

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

July 13, 2022
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Ferris, Vice Chair Bhargava, Commissioners Goepple, Malakoutian, Morisseau

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Brown, Cálad

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Emil King, Kate Nesse, Janet Shull, Department of Community Development; Matt McFarland, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not present

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER
(6:34 p.m.)

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m. by Chair Ferris who presided.

Chair Ferris stated that the meeting and future meetings would be held via hybrid format with both in-person and virtual options via Zoom.

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

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Brown and Cálad.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
(6:35 p.m.)

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

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None
(6:36 p.m.)

5. STAFF REPORTS

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule
(6:36 p.m.)

Comprehensive Planning Manager Thara Johnson briefly reviewed the schedule of upcoming

meeting dates and agenda items.

Thara Johnson informed the Commissioners that the City Council recently had a lengthy discussion regarding Next Right Work, the next set of affordable housing priorities. A number of priorities were presented to the Council following stakeholder meetings and discussion and the Council spent more than an hour working through the priorities, needs and recommendations for the next set of topics for the staff to be working on relating to affordable housing.

The Council also provided direction on the C-1 Comprehensive Plan A amendment that has been before the Commission in terms of expanding the properties from 300 feet to 500 feet, which will include three additional faith-owned properties for consideration and analysis.

B. Overview of Bellevue's Approach to Addressing HB-1099 Provisions
(6:39 p.m.)

Thara Johnson informed the Commissioners that the climate change bill, HB-1099, was not moved forward by the state legislature. Even so, several jurisdictions are choosing to address some of the provisions that were in the bill. Bellevue will not be including in the Comprehensive Plan as part of the periodic update a separate chapter relating to climate change. The existing Environmental Element, however, does include a number of policies relating to climate change, and there are other elements that also speak to the issues. During the update focus will be given to strengthening those policies and to adding new policies in support of climate change.

The Environmental Stewardship Initiative that was adopted by the Council essentially serves as the city's climate action plan. Staff intend to provide the Commission with a briefing on that plan by way of a refresher. Many of the HB-1099 provisions are in fact addressed in the Environmental Stewardship Initiative. Work will be done to link the Environmental Stewardship Initiative more closely with the Comprehensive Plan as part of the update process.

Commissioner Goepple commented that the city is moving in the right direction. If in the next legislative session a similar bill gets passed, the city will be in a good position to be able to incorporate any requirements as part of the periodic update. Thara Johnson said it would depend on what any new bill would contain.

6. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS
(6:44 p.m.)

Jessie Clawson with McCullough Hill Leary thanked the Council and the staff for working through the Next Right Work issues. All 16 items recommended by the consultant are very important to the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce, as are the additional items recommended by the staff. The Commission should emphasize the issues as well in both the Environmental Impact Statement and the Comprehensive Plan update. With regard to Wilburton, the planning processes are very exciting. The Comprehensive Plan looks forward ten years and the importance of doing so is clear when looking ten years back to see how much has changed. The Commission was encouraged to dream big for Wilburton. Expansion of the Downtown to the west will not occur, and growth both to the north and south is limited, leaving Wilburton as the natural extension to the Downtown. When considering prioritizing jobs or housing, it should be kept in mind that residential uses are key to the city, but the planning should not discourage the natural extension of the Downtown in terms of jobs.

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Betsi Hummer, 14541 SE 26th Street, agreed with the need to pay close attention while working on the Wilburton plan. The recent Wilburton neighborhood walk was fun. One topic that kept coming up was that cut-through traffic from BelRed has increased substantially, and on NextDoor a number of break-ins have been reported along with other property crimes. Calling the new development the Wilburton vision is very confusing because Lucile McDonald's *Bellevue: The First Hundred Years* indicates the old Wilburton mill at NE 8th Street and 116th Avenue NE was located in the commercial center called Midlakes. An issue raised by the neighbors was the concept of changing the name of the project from Wilburton to Midlakes to honor the history. With regard to the Affordable Housing Strategy Next Right Work, everything the staff presents should be questioned. Not all of the affordable housing should be located in Lake Hills and Crossroads. The 30 percent units should be equitably distributed throughout the city. The Commissioner were invited to attend the Lake Hills Neighborhood Association annual picnic slated for July 16 from noon to 2:00 p.m. at Evergreen Park.

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Dwight Schrag, 1106 108th Avenue NE, praised the work to update the Comprehensive Plan and to focus on affordable housing. The speaker noted that Vision Safety for Gun Safety by 2035 was a proposed Comprehensive Plan amendment in line with existing Comprehensive Plan policies, but it was turned down due to an insufficient amount of information. A good study session would have resolved everything, but that never occurred. Only one resident at the Comprehensive Plan hearing spoke against guns safety policies; the person was dressed in military camouflage. The city planner who coordinated with the citizens seeking the amendment recommended against the proposal. Gun safety is very important to the entire Eastside and it is time to focus on it. The proposal is similar to Vision Zero for traffic safety and equally important. The city should act to put in place the important public safety provision.

Thara Johnson noted that the written communications received following publication of the Commission packet had been sent to the Commissioners via email. One was related to Vision Zero for Gun Safety, and there were additional comments relating to the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and Wilburton vision.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(6:56 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION
(6:56 p.m.)

A. Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and Wilburton Vision Implementation Plan Briefing

Assistant Director Emil King said the last major update of the Comprehensive Plan was in 2015. The current effort was launched by the Council on February 28. Per state law, the Comprehensive Plan is updated every ten years or so and the work serves as a great opportunity to bring the community together to think about the overall vision for the city. A significant amount of outreach has already occurred as part of the process, including a citywide questionnaire that had a good response rate. Direction from the Commission will be sought to confirm the recommended range of growth concepts.

Strategic Planning Manager Janet Shull said the direction received from the Council regarding the Wilburton study area was to proceed using the 2018 Citizen Advisory Committee's preferred alternative as a baseline and to give consideration to updating the vision as needed in the areas

such as growth targets, housing policy, affordable housing, the Grand Connection, sustainability, equitable access, multimodal transportation and universal design.

Senior Planner Dr. Kate Nesse shared with the Commission the timeline for the Comprehensive Plan periodic update and the Wilburton project. The visioning process for both projects are nearing their respective end points. The goals for updating the vision for growth come from the state, the multicounty planning policies through the Puget Sound Regional Council, the Countywide Planning Policies, and the Council's vision for the city. Feedback from the community will also provide guidance for the update.

Over the past four months the city has launched a number of community engagement activities, including an in-person open house; a workshop completely in Spanish; two virtual workshops; six presentations to community groups; ten youth-focused workshops; 13 tabling events at key community locations and neighborhood gatherings; and flyers and questionnaires mailed to all households in Bellevue, of which more than 3300 were completed and returned. The questionnaire asked the respondents to evaluate how the city is doing in implementing the vision. Overall, the respondents indicated the city is doing very well. Two areas where things could be improved were indicated to be in the range of housing types and housing affordability, and in providing for and supporting an equitable community. The questionnaire included open-ended questions about what is loved about Bellevue and the most important challenges. Not surprisingly, the community's love for parks and green space came out on top, followed by safety and cleanliness. The challenges cited most often were related to housing and affordability, followed by homelessness and safety.

In addition to community outreach, staff have also visited with all of the city's boards and commissions, with the exception of the Salary Board and the Library Board. The feedback received has included the need to reach out to the community in an equitable manner, and anxiously looking forward to process updates and policy review within their areas of expertise.

In line with all the input received, the focus of the vision update has been revised. Actual language for the Commission to review will be brought forward in the fall.

Chair Ferris asked what citizen groups have not yet been reached. Dr. Nesse said staff have been working closely with the city's cultural outreach ambassadors to identify additional groups, especially those that speak languages other than English in the home. Staff are in the process of applying for a grant that will allow for conducting additional outreach to underrepresented communities.

Dr. Nesse explained that the concepts for growth will get put into growth alternatives that will be analyzed through the EIS and other analysis tools. Based on those analyses, a preferred alternative will be chosen. The growth concepts will serve as the building blocks for the growth alternatives. The concepts have been grouped into five areas: focus of growth; amount of growth; placemaking; housing typologies; and affordable housing.

There are several different concepts related to the focus of growth. Growth could happen in the existing growth corridors of Downtown, East Main, Wilburton and BelRed, but it could also happen in the countywide centers, which are the mixed use areas identified in the last Comprehensive Plan that include Wilburton/East Main, BelRed, Crossroads, Factoria and Eastgate. Growth could also be looked at in the Neighborhood Centers, the commercial areas that primarily serve essential uses for the immediate local areas; or along arterials; or gently increase density across the city. The final growth alternatives will likely involve some combination of the

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concepts.

The amount of growth is also being looked at in terms of the adopted housing and jobs targets with a 2:1 ratio of jobs to housing units. That translates into 35,000 housing units and 70,000 jobs. The capacity for adding that many jobs is in place, but not for adding that many housing units. Capacity for at least 8000 more housing units is needed at a minimum. There are, however, known additional demands for housing, including affordable housing and different types of housing. As a result, the housing unit focus will be on the range between the minimum and twice the target.

Turning to Wilburton specifically, Janet Shull said the 2018 baseline for the study area post-2035 estimated a full buildout of more than 19 million square feet, 15.4 million of which would be new. The 2035 capacity projection is for almost 16.2 million square feet, with 12.6 million square feet of that from new development. Under existing conditions, there is only 3.6 million square feet of development on the ground. In considering growth concepts for the study area, one alternative will be no action for purposes of the EIS. There will also be concepts predicated on the baseline conditions, which under the CAC vision would result in a jobs/housing ratio of 4:1. Alternative approaches will also be considered that will involve one or more growth concepts that would result in a jobs/housing ratio closer to 2:1. Attention will also be given to how growth could be distributed in the study area. The single core concept is in line with the Wilburton vision. Additional development nodes could be looked at where there might be opportunities for additional capacity or connections to job centers, and an areawide approach that would spread additional growth across the study area will also be considered.

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Dr. Nesse commented that different areas of the city have different characters and the desire is to build on and enhance them. A structure for talking about placemaking and character has been identified to be assured of policy support. The first character is all residential and the second is focused on residential but with some local-serving retail. The third character involves a central neighborhood node or center with commercial uses surrounded by residential and will include locally focused retail. The cultural hub character has a mix of retail and residential uses that might include nightlife. The retail center character has uses that draw from a broader region but also includes a mix of residential, office and retail, while the office center character has more of a daytime focus with offices, daytime restaurants and good transit access.

Janet Shull said four general placemaking concepts are being considered for Wilburton, each of which relates back to the 2018 CAC vision. The residential focus character is predominantly residential with attached units with amenities and open spaces within walking distance. The small-scale residential mixed use character has commercial and office space mixed in with residential. The medium-scale residential mixed use character has residential integrated into medium-scale commercial and office development, while the residential towers character has residential integrated or interspersed with commercial and office tower development.

Dr. Nesse said housing typologies are being considered across the city. Currently the most common types of units being constructed are on the opposite ends of the spectrum: small studio and one-bedroom units, and large houses with four or more bedrooms. There is construction happening in the middle but the net increase in the number of two- and three-bedroom units has been very small. One option would be to expand high- and mid-rise buildings with studio and one-bedroom units. Policies could be considered that would make the typologies that are more challenging for developments to bring online more financially feasible. Consideration could also be given to expanding low-rise typologies, such as townhomes, that either have private amenities or which are built around shared amenities. Low-rise typologies like small apartment buildings

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or cottage housing could also be introduced, or typologies like duplexes and triplexes could be reintroduced and expanded.

Ways to incentivize affordable housing are also under consideration. There are a number of programs in place that are successfully helping to create affordable housing units, such as the multifamily tax exemption, C-1, HB-1590 and Next Right Work. The list of considerations ranges from adding no additional incentives to expanding voluntary incentives, expanding tiered incentives, and mandatory inclusion of affordable housing in any type of development. The incentive types could be applied to different geographic areas in ways to meet the state and regional affordability requirements.

Commissioner Goepple commented on the range of housing types and affordability that were commented on by the survey respondents, noting that the message sent was that the city is either below average or very poor. Given the amount of growth forecast, the city needs to do better than a capacity of 8000 housing units. The city has historically underwhelmed in providing capacity and building. The outcome should be closer to a 2:1 ratio than the 4:1 ratio. Emil King said the recommendation of the staff was to look at all the way up to an additional 43,000 in housing capacity in the EIS. The 4:1 ratio was used as a starting point for Wilburton but the intent is to consider putting in much more housing in the area.

Commissioner Morisseau commended the staff for listening to the people who need housing as well as to the stakeholders who know how to bring housing online. The city's approach in addressing its growth targets needs to be bold. Emil King said the beauty of the EIS process is that different alternatives can be considered that package together the growth concepts. The amount of growth the city must plan for is a key element. The staff are suggesting housing numbers that far exceed the growth targets.

Commissioner Morisseau commented that if the number of housing units is increased all the way up to 78,000, the jobs/housing ratio would be close to 0.9. While the city needs to be bold, it does have a history of underbuilding, so the question is how realistic it is that a much higher goal will be achieved. Emil King agreed the city has historically not had enough zoning capacity for housing, so the first step will be to significantly increase the housing capacity citywide for a range of different housing types. How growth actually happens will be looked at in more detail in the EIS process.

Dr. Nesse said the city's initial analysis to see if adding 43,000 housing units could even be done in the city reached the conclusion that it is feasible, though it would mean implementing all of the strategies under consideration. Emil King clarified that all of the growth concept ideas will need to be subject to the EIS process to determine the benefits and the impacts.

Commissioner Morisseau commented that the city does not have the acreage needed to achieve that many housing units on a horizontal plane, thus the need to go vertical with more density allowed in smaller footprints. The 2:1 ratio is aggressive but admittedly more in line with everything that has been discussed in regard to the housing needs of the city. Many who work in Bellevue cannot afford to live in Bellevue, and the city has a responsibility to provide housing choices across the entire city. At the end of the day, it will require a combination of all the approaches discussed.

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With regard to the public engagement process, Vice Chair Bhargava agreed that the more than 3000 responses to the questionnaire was very good. Staff was asked how that compares to public engagement in general and whether or not the city has achieved the gold standard. Dr. Nesse

allowed that the city has set its sights very high in terms of engagement. All available resources have been used well in seeking engagement. The tactic that has the most return on investment is the cultural outreach assistants. The workshop that was in Spanish was the result of their work. Emil King added that the city has set as an internal goal a five percent response rate for citywide questionnaires. The staff are very happy with the initial wave of engagement. Things can always be done better and staff will continue to improve. Dr. Nesse said the number of people who visit and engage on the website is in line with industry engagement standards.

Vice Chair Bhargava voiced support for the notion of stretching to plan for an additional 43,000 housing units. Because the work is in an early phase in which assumptions are being tested for the EIS, the approaches taken by communities that are similarly situated in terms of transit and jobs growth should be reviewed in terms of their jobs/housing ratio. Emil King said other cities and how they are growing are reviewed from a total numbers standpoint and an urban design standpoint. Much has been learned by doing so, though there are always unique circumstances faced by individual cities. Vice Chair Bhargava asked about possibilities that might not have been considered due to being outside of Bellevue's range currently. Dr. Nesse said Bellevue started out as a suburban community and has grown into being a job center. While targets are set at the city scale, staff are very aware of the development going on throughout the Eastside. The 2:1 jobs/housing ratio recognizes that Bellevue is a job center. Households often have two wage earners, thus the 2:1 ratio translates into one house for every job. Vice Chair Bhargava suggested there might be analogs similar to Bellevue's vision for what it wants to be that will help define the boundaries and overall scope.

With regard to the concepts of growth outlined in the presentation, Vice Chair Bhargava noted that pure transit oriented development was missing from the mix. The question was asked what really good transit oriented development looks like and how it fits with the housing typologies. Emil King said the city's TOD growth corridor encompasses the areas in and around the light rail stations. A number of the countywide centers are served by the bus rapid transit system. Transit oriented development is addressed in those two categories even though it was not specifically called out. Vice Chair Bhargava suggested other housing typologies, like live/work and active adult communities, should be called out more explicitly.

Commissioner Malakoutian noted looking forward to what the staff will come up with as a growth alternative going forward. Staff have cast a wide net in all aspects. With regard to the Spanish workshop, the question was asked why workshops in other languages were not conducted, such as Chinese. Commissioner Malakoutian added that online there is a lot of solid research that correlates jobs/housing ratios in terms of housing prices in different cities, and studies that relate housing price to homelessness. Dr. Nesse said steps are being taken to conduct a workshop in Chinese. The Spanish workshop came about because of a connection that was made. The community engagement process is being looked at broadly as a way to build relationships beyond just the immediate project. Dr. Nesse said staff would follow up on the studies.

Chair Ferris wanted to know if the DASH property is included on the Wilburton map. Janet Shull said it is and added that staff are working to update all of the representative maps. A new questionnaire and interactive map has been added to the EngagingBellevue website specific to the Wilburton study area. Both are intended to both describe and inform the community about the vision and seek input.

Chair Ferris noted that the list of different types of business centers listed BelRed both in the growth corridor and in the countywide center. Dr. Nesse said the countywide center designation

is determined by the county where certain TOD and density requirements are met. Some of the countywide centers fall within Bellevue’s growth corridors and the overlap means BelRed is listed twice.

Chair Ferris suggested that when it comes to meeting the targets, it may be necessary to take an “all of the above” approach given how great the need is. One letter sent to the Commission suggests working toward achieving a ratio of 1.5:1. The more aggressive the better, especially in the initial push. Wilburton in particular will be a transit-centric area and the vision for the area needs to be aggressive. An office-only approach for the area will kill the possibility of any nightlife; the same is true of a residential-only approach. There should be a focus on all types of housing typologies in all areas of the city, but particularly in Wilburton given its unique situation.

Chair Ferris expressed having a passion around having housing typologies that can support families. Bellevue has the best school district in the entire state and families should be able to take advantage of it. Two-, three- and even four-bedroom units are needed.

Commissioner Goepple agreed with the need to gain more understanding of what other cities are doing. Seattle has a ratio of about 1.5:1 in its 2024 targets. Historically, Seattle has overshot in terms of job growth and that has resulted in being behind all the time on housing. A robust Bellevue could end up doing the same, and that speaks favorably in aggressively going above and beyond just 8000 housing units.

With regard to engaging communities of color, Commissioner Morisseau praised the work of the cultural outreach staff. It should be learned that there is no need for planning staff to do the engagement work in silo. There are many resources within the city, including the advisory councils to the Bellevue police department, the members of which are all leaders in the community. All of them are willing to reach out to members of their communities. The Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network is also a great resource that should be tapped. Dr. Nesse said BDAN has been contacted about hosting an event on the Comprehensive Plan periodic update. Stipends may potentially be offered to community groups to do outreach to their networks as well.

Chair Ferris asked if renaming Wilburton to Midlakes is something the city is considering, and if so would the Planning Commission get involved. Similarly, it should be known if the Commission will be involved in the gun provision issue raised by a member of the public. Emil King said Vision Zero for Gun Safety was an annual Comprehensive Plan amendment application from a few years ago. The proposal made by the proponent is that the issue should be addressed as part of the periodic Comprehensive Plan update. At the appropriate time it will be brought before the Commission.

With regard to the naming issue, Janet Shull said staff only recently learned about the issue. The study area has been referred to as a commercial area in the past, but the vision is for an area with mixed use transit-oriented development. Staff are open to considering an appropriate and meaningful name, that distinguishes the study area from the greater Wilburton subarea. Several names have been suggested and they will be considered.

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Commissioner Morisseau noted having been a member of the Commission when the Vision Zero for Gun Safety Comprehensive Plan amendment was previously submitted. At the time the Commission felt it was not the right body to consider the issues given the policies that would need to be considered. If the staff intends to bring the matter back to the Commission, staff along with the Chair and Vice Chair should go back and listen to the recordings of the previous

discussions. The applicant should be directed appropriately.

Commissioner Malakoutian reported also having been part of the gun safety amendment discussion. The Commissioners were not all aligned with the final decision about whether or not to move the amendment forward. The majority believed that the Commission was not the appropriate body to take up the issue. Reading the meeting minutes or listening to the recording would be a very good idea.

9. OTHER BUSINESS
(8:06 p.m.)

A. Remote Participation Approval
Chair Ferris and Commissioners Malakoutian and Morisseau were approved to participate remotely at the next Commission meeting.

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
(8:08 p.m.)

A. June 22, 2022

A motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Malakoutian. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Goepple and the motion carried unanimously.

11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None
(8:08 p.m.)

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(8:09 p.m.)

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Goepple. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Bhargava and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Ferris adjourned the meeting at 8:09 p.m.