making. While modest commercial additions might be acceptable, large-scale residential development would not be beneficial to the community.

Gerald McCallister, a newer resident of the Bridle Trails area, echoed the concerns regarding transportation and access, noting the existing traffic congestion and limited public transit connectivity to Evans Plaza, and adding that the walk to light rail is lengthy and challenging. The city should evaluate enhanced transit connections, such as restored bus service or other transportation improvements, before advancing land use changes that could increase the traffic demand. The Commission was encouraged to conduct a more comprehensive evaluation of the

transportation infrastructure prior to approving the proposal.

Absent additional persons wanting to testify, a motion to close the public hearing was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Goepple and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Nilchian expressed appreciation for the public input and requested clarification from staff regarding how the proposed amendment site fits within the surrounding land use designations and zoning patterns. Teun Deuling responded by describing the site's context within the PineView Neighborhood Center, noting that parcels to the east currently carry a General Commercial designation, while areas further to the north transition to lower-density residential designations. Adjacent areas to the west and north include low-rise office mixed-use designations that permit a mix of uses, including housing, and the General Commercial designation extends south of SR-520 into the BelRed neighborhood area. The highway forms a boundary between the BelRed and Bridle Trails neighborhood areas.

Commissioner Goepple focused on the Threshold Review criterion concerning significantly changed conditions and expressed difficulty understanding how the standard had been met. According to the definition of the criterion in the Land Use Code, changes must be of sufficient magnitude to affect the Comprehensive Plan as an integrated whole. Commissioner Goepple noted that the Comprehensive Plan was approved in 2024 and questioned how the Evans Plaza site could meet this Threshold Review criterion without opening the door for similar claims by other property owners. Teun Deuling acknowledged the complexity of the definition and explained that the staff conclusion was based primarily on changes to the Comprehensive Plan text and growth strategy emphasizing mixed-use residential development within Neighborhood Centers. While many Neighborhood Centers received updated Future Land Use Map designations during the 2024 Comprehensive Plan update and are covered by updated zoning provisions per the subsequent Housing Opportunities in Mixed Use Areas (HOMA) LUCA work, the Evans Plaza site remains designated General Commercial, which creates an inconsistency between the broader policy direction and the Future Land Use Map. The proposed amendment could address the inconsistency by aligning the site with the plan's policy emphasis on accommodating residential growth in mixed-use neighborhood centers.

Commissioner Ferris asked if any redevelopment under a mixed-use designation would be required to include ground-floor commercial or office uses. Thara Johnson replied that the question ties in with the Commission's discussions relating to the HOMA initiative. If implemented, the regulations would include requirements for ground-floor retail or commercial uses, subject to final Council action on the code amendments.

Commissioner Kennedy sought clarification on the nature of the Threshold Review decision itself, specifically whether the Commission was being asked to evaluate a particular land use designation change or merely to determine whether the proposal warranted further study. Thara Johnson said the Commission's Threshold Review role is limited to determining if the proposal should advance to the 2026 CPA work program for full review. Determinations regarding the precise land use designation, building heights, and other development characteristics will occur during the Final Review phase, if the proposal proceeds. The significantly changed conditions criterion pertains to whether circumstances warrant reconsideration of the plan designation. It is not focused on specific development outcomes such as allowable building heights. It is true that the Bridle Trails subarea plan has not been updated for several decades, and it is also true that broader policy changes have occurred since then. The question before the Commission with regard to the criterion is whether or not the proposed amendment addresses significantly changed

conditions. The Threshold Review stage does not include a focus on resolving policy questions.

Vice Chair Lu asked about the geographic scope criterion and how similarly situated properties are evaluated and specifically sought clarification on whether the comparisons are made against the current or prior land use designations. Thara Johnson explained that the Future Land Use Map serves as the governing baseline for such analyses as it reflects the currently adopted policy. The General Commercial designation is listed on the Future Land Use Map. The Commission is not being asked to recommend a specific new designation at the threshold stage but rather is determining whether the proposal should proceed for further study and evaluation.

Chair Khanloo referred to the concerns voiced by members of the public regarding potentially setting a precedent should other General Commercial property owners seek similar amendments. Teun Deuling said such considerations would primarily be addressed during the Final Review phase where broader policy questions such as the appropriate land use designation and the role of General Commercial areas are evaluated comprehensively. Threshold Review does not resolve those policy questions but determines whether the proposal merits further analysis within the formal amendment process.

Commissioner Nilchian asked if other parcel owners seeking similar changes would need to demonstrate their own significantly changed conditions rather than relying on approval of the application before the Commission as justification. Thara Johnson confirmed that each future applicant would be required to independently satisfy the Threshold Review criteria, including demonstrating significantly changed conditions specific to their own property. They cannot rely solely on the approval of another site as precedent.

Commissioner Goepple reiterated a continuing uncertainty regarding whether the proposal satisfies the significantly changed conditions criterion. While expressing general policy support for additional housing and density, the Commissioner stated a concern that the rationale presented, namely broader policy goals to encourage housing in Neighborhood Centers, could apply broadly across the city and therefore effectively nullify the intent of the Threshold Review criterion. Further assistance was requested in understanding how the criterion could be interpreted as being met for the site in question without establishing an overly broad precedent. Supervising Civil Attorney Matt McFarland acknowledged that the central policy and factual question facing the Commission is whether the city's general policy direction encouraging housing, particularly in Neighborhood Centers, is sufficient to satisfy the significantly changed conditions criterion for the Evans Plaza site. The staff report outlines an analytical framework, but determining whether the Threshold Review criteria are met is ultimately a policy judgment for the Planning Commission. The decision before the Commission is limited to Threshold Review and if advanced the proposal will return for Final Review where the criterion of significantly changed conditions will again be evaluated. The Future Land Use Map of the Comprehensive Plan carries legal weight in guiding future zoning decisions. One uncertainty remaining is in regard to implementing the zoning because there are related Land Use Code amendments still under development. That uncertainty is another factor the Commission may consider in its deliberations, though it does not resolve the Threshold Review question.

Dr. Kate Nesse said the Commission is operating within a defined annual timeline for Comprehensive Plan amendments. The proposed amendment is tentatively scheduled for Council consideration for inclusion in the 2026 work program in April. Any delay in the Threshold Review decision would require adjustments to the schedule and could compress the timeframe available later in the year for Final Review and community engagement, as Comprehensive Plan amendments must be completed within the calendar year. An additional study session could be

scheduled, if necessary, but staff have already completed the Threshold Review analysis and would not have new information to present. Extending the Threshold Review deliberations would reduce the time available for the more substantive Final Review process should the proposal advance. Matt McFarland added that the significantly changed conditions criterion will also apply during final review, which means that the issue will not be foreclosed by advancing the proposal past Threshold Review.

Vice Chair Lu asked for a clearer outline of what the staff analysis will entail if the proposal advances beyond Threshold Review. Thara Johnson explained that a detailed environmental analysis will be required, including evaluation of traffic and other environmental impacts, and will need to review the Final Review criteria. The criteria include consideration of significantly changed conditions, consistency with Comprehensive Plan policies, and compliance with the Growth Management Act. Final Review can consider alternative land use designations beyond the designation proposed by the applicant; alternatives will be included in staff's overall analysis and recommendation.

Chair Khanloo asked what happens if the Commission elects not to advance the application beyond Threshold Review. Thara Johnson said in that case the Commission will forward to the Council a recommendation to deny advancement. If the Council concurs, under the code provisions, the applicant would generally be subject to a three-year waiting period before submitting another privately initiated Comprehensive Plan amendment for the same site.

****BREAK****

(8:10 p.m. to 8:16 p.m.)

Commissioner Kennedy asked staff and legal counsel to run through the justifications regarding significantly changed conditions from the perspective of both the applicant and the city. Teun Deuling explained that the applicant's rationale focuses on on-the-ground changes such as shifts in the retail environment and expiring leases, whereas the staff analysis emphasizes broader policy changes within the Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2024. The city's growth strategy now emphasizes mixed-use residential development within Neighborhood Centers. Unlike most other identified Neighborhood Centers, the PineView Neighborhood Center that contains the Evans Plaza site retains a General Commercial designation that does not readily allow residential uses. That is an inconsistency between policy direction and the Future Land Use Map, which the proposed amendment could address. The application's scope is limited to the parcels under consideration; any other property owner seeking similar changes would need to pursue separate amendment applications and satisfy all applicable criteria independently.

Matt McFarland added that broader policy questions about whether similar reasoning might apply to other parcels is relevant in the context of a city-initiated amendment or a larger geographic review, but the Commission's role in a privately initiated amendment is limited to evaluating the specific geographic area included in the application. For proposals that involve much larger areas, such as in city-initiated Comprehensive Plan amendments, there are requirements for much broader noticing and the public comments might be completely different.

A motion to recommend to the City Council that the proposed Evans Plaza Comprehensive Plan amendment passes Threshold Review on the basis that it meets the applicable decision criteria in the Land Use Code 20.30I was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Lu. The motion carried 4-2, with Vice Chair Lu and Commissioners Kennedy, Nilchian and Ferris voting for, and Chair Khanloo and Commissioner Goeppel voting against.

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

8. STUDY SESSION (8:27 p.m.)

A. VISION 2050 and Centers: Briefing on Regional Planning Context

Chair Khanloo noted that the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) as a regional planning body composed of local governments, ports, transit agencies, and tribal governments across King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. VISION 2050, which was adopted in 2020, establishes the region's overall growth strategy and informs local comprehensive plans.

Liz Underwood-Bultmann, a planner with the PSRC, said the organization serves as the region's metropolitan planning organization, in all serving an area of approximately 4.5 million people and 2.2 million jobs across 82 cities and towns, as well as numerous agencies and stakeholders. The PSRC's role is to coordinate planning among jurisdictions to ensure cohesive regional development under the framework of the Growth Management Act. The counties and the cities work together to establish growth targets and adopt comprehensive plans consistent with the Countywide Planning Policies. The PSRC also certifies local comprehensive plans and Countywide Planning Policies for consistency with the regional requirements, a process tied to eligibility for regional transportation funding. The intent is to encourage coordinated planning across jurisdictions.

Liz Underwood-Bultmann said the key themes in VISION 2050 include addressing regional housing affordability and housing choice; supporting a strong and inclusive economy; reducing greenhouse gas emissions and addressing climate change; maintaining environmental health and open space; and concentrating growth in centers and near transit. Central to the plan is preparation for the forecasted population and employment growth. The region is expected to reach approximately 54.8 million residents and 3.4 million jobs by 2050. Growth allocations are developed collaboratively with the member jurisdictions and are distributed among the counties and cities according to regional policy objectives. Metropolitan cities such as Bellevue and Seattle are expected to accommodate a significant share of the growth due to their infrastructure, employment base, and transit investments. Transit investments, particularly light rail expansions, play a major role in guiding growth strategies by encouraging development near high-capacity transit and reducing pressure on rural and outlying areas.

VISION 2050 is supported by various implementation plans, including the Regional Transportation Plan and the Regional Economic Strategy, both of which are federally required components of the regional planning framework. The Regional Transportation Plan identifies major infrastructure investments and funding strategies through 2050, while the Economic Strategy guides regional economic development priorities.

With regard to the Regional Centers Framework, Liz Underwood-Bultmann described it as a foundational element of the regional growth strategy. The framework identifies locations where growth is intended to be concentrated, including in 30 regional growth centers and in ten manufacturing and industrial centers. The regional growth centers include major downtowns and mixed-use areas such as Downtown Bellevue, while the manufacturing and industrial centers preserve land for industrial uses such as ports and industrial districts. The centers guide growth allocations, inform transit investment decisions, and serve as priority areas for federal transportation funding administered by the PSRC. The framework was formalized in 2018 to

establish clear criteria and expectations for the centers, many of which had been designated in earlier decades without consistent standards. The PSRC is currently reviewing designated centers to ensure they meet adopted criteria and remain aligned with the growth objectives.

Liz Underwood-Bultmann said the regional growth centers occupy a relatively small portion of the region's urban area, but they have absorbed a substantial share of the housing growth in recent years, which is a reflection of the successful implementation of long-term planning strategies. Centers are typically major employment hubs, and the regional strategy seeks to encourage additional housing development in those locations to create balanced mixed-use environments. The framework includes different types of centers, including metropolitan centers such as downtown Bellevue and urban growth centers such as Totem Lake, downtown Kirkland, and downtown Redmond, as well as numerous countywide centers like Factoria and Crossroads within Bellevue. While many neighborhood and local centers do not carry formal regional designations, they remain important components of local growth planning.

There are criteria used to designate regional centers. They include existing concentrations of jobs and housing; plans for significant future growth; access to high-quality transit; walkability; and evidence of local planning efforts supporting development and livability. Local planning engagement and community involvement are essential to successful center development.

Commissioner Nilchian asked for a general overview of the timeline associated with VISION 2050. Liz Underwood-Bultmann said VISION 2050 was adopted in 2020 and is expected to be updated around 2030. Work on the next update is likely to begin in 2027. The planning cycle is coordinated with local comprehensive plan updates to ensure that regional policies are in place in time to inform the next round of local updates, including Bellevue's anticipated 2034 Comprehensive Plan update.

Commissioner Goeppele asked about efforts at the regional and local levels to leverage federal programs and potential legislation to support housing development. Liz Underwood-Bultmann said the PSRC tracks federal and state legislation related to housing and transportation through its government relations staff and has developed a regional housing strategy to identify opportunities across all levels of government to support housing production and affordability. The PSRC's primary role is convening and coordinating. Implementation often occurs through local governments, housing authorities, and regional coalitions.

Thara Johnson added that Bellevue has both state and federal lobbyists and said the City Council establishes state legislative priorities each year. Staff monitor all legislative developments at both the state and federal levels and coordinate with intergovernmental efforts to pursue funding and policy opportunities in support of housing and other priorities.

Commissioner Ferris asked about the PSRC's role in funding allocations. Liz Underwood-Bultmann explained that as a federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization, the PSRC primarily allocates federal transportation funds received through the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration. The funds are distributed through periodic funding cycles in support of various transportation-related projects across the region, including targeted programs for rural and smaller jurisdictions. The PSRC's funding authority is largely limited to transportation investments rather than housing development.

Commissioner Ferris requested clarification regarding the distinction between metropolitan centers and urban growth centers within the regional framework. Liz Underwood-Bultmann explained that the differentiation reflects the scale and intensity of development. Metropolitan

centers, such as downtown Bellevue and downtown Seattle, are larger and denser and have distinct planning goals. Smaller urban growth centers include downtown Redmond and Totem Lake. While both types of centers function similarly in terms of eligibility for transportation funding and their role in accommodating growth, metropolitan centers generally represent the largest and most intensely developed areas in each county.

Vice Chair Lu asked how the regional population and employment growth forecasts are determined. Liz Underwood-Bultmann said the PSRC uses a regional macroeconomic forecasting model that considers factors such as regional economic attractiveness and national trends. The forecasts are cross-checked with projections from the Washington State Office of Financial Management to ensure consistency with statewide growth management planning assumptions. The forecasts are typically revisited about every five years rather than annually.

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
(8:47 p.m.)

A. January 14, 2026

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

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(8:48 p.m.)

12. ADJOURNMENT
(8:48 p.m.)

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

Chair Khanloo adjourned the meeting at 8:48 p.m.



Kate Nesse
Staff to Planning Commission

Date
March 26, 2026