

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

June 9, 2021
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Moolgavkar, Commissioners Bhargava, Brown, deVadoss, Ferris, Malakoutian, Morisseau

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Elizabeth de Regt, Gwen Rousseau, Department of Community Development

COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Barksdale

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 Moolgavkar who presided.

Chair Moolgavkar stated that the meeting was being held remotely via zoom in order to comply with the Governor's emergency order concerning the Open Public Meetings Act, which prohibits in-person meetings.

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

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

3a. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
(p.m.)

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

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3b. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

A motion to nominate Vice Chair Malakoutian to serve as chair was made by Chair Moolgavkar.

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Absent additional nominations, Vice Chair Malakoutian was unanimously elected to be the Chair.

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Chair Malakoutian took a moment to thank Commissioner Moolgavkar for her leadership and for clearly representing the voice of the public.

A motion to nominate Commissioner Ferris to serve as Vice Chair was made by Commissioner Morisseau.

A motion to nominate Commissioner Bhargava to serve as Vice Chair was made by Commissioner Ferris. Commissioner Bhargava declined the nomination.

Absent additional nominations, Commissioner Ferris was unanimously elected to serve as Vice Chair.

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS (6:36 p.m.)

Councilmember Barksdale reported that the northeast gateway to Downtown Park is open. He recommended the Commissioners should check it out.

A. Recognition and Acknowledgement for Commissioner John deVadoss

Chair Malakoutian thanked Commissioner deVadoss for his service as a member of the Commission. He noted that Commissioner deVadoss was appointed to the Commission in December 2013 and that during his tenure he served as both Vice Chair and Chair. The list of issues Commissioner deVadoss was involved with include the 2015 major Comprehensive Plan update; many annual Comprehensive Plan amendment cycles, including the Downtown Livability Initiative, the Eastgate land use and transportation plan policies, East Main station area Comprehensive Plan policies, Shoreline Master Program, and Planning Commission code of conduct development. On behalf of the Commission, he voiced appreciation for the thoughtful handling of policy issues, his leadership and integrity in moving significant items through the Commission. He said the diverse perspective of Commissioner deVadoss helped to keep the Commission honest and out of the danger of group thinking.

Commissioner Moolgavkar said she would miss Commissioner deVadoss. She said she always appreciated his perspective and would miss the voice he has brought to the Commission. She wished him nothing but the best of luck going forward.

Vice Chair Ferris voiced her appreciation for the service of Commissioner deVadoss. She said his different perspectives have always made her think, often even after meetings ended.

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Commissioner deVadoss said as an immigrant and a citizen of the great country of the United States, it had been a privilege to serve the city as a member of the Commission. He said he would always remember and cherish his eight years as a Commissioner. He said there had been many good discussions and debates from which he learned much from each Commissioner. He thanked Councilmember Barksdale for giving him the opportunity to serve, and he thanked the previous Chairs with whom he served, noting that he had learned from each along the way. He said he felt like he got more out of serving on the Commission than he put into the Commission.

Councilmember Barksdale said he appreciated having served with Commissioner deVadoss on the Commission. He said the discussions were always thought-provoking. He noted that Commissioner deVadoss always brought to the table well-formed opinions and perspectives. He thanked Commissioner deVadoss for his service.

Commissioner Bhargava said during the short time his time on the Commission overlapped that of Commissioner deVadoss's he learned to appreciate his clear points of view. He said he wished

the time spent serving together could have been in person. He wished Commissioner deVadoss the best of luck.

Commissioner Morisseau said Commissioner deVadoss's voice would be missed. She said she had thoroughly enjoyed her conversations with Commissioner deVadoss both during Commission meetings and after the meetings. She wished Commissioner deVadoss the best of luck in all his future endeavors and said she hoped he would continue to share with the Commission his unique perspectives.

5. STAFF REPORTS
(6:44 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Comprehensive Planning Manager Thara Johnson took a few minutes to review the Commission's schedule of upcoming meeting dates and agenda items.

6. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

A. Oral Communications
(6:48 p.m.)

Mr. Emmanuel Solis, a Sherwood Forest neighborhood resident, congratulated the new Chair and Vice Chair on their elections, and thanked Commissioner deVadoss for his service. He said he and his wife over the years have, along with others from the Northeast Bellevue neighborhood, collaborated with the city by engaging and promoting the participation of the communities in multiple projects. That includes over the last year the Great Neighborhoods program. The Great Neighborhoods program has been a great opportunity for the local community to influence the vision and policies for the Northeast Bellevue subarea. He said he feels passionate about the program and as such as invested a lot of time and energy in it. The desire is to see a great outcome. During the study session two weeks ago, the community raised the concern that the proposed draft made substantial changes to the Land Use Code by selectively moving some of the policies previously in the Crossroads subarea plan, but not the most critical policy [S-CR-63](#). He said he was pleased to see that staff has since recognized the importance of preserving the policy in the new Northeast Bellevue area plan, and he urged the Commission to support the changes described the agenda memo. He reminded the Commission of the community's solid support for preserving the forest and open space on the property between NE 24th Street and Northup Way. The open space plays an important role in the Sherwood Forest community. Over the years the Commission has many times recommended preserving the area as a buffer for the neighborhood. The unique and special importance of the property should continue to be clearly noted in the subarea plan.

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Ms. Els Bloome, a Northeast Bellevue resident, said she was happy to see in the agenda memo that staff had reframed the conversation from "affordable housing" to "more housing options." Because affordable housing means different things to different people, it is clear what the city has been talking about is more housing options to provide attainable housing, rather than providing affordable housing in the defined sense of 80 percent of area median income or lower. In the Great Neighborhoods process, housing affordability was mainly raised by residents in the context of aging in place. Various options were discussed, including ADUs where the owner needs the rental income to be able to afford to stay in their home. Other housing types were also discussed, including duplexes, triplexes and detached ADUs. For each, the key consideration is

how they fit with the residential character of the single family neighborhood. Generally, residents were okay with housing types that blend in, such as ADUs and detached ADUs if they are done right. Triplexes and detached ADUs generally change the character of a neighborhood and impact the expectations neighbors have of privacy, property value and access. The neighborhood generally is supportive of ADUs, but there are implementation concerns aimed at making sure they have the desired impact. Should a 75-year-old woman decide to convert an empty bedroom wing into an ADU to facilitate her ability to pay her property taxes, she would need first to figure out how to finance the remodel, find a contractor and obtain all necessary permits. She would need to find a tenant and follow all regulations and requirements landlords must comply with. A new landlord may be ill-equipped to master all the steps, such as performing background checks on tenants and addressing tenants that do not pay their rent. She may need a support line to provide her and other inexperienced landlords to avoid having to use their next eggs to pay for legal counsel. She said there remains a lot of uncertainty and a lack of clarity about the specifics of the different housing types, and that may well be the reason residents are hesitant to support them. Making changes without any implementation guidance is like asking residents to write a blank check. For example, will owner occupancy be required for ADUs. Will there be minimum lot size requirements for duplexes. Will off-street parking be required. A broader discussion at the citywide level is needed to determine how Bellevue will meet its housing targets.

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Ms. Sue Lawrence, a Northeast Bellevue resident, shared with the Commissioners photos of trees being removed from the Sherwood Forest neighborhood. She said the neighborhood has documented more than 30 mature trees being cut down in the last few years. The trend continues, especially when houses are sold and transformed into mega mansions. The owners can cut down a large number of trees without a permit because the rules are lax and penalties are not enforced. Trees are a key reason residents love living in Northeast Bellevue, but sadly they are being cut down left and right to make room for larger houses. In 2018 the neighborhood had a 30 percent tree canopy; that number has dropped since. The city has a tree canopy goal of 40 percent by 2050 and to meet that goal will need a stronger tree policy; will need to require a permit to cut down any significant tree; should require a city arborist to determine if the need to cut down a significant tree is valid; and should invest in staff for code updates and enforcement, strategic education and outreach. Building more houses will result in even more tree loss. Urban growth and tree preservation need to be balanced if Bellevue wants to continue being a city in a park for a generation to come.

Mr. Lee Sargent, 16246 NE 24th Street, said he is the current president of the Sherwood Forest Community Club which is located in Northeast Bellevue. He said he has been involved and present at meetings during the Great Neighborhoods process and has responded to surveys and questions. Throughout the process, preserving the Bellevue Technology Center area and the issue of tree preservation came up many times and saw a lot of support from the neighborhood. A number of concerns were expressed about traffic due to issues in both Redmond and Bellevue. During the process, the city's goals around housing affordability, increased occupancy and tree canopy in single family neighborhoods was often lost sight of. While talking about Great Neighborhoods, several 40,000 square foot houses replaced much smaller homes on sites in the Sherwood Forest neighborhood. That caused trees to be removed, which reduced the overall tree canopy. It also caused taxes to rise on surrounding homes, increasing costs and making it more difficult for young families and retired persons. The houses were built for single families, reducing permeable spaces and keeping the old population density. Some of the trees that were removed were many decades old and provided more resources than new and smaller trees will provide. The city's regulations did not prevent or question the changes.

Mr. Benjamin Mousseau, 16964 NE 37th Street, said he was 19 and was invited to offer the youth voice on the issues. He said he had read over the draft plan and generally liked it. He allowed that through the process many spoke in favor of retaining the characteristics of the old houses in the area that were built in the 1960s. He said he was not personally attached to that idea given the need to be moving toward more sustainable housing to be in line with the Net Zero by 2050. Since buildings last a long time, it is important to make sure that even if the old houses are kept, things are made as up to date as possible in terms of climate change readiness. He said he would like to see more in the draft plan about the need for bike lanes. With regard to Policy S-NE-43, he pointed out that the language encourages the use of impervious surfaces in new public and private developments and suggested the intent likely was to refer to pervious surfaces instead. He echoed the previous speakers who indicated the need to retain trees in the neighborhood and suggested more should be said in the plan about how to get homeowners and private property owners to retain big trees and to plant new big trees.

Ms. Lucy Chai, a Bellevue native, said she currently resides in Silicon Valley with her husband and just recently closed on a house with a price tag of \$2.7 million, having lost a bid for land alone at \$1.9 million. The 98004 zip code is the single most expensive zip code in Washington State next to Medina where the tech giants live. The plan under discussion outlines a desire to have affordable housing, but that is just not feasible in Northwest Bellevue, which borders Medina and Clyde Hill, as well as Yarrow Point, West Bellevue and the Downtown. ADUs have not been good for the Silicon Valley area. There are RVs parked everywhere and peddlers on every street looking through trash cans for cans to make money. Bellevue should not be allowed to turn into the same, and Bellevue should not be allowed to turn into Seattle. The crime rate should be kept low and public safety should be kept high. The Northwest neighborhood does not have the resources to manage a higher-density neighborhood. The engagement report, which outlines a vision for diversity and community, does not represent the majority of the residents. Only 227 people provided feedback online, only 27 people participated in the brainstorming event, and only 20 people attended the virtual event. Of the 20, 53 percent supported affordable housing, but that is only ten people from the Northwest neighborhood. Having detached ADUs is not the answer for Northwest. The area needs to keep its single family homes and its tree canopy. The neighborhood should say no to higher density and should be kept beautiful.

Mr. Dick Thompson, a resident of the Northwest Bellevue neighborhood, said at its previous study session the Commission perceived that there were issues in the Northwest and Northeast neighborhood area plan that were unresolved, and the suggestion was made that the staff should consider expanding the schedule for completing the two plans. From the packet of information for the current study session, staff responded to the suggestions, acknowledging that there are issues that would benefit from a citywide discussion forum rather than separate discussions by 16 individual neighborhoods. The issues relate to tree preservation and/or removal, and housing options and affordability. The issue of tree preservation is mentioned in the citywide Environmental Stewardship Plan established in December 2020. The city's Affordable Housing Strategy activity has been lumbering along since 2017. Nevertheless, staff are not recommending schedule changes to neighborhood plan development. He proposed removing all mention in the neighborhood area plans of tree preservation, affordable housing and density growth, including in the policy overview sections and in the goals and policies sections. Clear mention should be made, however, that the issues are not forgotten and will be dealt with at the citywide level, hopefully with public participation. When the studies are complete, the Northwest and Northeast subarea plans should be amended to reflect the results. There remain unresolved issues in the current draft that hopefully the neighborhoods will have opportunity to comment on. One issue is the lack of specificity of policies in neighborhoods containing great diversity in character, land use and application. It will be difficult to achieve the vision the residents have developed for

their neighborhood with one size fits all policies. The process deserves another feedback cycle with the stakeholders before the Commission reviews the drafts again. The pandemic has made things difficult, but no additional time has been allowed. The draft represents the first revision of the neighborhood subarea plans since 1983. The remaining 14 neighborhoods will benefit if more time is taken to do a better job on the first two neighborhood plans.

Ms. Nisarga Ramesh, said she is a senior at Interlake High School and an intern with the Great Neighborhoods program. She said she wanted to get involved with the program because youth voices are underrepresented in local government. She said many of her peers care about creating change through activism, and they should know they can direct their energy into making changes on a local scale as well. She said along with a team of 18 students she organized a youth data walk in March. The students had to stay on specific topics related to the neighborhood plan. In May, the group hosted in-person open houses at Interlake to see what students had to say about the draft policies. Attendance was impacted by the pandemic, but there were a lot of meaningful responses and feedback from students who shared on the policies and topics they care about, including environmental policies such as preserving green spaces and creating trails, and making sure that future developments address sustainability. She voiced her support for the draft Northeast Bellevue plan, including the housing affordability policies.

Mr. Jerome Taylor, a resident of the Crofton neighborhood in Northeast Bellevue, commented that going into the Great Neighborhoods process the citizens were given the impression that it was the method by which to bring about change and updates to the neighborhood. The planners and the city in general appear to be concerned about the issues of diversity, density and housing options. However, the three most important issues delineated by the citizens were traffic, traffic and traffic. He said in his neighborhood, NE 24th and Northup Way have become dangerous roads east of 164th Avenue NE. They are no longer the roads that lead to the neighborhoods, they are no longer access roads, they are now mainly roads to get through the neighborhood. They are heavily traveled during the day and without any form of mitigation to the east of 164th Avenue NE down to Lake Sammamish. The provided walking space is uneven and inaccessible to the disabled community. Moms cannot walk down the street pushing a stroller. The bike lanes are inconsistent, narrow or non-existent. He said he had anticipated the plan would lead to a plan for action, but the plan is more a vision than a plan for improving the neighborhood, which is disappointing. The suggestion was made at the Commission's previous meeting that more time is needed to make decisions on the issues. Government is intended to work for the citizens, who elect the Councilmembers to make decisions. The Commission has a lot of data and information. It should have some discussions and make decisions and then be responsible for the decisions made. If the citizens do not like those decisions, they will let the elected officials know.

Ms. Chris Buchanan ceded her time to Ms. Chai, who had requested additional time to speak.

Ms. Chair said she did not want anyone listening to walk away with the idea that she is elitist or racist. She said she is all for diversity and for affordable housing and community. She said she learned from her time living in Silicon Valley that the tech companies that are coming to Bellevue will bring diversity with them. With regard to affordable housing, she said it makes no sense to increase density in an area that is already dense. Instead of building ADUs, people should rent in areas outside of Bellevue. That is the norm for Silicon Valley. There are more affordable cities around Bellevue, including Redmond, Renton and Kirkland. The Northwest neighborhood should not be asked to sacrifice what it has, its beauty and quality of life. Allowing ADUs will open the door to much trouble. The engagement report should be revisited and there should be more surveys conducted around the Northwest area, and a better job of publicizing it should be done. The vision that has been put out is not a representation of how the Northwest

Bellevue residents really feel. The issue is being moved forward too fast and time should be taken to step back.

B. Written Communications
(7:26 p.m.)

Comprehensive Planning Manager Thara Johnson said three letters were received relating to Great Neighborhoods. She noted that they had been forwarded to the Commissioners earlier in the day.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(7:27 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION

A. 2021 Comprehensive Plan Amendments: DASH Glendale CPA
(7:27 p.m.)

Vice Chair Ferris recused herself from the discussion due to a potential conflict of interest.

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Senior Planner Gwen Rousseau stated that the city's Comprehensive Plan is the city's foundational policy document, guiding the nature and intensity of development by setting out the city's vision for the future. The plan amendment process is a mechanism for modifying the city's land use development and growth policies. Under the Growth Management Act, property owners are permitted to propose site-specific Comprehensive Plan amendments. Such privately initiated plan amendments are accepted and reviewed annually. Applications to amend the Comprehensive Plan follow a two-step process, which is described in the Land Use Code. The first step, threshold review, determines which proposals are included in the Comprehensive Plan amendment work program. That step was completed on April 5 when the City Council established the annual work program. The second step, final review, determines whether a proposal should be adopted into the Comprehensive Plan. The merits of each proposal is evaluated against the decision criteria found in the Land Use Code at 20.30I.150. The final review process includes a review by the Commission, a public hearing before the Commission, and a recommendation to the Council, which then reviews the recommendation and takes final action. Site-specific amendments approved by the Council lead to rezoning actions to implement the Comprehensive Plan.

There are five final review decision criteria. Amendments must: 1) must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and other goals and policies; 2) address the interests and changed needs of the entire city; 3) address significantly changed conditions; 4) be suitable for development in general conformance with adjacent land use and the surrounding development pattern, and with zoning standards under the potential zoning classifications; and 5) must demonstrate a public benefit and enhances the public health, safety and welfare of the city.

Ms. Rousseau said the DASH Glendale & Evergreen Court CPA proposes a map amendment from Multifamily-Medium (MF-M) to Neighborhood Mixed Use (NMU). The site covers a total area of 7.6 acres and is comprised of two parcels located at 900 124th Avenue NE and 12600 NE 8th Street within the Wilburton/NE 8th Street subarea. The existing uses on site include the Glendale apartments, an 82 unit two-story multifamily complex built in 1970 for moderate-income households, and Evergreen Court, an 84 unit three-story multifamily complex built in

1977 housing low- and moderate-income older adults. The surrounding zoning districts include Office and Professional Office to the west and north; R-10 multifamily residential to the south; and R-20 multifamily residential to the east. The surrounding uses include office buildings to the west office and multifamily to the north, multifamily to the east, and office to the south with multifamily and single family beyond.

Amending the land use designation for the site from Multifamily-Medium to NMU would allow for a subsequent rezone from R-20 to NMU, enabling DASH to redevelop the buildings to higher densities and greater heights and to include non-residential neighborhood serving uses such as retail and services. Additionally, the site would move from having density measured in the number of units per acre to a Floor Area Ratio of 1.0, with the ability to exempt an additional 1.0 FAR for affordable housing. The height limit would increase from the current 30 feet to 75 feet. Under the proposed designation, the number of units on the site could be increased by more than twice.

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If a new NMU designation is approved for the site, the transition area design district regulations would apply within 150 feet of adjacent multifamily uses. That would drop the height limit within the design district to 45 feet. The transition area regulations are intended to provide a buffer between residential and commercial/mixed use developments. Also required within the transition area is a 30-foot building setback, site perimeter landscaping totaling 20 feet along the street frontage, 10 feet along NE 10th Place, and eight feet along the property lines to the north and west.

No significant transportation impacts are anticipated to result from approval of the proposal. Any project or development related impacts to water, wastewater and drainage would be mitigated at the time of development. The proponent has indicated they will develop and implement a relocation plan to minimize displacement of current residents by placing them in other DASH owned properties, and via phased construction allowing for existing residents to move into new homes upon completion.

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Ms. Rousseau informed the Commissioners that to date a total of seven public comments had been received, five of which were in support of the proposal. One voiced concern about the loss of tree canopy and the impacts on air quality, and one questioned if the proposal would result in a loss of senior housing.

The Commission was asked to review the proposed amendment against the decision criteria and identify any additional information needed for final review, and to set a final review public hearing date.

Commissioner Bhargava asked staff to outline what they see as significantly changed conditions for the site. Ms. Rousseau said the Land Use Code defines what significantly changed conditions are. Generally they involve the unintended consequence of a policy change, though a change to the subject property or the surrounding area could be a significant change. Any kind of recent policy text or map change that would require a Comprehensive Plan amendment to make sure the Comprehensive Plan is integrated and acts as a whole would also qualify. Ms. Johnson added that more details will be outlined at the public hearing and in the staff recommendation. She noted that significantly changed conditions can result from changes that have occurred since the last time a particular subarea was updated. The last update to the BelRed subarea did not include the exact location of the Wilburton light rail station, and that is a significantly changed condition. Additionally, the area around the subject property has redeveloped significantly since the subarea plan was last updated.

Commissioner Brown thanked staff for their presentation which framed the issues. She said one thing the Commission struggles with is that Bellevue has some of the most expensive real estate in the state, the nation and even in much of the world. Accordingly, it is necessary to manage it effectively, and it is necessary to enable people to live in Bellevue. Having DASH/Glendale as affordable housing, however that is defined, is very important. She asked what elements of the proposal would make the units more affordable. Ms. Rousseau said the site is currently owned by an entity that is in the business of providing affordable housing. The Glendale apartment complex is nearing the end of its life cycle. Redevelopment of the property under the NMU designation will allow for the provision of additional units by almost twice, making use of the land more efficient. Another advantage of being able to develop at a higher intensity is the ability to get financing.

Commissioner deVadoss stated that as much as the city would like to believe it can somehow solve the affordable housing problem, the truth is that is a pipe dream. As long as the federal reserve keeps interest rates artificially low, and as long as the federal government keeps printing dollars, there is nothing that can be done to fix the problem. The idea of needing to be efficient with the space is fundamentally flawed. It is about people and community first, and so long as there are people living together, efficiency does not matter. At least half of the units on the subject property are for senior citizens and redevelopment will disrupt their lives. Additionally, the thinking that retail and services will be beneficial is suspect; retail is shifting, and the thinking may be based on assumptions from a few years ago. At the end of the day, there really are no changed conditions.

Commissioner Moolgavkar said she has heard staff repeatedly state that financing as a reason for a Comprehensive Plan amendment. Financing would never be brought up in regard to any other type of development except affordable housing. While it might be a benefit, it is not a reason to approve a Comprehensive Plan amendment. She said the Commission does not go into public hearings with enough information. The Commission should have in hand the information that will be in the staff report for the public hearing well ahead of the public hearing so there is time to think about it. The Commission recommended during the threshold review stage not to move the issue forward, but the Council overrode that recommendation. That could have been the result of the staff not giving the Commission all the information it needed.

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Ms. Johnson responded by saying the intent is to have the staff recommendation published about three weeks prior to the public hearing. She said staff would make sure the Commissioners are provided with a link to the public hearing notice, which will also include the staff report and recommendation. The Commission's packet for the public hearing will also provide an overview. Commissioner Moolgavkar commented that being afforded the time to discuss the staff report and recommendation in an open session in advance of the public hearing would be very helpful given how much information there is to digest.

Chair Malakoutian stated that doubling the number of affordable units is a great thing. He raised the issue of the current owner choosing to sell the site several years out and asked if the new owner would be prohibited from renting out the units at market rate, including any bonus units. Ms. Rousseau said bonuses given for affordable housing generally require permanent affordability for the life of the project. Ms. Johnson added that typically a covenant is recorded on the property.

Commissioner Morisseau asked if an additional study session ahead of the public hearing, and not on the day of the public hearing, could be put on the calendar. She also asked staff to include

links to any policies referenced to make it easier for the Commissioners to be fully informed. Ms. Johnson said the agenda for the Commission's June 23 meeting is fairly full. Other options would be to have a longer meeting on June 23, or add an additional meeting to the calendar.

Chair Malakoutian asked if the full staff report and recommendation would be ready by June 23. Ms. Rousseau said it is possible, but added that the challenge would be getting the report to the Commissioners prior to the meeting to allow for reviewing it.

Commissioner Brown asked if there were estimates in hand for what the units would rent for. Ms. Johnson said staff would ask the applicant to provide some numbers for the Commission to review.

There was agreement to add an additional meeting to the calendar, and to set a public hearing for July 28.

B. 2021 Comprehensive Plan Amendments: Neighborhood Area Plans for Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue

(8:05 p.m.)

Vice Chair Ferris rejoined the meeting.

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Senior Planner Elizabeth de Regt briefly reviewed the process and the comments and feedback received to date. She noted that interest had been expressed in having more specificity in regard to some portions of the plan, and that questions had been raised about whether additional community engagement would benefit the level of detail in the plan. Interest was also expressed in having more time to review the plan.

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Ms. de Regt stressed that long-range planning for the Comprehensive Plan involves broad policies. It does not include implementation which is a separate work item that follows a separate process. The subarea planning process brings the broader Comprehensive Plan to life in a local way. She noted that some issues raised by the neighborhoods could benefit from future citywide discussions. They include updates to code related to tree preservation and removal; increasing housing options within the neighborhoods; and policies limiting multifamily and retail around the Crossroads area, which is more specific to the Northeast Bellevue plan.

Ms. de Regt said the schedule calls for a July 14 public hearing, but she said if the Commission desires additional review time, the issue could be added to the July 28 agenda.

Ms. Rousseau reviewed the draft plan for Northeast Bellevue. She said the sense of place policies in the Northeast Bellevue plan focus on maintaining the woodsy feel of the neighborhood and maintaining the buffers between the adjacent higher activity areas. Policy S-NE-3 calls for encouraging a graceful transition between the neighborhood scale of Northeast Bellevue and the scale of higher intensity uses in surrounding neighborhoods, and Policy S-NE-5 calls for maintaining a tree-lined buffer along Bel-Red Road to buffer adjacent homes from adverse impacts.

Because the boundaries for the Northeast Bellevue subarea will be changing, part of the former Crossroads area plan will be incorporated into the Northeast Bellevue plan. There are policies in the current Crossroads plan that limit multifamily development and retail uses in District A. Because the issue of limiting multifamily housing requires a broader discussion, no changes to

the existing policies are proposed. Any changes to the policies will be deferred to a larger process, such as one focused on housing generally or the Crossroads subarea update. Since publication of the draft plan there has been a lot of feedback in which a strong desire has been voiced to also pull over the policy related to the Bellevue Technology Center to clearly state the appropriate use of the site is office.

With regard to a sense of community, Ms. Rousseau said the Northeast Bellevue plan highlights the importance of enhancing gathering opportunities and programming that serves ~~to build~~ neighborhood connections. The policies focus on creating new ~~gathering places, and seek to~~ build neighborhood connections by celebrating the diverse cultural backgrounds of the Northeast Bellevue residents, supporting community events and avenues of communication.

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The policies regarding housing affordability seek to increase the range of housing sizes and types within the neighborhoods to maintain access for a broad range of households, including many who have lived in the neighborhood for decades. At the same time, the residents want to maintain the look and feel of their neighborhood by ensuring adequate separation between houses, adequate infrastructure to serve new households, and minimizing impacts on the environment and existing residential character.

The plan section related to mobility and access includes policies stressing the need for safety for all modes of travel and expanding transportation choices. There is a real desire to work on improving access for pedestrians and bicyclists. One policy calls for supporting increased public transportation service, including first- and last-mile on-demand transit services and connections to and from light rail stations, major transit centers and other key destinations. Access to goods and services are also highlighted in the policies.

The section of the plan focused on the environment mirrors the strong desire of the residents to support citywide tree preservation and code assessment. There are policies that encourage the planting of trees and education. A new policy has been proposed aimed at supporting efforts to both protect Northeast Bellevue's tree canopy and enhance the health of trees on both public and private properties. Language is also included that calls for protecting water bodies such as Lake Sammamish from water pollution, and preserving and enhancing areas for park acquisitions.

Ms. de Regt reviewed the draft plan for Northwest Bellevue. With regard to the sense of place section, she said the policies call for maintaining the variety of the sub-neighborhoods. There are also policies that call for exploring opportunities for small-scale commercial uses at key locations to improve access to goods and services throughout the neighborhood. There are policies that call for coordinating with the local jurisdictions that neighbor Northwest Bellevue, and there is policy that encourages buffers such as McCormick Park and/or gradients of building scale to ease the transition to Downtown Bellevue.

The sense of community section encourages ways to welcome new residents and focuses on inclusivity for all. Aging in place and supporting seniors is called out in the policies. The housing affordability section policies came out of conversations with the community. They address the variety of land uses allowed in Northwest Bellevue, and call for exploring the introduction of detached ADUs and working toward limiting their impact on the residential character of the neighborhood streets.

The section focused on mobility and access talks about a lot of different transportation options. There is a clear focus on pedestrian safety and improving pedestrian mobility, as well as on supporting additional modes of access, such as bicycling and transit; vehicular movement safety

and efficiency; and prioritizing access to particular areas such as between residential areas and population destinations.

Trees are an important focus for Northwest Bellevue residents. Accordingly, the environment section of the plan encourages tree planting and education. The policies focus on supporting efforts to protect and enhance the tree canopy as well as the health of trees on both public and private properties, and also focuses on protecting water bodies.

Ms. de Regt sought direction from the Commission on the draft policies and to work toward scheduling a public hearing, potentially on July 14. If the Commission wants additional time to review the plans, an additional meeting could be added to the Commission's July 28 meeting agenda.

Vice Chair Ferris asked why it was necessary to wait before discussing the Crossroads plan policies. Ms. Rousseau explained that currently there are a lot of policies in the Crossroads area plan that talk about limiting multifamily development. She said the current focus is on updating the Northeast Bellevue plan, not the Crossroads plan, so instead of making changes to the small area of Crossroads that is going to be moved into Northeast Bellevue, the suggestion is to hold off discussing the policies for that area until the Crossroads area plan is updated.

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Vice Chair Ferris commented that the draft plans are obviously something staff and the community have spent a lot of time on. She added that they will have impacts for years to come. She said she would like to see the policies and implications in the plans that most everyone agrees with pulled out and moved forward on a separate track, leaving the more difficult issues that need more time and community input to be addressed later. She suggested the community input needs to especially include younger voices because those are the ones who will in the future be impacted by the plans.

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Commissioner Bhargava referred to the three topics staff suggested would be better addressed at the citywide scale and asked what that process might look like and what the timing might be. Ms. de Regt said the first of the three topics is related to updates to code related to tree preservation and removal. She said that issue is already set for a future citywide work plan item as part of the Environmental Stewardship Plan, which will be addressed fairly soon. The second issue is increasing housing options within the neighborhoods. Staff are interested in tying the topic to the larger periodic update of the Comprehensive Plan and the associated housing needs assessment and growth target conversations. That will also come up fairly soon. The third topic is the Crossroads policies limiting multifamily and retail uses.

Ms. Johnson pointed out that the state requires the city's Comprehensive Plan to receive a major overhaul every eight years, and that work has a deadline of 2024. The intent is to have the Council launch the effort early in 2022. She added that work on the housing needs assessment is anticipated to kick off in the fall of 2021. That work will tie into the periodic update of the Comprehensive Plan. Staff are also currently working to develop growth targets for the planning period 2019-2044 both in terms of jobs and housing.

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Commissioner Morisseau commented that in her view Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue are completely different from each other. She said she found it interesting that the engagement process yielded the same five categories for both areas. She asked what other topic areas were shared by the community members as part of the engagement process that did not make the top five list. Ms. de Regt said staff also found it interesting when going through the engagement process that both neighborhoods would choose the same five categories. The

categories were deemed to be very broad and the individual policies within each category vary between the two areas. Nothing was highlighted by either neighborhood that does not fit within one of those five broad categories.

Commissioner Morisseau reiterated her desire to see the city really think about its engagement processes. She said the city should shy away from doing the same thing and expect different results. She said since moving to Bellevue in 2007, the city has changed drastically. The community engagement process needs to change to intentionally target the population. Chair Malakoutian concurred.

Commissioner deVadoss noted that he is a resident of Northeast Bellevue. He said he is all for inclusive comments and feedback for the process. He stressed the need to prioritize the feedback from those who actually pay property taxes. The opinions of those who offered feedback but who are non-Bellevue residents are not important. It is a very good idea to get the Bellevue Youth Theatre back in operation, and the focus on trails and access to them is also a wonderful idea. Undergrounding utility lines is another good idea. The biggest mess in the area is traffic and nothing should be done that will make that worse, such as adding bike lanes where they may have unintended side effects. He said there is no place for a racial breakdown in a Planning Commission document. The charter and mission of the Commission has nothing to do with race and it is disappointing that the process is dividing people by race.

Commissioner Brown voiced her appreciation for the work of staff to seek out the voices of different people in the community. The two neighborhoods are indeed incredibly different and diverse. While the residents of each area have similar concerns, the two areas should in fact be treated differently. Given the concern residents share about wanting to be able to age in place, and wanting to maintain the character of their communities while providing options for aging residents or for the children of residents who may not be able to afford their own place, there is a need for the code to be flexible and accommodating. While it is important to listen to the voices of those who pay property taxes, it is also important to recognize that many would like to be paying property taxes in the neighborhoods but cannot afford to do so; their voices also need to be heard. Many work in Bellevue but cannot afford to live in Bellevue, and therefore they must commute and add to the level of traffic congestion on the roads. People should have the options of walking or biking to destinations in their communities, but they should also be able to drive without encountering heinous traffic. She said she was ready to move forward with many of the policies that are supported by the communities.

Commissioner Moolgavkar concurred with the observations of Commissioner Morisseau. She said many from Northwest Bellevue indicated they had not had the chance to participate in the process. That is not a reflection of staff's efforts, rather it is a reflection of the fact that the process is not quite right. She said she did not fully grasp how the three overarching city policies interact with the two neighborhood subarea plans.

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

Chair Malakoutian said he is a resident of Northwest Bellevue and noted that he had participated in the process at the neighborhood level. He said he appreciated the efforts of the staff. The concerns voiced by Commissioner Morisseau that some people were not reached by the process are valid and should be addressed.

Vice Chair Ferris reiterated her desire to see the Commission identify the areas around which

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there is common agreement and separate out the issues for which more input and consideration is needed.

Commissioner Brown noted that the city has changed drastically since 1983 when the subarea plans were last updated. If the plans are going to be updated only once every 40 years, when the work is done it should be done right. The resulting plans should meet the real needs of each community.

Commissioner Morisseau agreed with the need to listen to the voices of those who pay property taxes, but she also stressed the need to listen to tenants and renters. There are people who come to work and play in the city. Many would like to live in Bellevue but cannot afford to. The city's chief of police cannot afford to live in the city. Limiting the perspective only to property tax payers would do the entire community a disservice.

Commissioner Morisseau asked staff to address some of the comments made by the public during open communications. One person asked about office space in Northeast Bellevue, and another comment was made about the need to really understand what is meant by affordable housing. There was also a question asked about the use of "impervious surfaces" in the document, suggesting that it probably should read "pervious." One gentleman suggested the three main issues are traffic, traffic and traffic and that issue should be addressed. Ms. Rousseau allowed that the reference to "impervious surfaces: was in error and should indeed be changed to "pervious surfaces." With regard to office space, she said the request was made to carry forward the policy from the Crossroads plan. That comment has been taken to heart and the policy will be moved into the Northeast Bellevue plan. She allowed that during the outreach process there was a desire on the part of many to talk about housing affordability versus affordable housing, with the latter term referring to [housing](#) affordable to persons earning 80 percent or less of the area median income. In the broader sense, the intent is to make sure there are housing options that are affordable to all households along the income spectrum. Traffic continues to be a concern for many. It is true one cannot walk or bike safely along Northup Way, and it is true that many roads have become cut-through routes. There have been talks with the city's transportation planners about processes they can use to continue to engage the community in terms of implementing projects.

Commissioner Bhargava agreed that there are portions of both plans that everyone can agree with. However, the fundamental issues that are core to the communities must be addressed. To just push forward the issues around which there is agreement will not really benefit the neighborhoods. The city has clearly made an effort in terms of community engagement, and many were involved as a result. It is the responsibility of the communities to engage in efforts when they happen. While it is true that more can always be done, there must be a clear stopping point. The current focus is on establishing a policy framework; it is not on specific infrastructure design or implementation. At the end of the day, the policy framework must enable choices and flexibility. It is true that there is congestion in the neighborhoods, but it is not true that adding bike lanes will exacerbate the problem. Allowing for more transportation mode options will over time prove to be a benefit. The policies should lay the foundation for multimodal transportation choices in ways that will ensure safety and connectivity. A similar view needs to be brought to play in terms of housing choices and diversity.

Commissioner deVadoss said he has always thought of his role as a Commissioner not to do what he thinks is right but rather to do what the people want. He said he hoped the Commission would not see the neighborhood subarea process as an opportunity to do what the Commission thinks is right. The focus should be on what the people want and helping them achieve it, even if

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it conflicts with the personal opinions of the Commissioners.

Commissioner Moolgavkar asked if the Commission would be required to make a recommendation to the Council the same day as the public hearing. Ms. Johnson said the Commission could choose to hold off making a decision until the following meeting.

Commissioner Morisseau reiterated her desire to schedule an additional study session prior to the public hearing. She asked if the additional study session could be held on July 14 and the public hearing on July 28.

Chair Malakoutian said the usual practice is that issues raised at the public hearing trigger the need for an additional study session. He asked what more information is needed prior to the public hearing. Commissioner Morisseau asked why that approach was not being used for Glendale and Chair Malakoutian said in that instance the staff have not completed their report and will be coming back with a recommendation, which Commissioner Moolgavkar wants to hear before the public hearing.

Ms. Johnson explained that for the Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue neighborhoods, staff will be preparing a staff report and recommendation. It will be published along with the public hearing notice.

Commissioner Morisseau said it appeared to her that the two processes were not consistent with each other. The best approach would be to have the staff recommendation in hand and allow time for the Commission to discuss it prior to the public hearing. Commissioner Moolgavkar agreed.

Councilmember Barksdale commented that ultimately both Glendale and the Great Neighborhoods plans will need to be wrapped up before the August break. There will be no additional time after the public hearing if the public hearing is pushed back to July 28.

Vice Chair Ferris said she would like to hear more from the public and then to schedule time on an agenda to discuss the comments before making a decision.

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Commissioner deVadoss said the request from Commissioners Moolgavkar and Morisseau to have and read the staff recommendations before the public hearing is very reasonable. In going into a public hearing, the Commission should have in hand a final proposal. To do otherwise would violate the public's expectation.

Ms. Johnson commented that if an additional study session on the neighborhood plans is added to the schedule between June 23 and July 14, there will be four public hearings on July 28: Glendale, Northeast Bellevue, Northwest Bellevue and the Transportation Element Comprehensive Plan amendments. That will make for a very long meeting.

Ms. de Regt said the original intent was to spread out the public hearings and to keep July 28 open for potential additional conversation about any issues raised at the public hearings. Part of the issue is the timeline constraint. The Commission wants to have an additional study session with the staff recommendation in hand before putting out recommendations that will be included in the notice for the public hearing. The public hearing notice will need to go out shortly for the July dates and the timeline is just too tight.

Commissioner Moolgavkar commented that decisions of the sort under discussion are big and complicated, and she said going forward the staff needs to think through how they are scheduled.

That might entail working with the Council to allow for more time to make the big decisions.

There was agreement to schedule an additional study session, potentially on July 7, for both Glendale and Great Neighborhoods, and to set July 14 as the public hearing for Great Neighborhoods.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None
(9:23 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
(9:24 p.m.)

A. May 26, 2021

A motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Vice Chair Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moolgavkar and the motion carried without dissent; Commissioners deVadoss and Morisseau abstained from voting.

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A motion to extend the meeting to 9:45 p.m. was made by Vice Chair Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brown and the motion carried unanimously.

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11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS
(9:26 p.m.)

Ms. Michelle Niethammer took a moment to recognize the service of Commissioner deVadoss and said he would certainly be missed. With regard to why the Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue plans were so similar, she said that came about by design in terms of the questions staff asked the community. There were specific topics for which the city sought feedback from both neighborhoods. Some of the Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue sessions were combined followed by breakout sessions. The two communities are different, but there are some similarities. Northwest Bellevue is close to the Downtown, but Northeast Bellevue abuts the Overlake urban center in Redmond for which plans are being made that will involve a lot of development that will materially impact the Northeast Bellevue neighborhood. Before the next study session, the Commissioners should take the time to read the existing Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue neighborhood plans. There is much in each plan that remains valid. Traffic is one such issue. There is a section in the Northeast Bellevue plan that talks about traffic, particularly the traffic generated from the development of Evergreen Heights, which is the Microsoft campus. The need to accommodate the growth planned for the area is a concern of the neighborhood. At the end of the day, the plan will be needed to help the neighborhood grow and thrive in the years to come.

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(9:31 p.m.)

13. ADJOURNMENT
(9:31 p.m.)

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

Chair Malakoutian adjourned the meeting at 9:31 p.m.