

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

January 24, 2024
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Calad

STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Emil King, Brooke Brod, Kate Nesse, Jesse Canedo, Department of Community Development; Kristina Gallant, Nick Whipple, Department of Development Services; Matt McFarland, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Not Present

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 Bhargava who presided.

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

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Calad.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
(6:32 p.m.)

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

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None
(6:33 p.m.)

5. STAFF REPORTS
(6:33 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. It was noted that additional meetings may need to be added in both March and April.

6. WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Chair Bhargava took a moment to note that under Ordinance 6752, the topics about which the public may speak during a meeting are limited to subject matters related to the city of Bellevue government and within the powers and duties of the Planning Commission. Additional information about the new rules of decorum governing conduct of the public during meetings can be found in Ordinance 6752. An open house on the Comprehensive Plan hosted by the Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network is planned for February 8.

A. Written Communications (6:36 p.m.)

Thara Johnson noted that staff had included in the packet all written communications received.

B. Oral Communications (6:37 p.m.)

Alex Tsimmerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners damn Nazi rats. The Council has appointed Mohamed Malakoutian to serve as Deputy Mayor, and that is very important for all decisions to be made in regard to the Comprehensive Plan. Deputy Mayor Malakoutian works for Amazon. Local governments have privileges and around the region they are all doing classic fascism. They do not care about poor people or senior citizens. The appointment of an Iranian Muslim as Deputy Mayor transitions the government to antisemitism. All the decisions of the government make no sense. The Commission supports the government and the City Council and is making decisions that are totally against the people, against all Americans and against all Jews. Everyone can understand what the Council is doing is pure fascism, pure antisemitism, and purely against America. Everyone should stand up to bring America back. The Chamber should be cleared of the anti-Nazi antisemite.

Vice Chair Goepple asked the record to reflect that the previous speaker's comments were in direct violation of Ordinance 6752 and constituted a rant and personal character assassination as well as belated campaigning. The comments were not focused on anything before the Commission. Chair Bhargava concurred.

Betsi Hummer addressed the importance of the work done by the Commission as reflected in the Eastgate proposal to build another auto dealership. It was stated that the speaker's husband, a landscape architect, had served as a member of the Citizen Advisory Committee for Eastgate. Then in 2015 the matter was presented to the Planning Commission for review and there was no one present from Eastgate to hear about it. After a general notice was sent out, a few people started showing up. It is dismaying to see the public not be aware of the changes that were made and not being involved in the decision making. The developers who own the property and have the vision spend years getting the permits, and by the time the sign goes up it is virtually a done deal. It is heartbreaking to see citizens feel their voices are not being heard. People need to be involved and feel as though they have been heard. When it comes to Wilburton, there should be robust public input with all views taken into consideration.

Matthew Rowe, a physician and engineer, noted having done some advisory work for the Mayo

Clinic several years ago. The Commission was asked to consider the possibility of the city of Bellevue becoming a central node in a grand digital connection, something with a high conceptual barrier but very low financial cost. Most Eastside leaders know and trust each other. That is good and necessary. Unfortunately, leadership at the senior level does not filter down to digital trust between the organizations. For example, when Overlake offers a course in suicide prevention, because there is no digital trust between the city and the hospital, the free course is not amplified throughout the community. Effectively, the city does not digitally trust Overlake and vice versa. It also does not digitally trust the Bellevue School District, Bellevue College or the county health department. The websites of those individual entities do not amplify each other's digital content. The lack of interorganizational trust is limiting the city in a variety of ways, including approaching Vision Zero, earthquake preparation, Fentanyl overdose, heatwave preparation, cold snap preparation, street racing, hate crime reporting, and improving vaccination rates. To improve digital trust in the region, the gatekeepers of the digital trust networks must come together. If they can come to trust each other, and if they have a mandate from the leadership of their respective organizations, they can go after some of the problems organically. The city should consider trust in terms of leadership relationships but also operational trust within and between the organizations.

Veronica Shakotko with Master Builder Association of King and Snohomish Counties stated that the organization supports balanced tree code policies. The members want regulations that are simple to follow and that result in efficient and predictable permitting processes. Uncertainty in permitting processes results in extended construction time and adds cost to projects. Streamlining is always better and more affordable. The organization supports the concept of the right tree in the right place. Friendly tree replacement policies allow for a degree of flexibility, which is critical. Primarily, the members want flexibility, simplicity and predictability. Replacing trees at the end of their natural lifespans with native trees, and the ability to match the right kind of tree at the best location, will help grow the tree canopy to better withstand climate effects. It is encouraging that the Commission is considering tree density credits as a retention alternative. Adding additional requirements could undermine the credit system. Careful consideration should be given to adding any additional requirements to retain trees over a certain size or in certain areas of a property, or in certain groupings. The work of the staff in allowing the organization to meet with the Bellevue Development Committee is very much appreciated. Staff did a great job of seeking feedback from the industry. Bellevue has done great things in many respects relative to the city's housing supply and the organization looks forward to working with the city moving forward with the difficult and laborious work.

Alexis Chartouni noted having been part of the Bellevue Development Committee tree retention presentation. The key takeaway was that retaining trees should not also impact development yield. The provision of incentives is the right way to go, allowing the yield that otherwise would have been allowed either through added height or in a different location on site. With regard to Alternative 3 and the preferred alternative for BelRed, the key yield differential is about a nine-story difference between the H-1 and the H-2 heights. It comes down to where the H-2 limits are on the map between a small central area around the station at 130th and a much broader area encompassing the area between Northup Way and Bel-Red Road. A quick analysis shows that about 15 towers could be put in the expanded zone above and beyond the preferred alternative. Those nine floors equate to about 80 and 100 units per tower, a difference of about 1500 residential units between the preferred alternative and the higher density Alternative 3. Of those 1500 units, there is the opportunity for the multifamily tax exemption, making about 300 of those units affordable under that program. To get those extra heights under the current code, which essentially has an FAR of 1.25, an additional 120 affordable units would be netted for a total of 440 units. That is the key metric difference between the two maps.

Craig Spiegle allowed having been outspoken over the past year on the effectiveness and concerns regarding community engagement efforts. Staff have taken several steps to address the concerns, including video streaming and recording all meetings. Another positive change resulted from moving the sign-up time to noon, enabling residents a chance to participate. The city recently hosted two community engagement events, including the tree canopy LUCA meeting at the Botanical Gardens and the Comprehensive Plan meeting. At both there was a good level of dialog and attendance. The plan to create a toolkit across all departments and commissions is an important first step toward enhancing objectivity and transparency in the process. The Commission was asked to go a step further by embracing the model developed by the International Association of Public Participation. The model includes five key pillars designed to maximize community engagement, impact and trust in the process. The pillars are informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering. By design, the framework involves a two-way dialog on each step of the process, underscoring objectivity and reducing the risk of bias. By embracing the framework, Bellevue can have a more creative and effective solution long term, and more importantly, build a trustworthy and transparent engagement process that is respected community wide.

Lee Sargent, 16246 NE 24th Street, spoke on behalf of Trees for Livability, many members of which encountered difficulties in getting to the meeting given the full parking lot and other issues. It is often easier for builders just to clear a lot of all trees and replant after the development occurs, but the issue involves significant trees that are 40 or 50 years old or older. Some are landmark trees that are 90 years old and which cannot simply be replaced by planting new trees. The significant trees are those that can actually survive hotter weather. The city must take seriously the fact that there is work to be done. Significant trees are a resource for the community, not just for property owners.

Charles Fritzmeier, a resident of Bellevue for more than 40 years, noted being an architect, developer and builder with experience regionally, nationally and internationally. With regard to tree code revision efforts, one thing that has happened is the trees become the target and the enemy. That is the wrong approach. More often than not, most residential development in Bellevue involves a single family 2700 square foot residence occupied by 2.4 individuals being torn down and replaced with a 5000-square-foot house to be occupied by 2.4 people. The reality is the culprit is the design of the individual structures being put up on sites. Maximizing the size of the development box brings a greater profit to the developer, but it does not bring a greater quality of life to the city or to the residents of the city. The missing link is builders and developers trying to adapt preexisting designs to a site that maximizes their profit, rather than looking at the footprint of the structure that is being taken down and expanding it appropriately to accommodate the character of the site. If Bellevue wants to be a city in a forest, changes need to be made to preserve that green character. Like other communities have done, Bellevue should have a design review board with some real teeth. The approach does increase costs, but only slightly. Kirkland has been very successful using the approach. Left out of the tree code consideration is a stronger emphasis on bringing arborists into the equation to determine which trees should stay and which trees should be removed.

Eddie Chang, vice president of government affairs for Washington Realtors, and a member of the board of Seattle/King County Realtors, noted having worked for builders in the past doing site work ahead of construction. The cost difference between having a pre-made plan furnished by an architect versus a custom design that wraps around existing trees is about \$100,000. There are implications to consider relative to HB-1110 and HB-1245. Bellevue does not need more 5000-square-foot homes, but it does need more duplexes and fourplexes, and lot splitting to allow for

the creation of more density and more housing availability. An existing tree could potentially eliminate splitting a lot and thus prevent building something like a fourplex. The new highrise condominiums are nice but they are not really affordable for the average consumer. Neither are the \$3 million to \$5 million new homes being built. Small homes on split lots, or smaller multifamily homes in residential zones offer the possibility of affordable housing.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None
(7:07 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION

A. Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA) to Support Tree Preservation, Retention, Replacement and Protection
(7:07 p.m.)

Code and Policy Division assistant director Nick Whipple commented that staff had enjoyed a busy time since the first presentation to the Commission on the tree code issues. The work included meeting with the Bellevue Development Committee on January 10, and a community meeting at the Botanical Garden on January 11.

Senior Planner Kristina Gallant said comments received during the January 10 meeting with the Bellevue Development Committee included an emphasis on providing assurance for the zoned density, the importance of providing clarity early, and a desire for alternative performance options including a fee-in-lieu and off-site planting. Participants requested incorporating flexibility for the notion of the right tree in the right place by recommendation from an arborist; considering a tree's location within the site; development regulations for height, FAR and setbacks; and general flexibility for affordable housing and middle housing. The public information session held on January 11 had 47 participants. Comments during the session included support for preserving landmark trees wherever possible, concerns regarding tree removal for large single family home development, a desire for development to respond to the site, encouraging native species and groves of trees, and mixed opinions covering strict and consistent application citywide versus being open to some development incentives to support retention.

There was a lot of discussion during the January 11 meeting regarding enforcement and implementation. On the enforcement side there was support for requiring maintenance agreements, the need for improved tracking, an interest in a tree service provider registry, support for strict penalties, and ensuring having sufficient staff resources available. On the implementation side there was a great emphasis placed on the importance of education regarding regulations and the importance and benefits of trees.

Kristina Gallant noted the Commission had previously asked how Bellevue's tree canopy compares to neighboring jurisdictions. Bellevue's 40 percent tree canopy is ahead of Redmond, Kirkland, Burien, Portland, Seattle, Tacoma and Spokane, but is less than Bellingham's 42 percent. Even so, there is room for improvement. A chart showing canopy change by land use based on the two most recent canopy analyses indicated that growth in certain areas has offset losses in other areas. Single family neighborhoods have seen a net decrease from 2019 to 2021. The city is facing an opportunity with the update to address the known flaws, and to review the regulations comprehensively.

The Commission had previously also asked about how the tree regulations are enforced. The first

step is the identification of a violation, which Code Enforcement will investigate. Where it is determined that a violation has occurred, Code Enforcement first seeks voluntary compliance. Typically that involves replanting trees. When voluntary compliance is unsuccessful, the city code allows for pursuing monetary penalties based on the value of trees. The first step along that path involves the issuance of a notice of civil violation, which automatically triggers scheduling a hearing before the Hearing Examiner. The Hearing Examiner makes the ultimate determination as to whether a violation has taken place and sets the final penalty. Often there really is not enough evidence available to confidently move on to the civil violation hearing process.

Addressing the question previously asked about the limitations of a minimum tree credit system approach, Kristina Gallant said setting up the system requires increased up-front analysis. There is a wide degree of latitude in how such a system can be implemented, making it necessary to be very clear about the city's priorities. The approach is being used in more jurisdictions, but remains an emerging approach and as such there is a clear need for deliberate education for both applicants and city staff to facilitate a smooth transition.

The tree credit systems can be implanted in a wide range of ways, so it is important for the City to have clear priorities. On one end is the purely market-based approach where the minimum tree credits can be achieved in any way, whether it be by planting, retaining or through an in-lieu fee. That provides for maximum development flexibility, but the least certainty for retaining large trees. On the other end is the extreme of imposing strict retention requirements, possibly even above the minimum credit level. In that case there would be the least development flexibility but the greatest certainty for preserving large trees. The desire is to find the middle ground and identify a mixture of incentives and requirements.

The list of potential incentives includes giving extra credit for things like retaining landmark trees, retaining trees in groves, and retaining and planting native species. There is support for continuing to discount alders and cottonwoods. There is an existing, up to ten percent, parking reduction for projects that exceed the required retention, which could be maintained. And the Commission has commented on ways to offer incentives for exceeding the minimum retention requirements, especially in places that have lower canopy percentages.

In regard to incorporating flexibility, at the top of the list would be allowing for the removal of trees that are not well suited to their location. Next would be looking at certain development regulations when necessary to accommodate retaining trees, such as where there is a focus on affordable housing and missing middle housing types. The in-lieu fee has been called out as an option of last resort for the cases where on-site tree retention truly cannot be accommodated. There have been comments made about accommodating existing view neighborhoods, and about limiting barriers to removing genuinely hazardous trees and invasive or noxious species.

The list of potential requirements includes: establishing a minimum tree density, scaled with development type; updating the definition of significant tree to six inches instead of eight, expanding the trees subject to the regulations; implementing a permanent definition for landmark trees; and establishing some additional enforcement tools, such as inspections for tree retention, requiring signage for permitted tree removal activities, considering markers identifying retained trees during construction, and establishing a tree contractor registry.

Kristina Gallant said staff are proposing a full re-write of Section 20.20.900 Tree Retention and Replacement. The section is currently difficult to follow. Six subsections are proposed: purpose, applicability, definitions, required review, minimum tree density, and tree protection. The purpose section of the draft LUCA has been revised to emphasize our canopy goal of preventing

citywide net loss of the tree canopy and to address local canopy gaps. The section also calls for reducing the impacts of development on the storm and surface water systems and water resources; provides guidance and flexibility to support the concept of the right tree in the right place; and preserving other public benefits of the city's urban forest, including minimizing heat impacts, enhancing ecosystem resilience, and storing carbon.

The applicability and required review components have generally been maintained but the language has been updated for clarity. The tree retention requirements are triggered by any permit, approval or review for development activity, with the review work being done by the Department of Development Services. The section directs to the city code the regulations for tree removal not associated with development activity. The section maintains certain exceptions, including for shorelines, critical areas, and the Downtown and East Main where there are currently separate regulations for trees.

A few section-specific definitions are included in the draft; they apply only to the specific tree retention section. The definitions for significant tree and landmark tree are separate in that they apply throughout the Land Use Code. With regard to development activity, the definition maintains the existing approach but is called out specifically for reasons of clarity; it defines the permits, approvals or reviews which trigger tree retention requirements. A definition for invasive and noxious species is also included and is intended to be used to establish those species ineligible for tree credits and not allowed to be planted as part of a development project.

The tree canopy site area is the area of a site that is used to calculate the minimum required tree credits. It is also the area in which any new required trees must be planted. The site area excludes critical areas and their buffers, shoreline vegetation conservation areas, any public rights-of-way, private roads and submerged lands. The total square footage of the tree canopy site area is used to calculate the minimum credits that must be achieved. Trees within the site area could earn credits and could be subject to the retention requirements.

Kristina Gallant reminded the Commissioners that the LUCA was initiated in November 2022. The first public information session was held in June 2023, and the first study session in December 2023. A presentation was given to the Bellevue Development Committee on January 10, and that was followed by the second Commission study session on January 11. A third study session with the Commission is planned but not yet scheduled. The Commission will ultimately conduct a public hearing and forward to the Council a recommendation.

Commissioner Ferris asked if a landmark tree in the middle of a lot on which someone wanted to build a house would be allowed to be removed. Kristina Gallant said that is one of the areas for calibration, the specifics of which are still being determined. Some degree of flexibility will be required to accommodate development along with consideration for replanting multiple trees.

Commissioner Ferris asked if the city would consider allowing greater building height in exchange for a smaller building footprint in cases where development occurs in a grove of trees. Kristina Gallant said that is another area that is being tested. Currently consideration for additional height is not being considered for market-rate standalone single family housing, but it is being considered for affordable housing and middle housing types.

Commissioner Ferris commented that the enforcement ideas as outlined are terrific. With regard to educating the public, a perfect place to start would be in the schools.

With regard to relying on the public to report violations, Commissioner Ferris asked how easy it

is for a person to report to the city something a neighbor is doing that does not look right. Kristina Gallant said violations can be reported through the MyBellevue app. There is also a tree removal page on the city's website that includes how to report possible violations to code enforcement.

Commissioner Brown voiced being concerned about the written comment from an individual who compared the practices of the past, when removing a tree could easily and inexpensively be done, with the current approach where one must hire an arborist, someone to do an ecological study, and pay permit fees, all of which adds up to quite a lot, all to cut down a tree that may in fact be dangerous or which is just in the wrong place. Kristina Gallant said the city has heard from a lot of commenters who are looking to remove trees in critical areas, which does trigger other requirements and which can usher in additional costs. Currently, in cases where a permit is required to remove a landmark tree or a significant tree over the allotment, the permit fee is under \$400. In the Bridle Trails areas, removing up to two trees reaches that same price point, however removing more than three trees triggers certain other land use reviews, and the cost increases to around \$734. Removal of trees as part of development triggers more staff review time and thus a higher cost.

Commissioner Khanloo noted not having seen any guidelines for building around trees. Around the world there are examples of development working around existing trees, even high-density development. Commissioner Khanloo also asked why the Downtown and East Main are excluded from the tree canopy requirements. Kristina Gallant explained that Downtown and East Main both have their own specific green factor that projects must achieve, which includes scoring for trees. That was implemented in 2017 and there has been solid canopy growth in the Downtown since then. The approach can be amended in the future, but so far the approach is proving to be positive. Commissioner Khanloo urged including guidelines for developing around existing trees.

Vice Chair Goepple remarked on the fact that the city has already essentially achieved the goal of 40 percent canopy coverage. The city also has goals in terms of affordability and housing production around which the city scores very low. It is therefore important to see some flexibility built into the process to ensure that the city can produce additional housing units in order to achieve the goals. To the extent the city does not allow for some level of density, the result will be more sprawl, which means trees in other places will be cut down. It would be shortsighted for the city just to focus on the trees in its own backyards; it needs to look more broadly in terms of maintaining the overall forest.

Vice Chair Goepple voiced support for the tree credit calibration approach. While not everyone will be happy with it, it has a fair amount of sense. With regard to transitioning from eight inches to six inches in determining a significant tree, there are concerns about the possibility of creating issues in a couple of different ways. It does not take long for a tree to reach six inches at chest height and that might potentially serve as an impediment for development. When it comes to the definition of significant tree being picked up in the Clearing and Grading code, the ability of individual homeowners to potentially remove a tree could be impacted, such as an ornamental tree planted too close to a house that eventually exceeds the six-inch standard, the removal of which may trigger a very expensive process.

Chair Bhargava agreed with the public comments about the need for a tree code that is simple, measurable, enforceable and flexible. The process of enforcement as outlined could have limited outcomes in he said/she said situations. Baseline existing conditions at a site needs a source of truth. Kristina Gallant said when complaints come in the code enforcement officer visits the site.

In some cases the officer finds a stump, clearly establishing that a tree has in fact been removed. Assumptions can be drawn from the stump as to the size of the tree and whether it was significant or a landmark. The question then turns to attempts to confirm when the tree was removed. Enforcement offices do look to aerial photography and Google street view. Absent there having been a recent development, the baseline condition cannot necessarily be determined given that the city does not have a specific inventory of all sites. Chair Bhargava proposed the city should look to technology and innovation, possibly going so far as asking someone buying a parcel to submit a simple drawn imagery, maybe funded by the city, as a way of establishing a baseline, removing conflict and bringing truth to the arguments.

Chair Bhargava voiced support for the comments made about assurance of zoned density. The concept is an important one for development to happen, but the incentives and a framework will need to be established in order to make it happen. Building around what exists on sites is not always possible. There should be a high threshold for what a landmark tree is for all sorts of reasons. There should be a high fee associated with removing a landmark tree, but not an absolute prohibition. Any incentives and punitive measures need to be commensurate with the value of a giving landmark tree to the community.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Khanloo, explained that currently in single family neighborhoods the current retention system is based on allowing the removal of up to a certain percentage of the trees on site at the time of application. In many cases that means sites can be cleared before coming in for a development permit, and then because there are no trees on the site, there are no requirements to add trees. If a site has only a few trees, the requirements regarding retention are very low. That is why staff is recommending a minimum-based system, allowing for requirements to add trees. In the commercial mixed use areas such as the Downtown there are requirements for street tree and landscaping requirements, all of which is helping to keep up with the tree canopy in those areas. Maps showing the areas where there has been a net loss of tree canopy can be produced and provided.

Commissioner Khanloo added that the police department has two drones that possibly the planning department could use to help map the tree canopy. The city should not have a passive approach to the tree canopy. The city should actively monitor the tree canopy in all areas. Designing around trees is expensive for developers, but the public needs to have the trees.

Vice Chair Goepple asked if consideration is being given to the impacts of the tree code revisions as they relate to things like HB-1110 and HB-1337 and the ability to produce additional housing units. Kristina Gallant said staff are trying to do as much future-proofing as possible, but of course once the code is actually developed in response to that legislation, thing might need to be tweaked once again. It is in the credit approach itself, scaling with the type of development rather than the specific neighborhood, is where additional flexibility can be added.

Chair Bhargava concurred with the notion of having maintenance agreements for trees, something that is trackable. Arborists are expensive and perhaps the city could help out with those costs as part of the process, possibly by having an arborist on staff. The rationale for going to six inches from eight inches in determining a significant tree has not been fully explained.

****BREAK****
(7:58 p.m.)

B. Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update: Volume 1 Policy Changes in the Community Engagement and Economic Development Elements

(8:01 p.m.)

Planning Director Emil King brought to the table the Community Engagement and Economic Development elements of the Comprehensive Plan and noted the staff would be seeking direction from the Commission on each section. The Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update process to date was briefly reviewed with the Commission and the schedule going forward was highlighted.

Community Engagement Lead Brooke Brod reminded the Commissioners that there has been a lot of community engagement since the update process was launched in early 2022. More than 5000 community members have been involved through a variety of workshops, focus groups, surveys, and through questionnaires, both online and in-person. There has been a significant amount of targeted outreach to underrepresented groups. A statistically valid survey was conducted in January 2023, and early in the process a strategy team comprised of 50 stakeholders representing non-profits, developers, the business community, neighborhood leaders and arts leaders was tasked with providing input and perspective on the policies. There have been a lot of comments about how to take into account both current residents and future residents and businesses.

The draft policy moves were released to the public on January 15. An open house was held on January 20 that saw nearly 100 attendees. There are questionnaires currently online that show all of the new and updated policies, all translated into the city's top six languages. Work is under way with three of Bellevue's schools to engage the youth as well.

The changes to the Community Engagement Element are focused around providing guidance to the entire engagement process. They range from building the capacity of community members to participate to planning for engagement and executing those engagement plans. The changes seek to recognize how dramatically Bellevue has changed as the city has become more diverse and global. New and updated policies emphasize taking concrete steps and dedicating adequate time and resources to support representative participation across city projects and policy development.

The element has been divided into four sections, with the first section focused on building community capacity. New policies focus on building the knowledge, confidence and skills of the community to participate in all aspects of civic life. The second section centers on planning for engagement. The policies call out the fact that a lot of work needs to be done with the community and internally before launching public participation efforts. They offer direction and guidance around specific analyses to understand who will be impacted by a participate project, to consider ways to discuss ways for the community to be engaged, and they encourage using the new planning time to think about new and innovative techniques that might be appropriate for any project. The third section involves the actual engagement of the community and the new policies focus on setting engagement metrics and goals about who is being engaged, monitoring how well the engagement process is doing in terms of reaching all voices, and being explicit in reporting back to the community about what was heard during an engagement process and how input from the community is being used. The policies also encourage folks to go above and beyond the minimum requirements for engagement when possible and appropriate. The final section include general policies about supporting good overall relationships and two-way communications with the city. The policies strive to do better collaboration and coordination with tribal entities, and focus on more support and direction around having continuous communication within the community.

Emil King stressed that the policy moves are all based on feedback previously provided by the

Commission and the public. They will all be brought back in final draft form in about May.

Commissioner Ferris called attention to policy CE-4 and allowed that there is currently a big push around affordable housing and a lot of stakeholders involved. Some of the people who will be most impacted are potential residents and there should be a way to reach out to them. Similarly, while it is relatively easy to seek input from business owners, a way should be identified to get input from potential customers. Brooke Brod said one impetus behind the policy update was the recognition that prior to launching a particular project or doing policy work, the staff needs to take the time to examine the overall landscape and seek to understand who the stakeholders might be.

Commissioner Khanloo commented that sometimes only the loud voices are heard, and that is not always the majority. There is a clear need to hear all the voices. Brooke Brod indicated that some of the things in the policies that will support good implementation are calling out for new and innovative techniques and embracing them. There are also updates that specifically call on staff to consider how to reduce barriers to participation.

Commissioner Brown voiced general support for the policies and for bringing them into modern sensibilities but questioned whether the city is using technology as effectively as it could in terms of social media in all its various forms to broadcast information to make sure people know what is happening. Microtargeting can be done to reach specific neighborhoods. Brooke Brod allowed that the platforms used by the public likely will change in the future and the city will need to monitor all the new and innovative technology options. Consideration must be given to whether or not there is sufficient staffing to support the platforms. The city must also be thoughtful about how the platforms might be using the data of residents, and there are responsibilities around public records.

Vice Chair Goepple called attention to the old policy CE-3 which called for ensuring that process that identifies new commercial areas or expands existing areas includes considering the impacts of the potential development on affected residential neighborhoods and results in decisions that are consistent with other policies in the Comprehensive Plan. Concerns about listening to the neighborhoods and giving consideration to possible neighborhood impacts have been called out in the public testimony. Brooke Brod said some of those concerns are addressed in the updated policy CE-4. In other parts of the update there is a more specific definition of “community” that includes both residents and those who commute to Bellevue to work, shop, dine and visit. Some of the policies may in fact be better addressed in the Land Use Element.

Vice Chair Goepple added that the generality of the term “community” is too broad. Emil King noted the comment and agreed to give the issue some follow-up when the full draft plan is brought back.

Chair Bhargava referred to CE-2 and suggested the policy focus needs to go deeper than just engagement with leaders. It is not adequate to conclude that the leaders represent the communities adequately. With regard to CE-3, it is not clear what is meant by “adequate time.” There are policies that talk about specific residential and industrial development need to be more specific. The concern regarding CE-12 is that language is too loose; even those who do not live in Downtown Bellevue are impacted by development projects in the Downtown. The policy language needs to be more precise.

Commissioner Khanloo agreed with the comments of Vice Chair Goepple concerning CE-4 and CE-5. Citizen engagement is very important in policy making.

Commissioner Brown voiced support for the language of CE-19 and how broad it is in the definitions of involving all members of the community.

Emil King briefly reviewed the comments made by the Commission about possibly changes to the language of policies CE-2, CE-3, CE-4, CE-12 and CE-13. There was consensus by the Commission to direct staff to address those areas of focus.

Moving on to the Economic Development Element, Dr. Kate Nesse said a lot of the guidance in the current plan is working well. For the most part, all that is needed are tweaks to the policies. The element is divided into sections. Policy ED-15 in the Business Development section is new in support of the continued growth of arts organizations. There are additional arts policies in the Urban Design and Arts section. In the Community Livability subsection, ED-18 was updated to support the development of housing for Bellevue workers. ED-22 gives the city a more active role in strengthening destination retail, particularly outside of the Downtown. ED-27 has been broadened to include all areas, not just the commercial areas that are in decline. In the Education section, ED-34 was added to support the recruitment of a four-year research institution. Finally, ED-46 was added to the Economic Implementation section to support city assistance in locating space for displaced businesses.

Vice Chair Goepple asked what the focus is in ED-34 in terms of a research institution. Dr. Kate Nesse said Bellevue College does grant four-year degrees but it is not considered to be a research institution. Chief Economic Development Officer Jesse Canedo added that Bellevue College is the largest open enrollment institution in the state and it does a great job doing what it does. Regionally, however, there is a large deficit in advanced degrees and research and development compared to the growth of the area. The desire is to see an institution locate in Bellevue that will add on to what Bellevue College is doing, something that will require a long-term conversation with the state, Bellevue College and other higher education stakeholders. It is too early to be too specific as to any research institution.

Commissioner Brown asked if consideration has been given to locating a University of Washington branch campus in Bellevue, and Jesse Canedo said that would also be on the table.

Vice Chair Goepple asked if there could be a way to both attract a research institute and expand offers with Bellevue College. The city should not chase a prestige research institute without also seeking to grow Bellevue College and all it does in terms of providing for broader community development. Jesse Canedo said the policy as drafted does not preclude working with Bellevue College in the future.

Emil King noted that in all there are six policies under the heading of education. The suggestion made was to go back and look at those policies to add additional policies or revise the existing policies to talk about the offerings of Bellevue College. There was consensus in favor of doing that.

Commissioner Brown voiced support for the more concise format of ED-27 to make the focus more general. The proposed changes to all the other policies make sense as well.

Commissioner Ferris called attention to ED-2 and the language that distinguishes between a local branch office versus an independent office. The Commissioner noted having been very much embedded in the community when running a local branch office for a large organization, and very involved in the development of the community. It is true that not all branch offices are the

same, but it is not clear what is to be achieved by separating them out. Dr. Kate Nesse allowed that some branch offices are not really focused on their community while others are very invested. The addition of “independent” in front of “local businesses” was intended to focus on those businesses that are involved in the community. The policy could be drafted to make that clearer.

Vice Chair Goeppelle and Commissioner Brown agreed with the need for some clarity.

Chair Bhargava asked Commissioner Ferris if the desire was to revert back to not distinguishing branch versus local businesses. Commissioner Ferris said no branch office should be considered to be something the city does not want. Businesses that are really embedded in the community are to be desired. Chair Bhargava said the policy as drafted can be interpreted to call for promoting local businesses and not as a deterrent to something else. Commissioner Ferris said the city should promote businesses getting involved in the community.

Chair Bhargava asked if a franchise retail outlet would be considered to be a local business or a branch office. Commissioner Ferris said that would depend on whether the business is an active participant in the community.

Emil King said staff would be happy to take another look at the language of the policy. There was consensus to direct staff to do that.

Commissioner Khanloo called out the use of the words “encourage” and “support” in policies ED-29 and ED-30, noting that the language of other policies outlines a more active role for government. Dr. Kate Nesse said the verb used depends on several things. Sometimes it depends on what the city is able to do; for instance, the city cannot start up new businesses, but it can encourage them or create a good business climate. Where the city is not in a position to mandate or require certain desired things, the approach is to use supporting language.

Commissioner Khanloo asked staff for a scenario that might result from ED-46 . Dr. Kate Nesse said the policy came from a recommended mitigation measure in the draft Environmental Impact Statement. The city recognizes that with new development comes the potential for the displacement of both residents and businesses. The desire is to make sure the city will do things within its powers to retain those businesses. The city does have a program in place currently that helps businesses locate space and the policy could build on that program.

Commissioner Brown noted that a lot of language had been removed from ED-26 and stressed the desire to see the creation of third places emphasized.

Chair Bhargava noted that ED-5 calls for fostering business innovation and startups through business development strategies, and suggested the language is too specific on startups for a policy that is focused on innovation.

Chair Bhargava voiced support for adding the idea of equitable and environmentally sustainable economic growth to ED-6, but asked if “environmentally sustainable economic growth” will foster the right outcome or limit the growth of some businesses. Staff was asked to consider the possible implications of the policy. Dr. Kate Nesse said the policy language originally pitted businesses against the environment. The intent of the policy was to use the concept of a triple bottom line: to support business development that is equitable, environmentally sustainable and economically feasible. Chair Bhargava said the policy does not give clear guidance in terms of the desired outcome. Dr. Kate Nesse said what is being pushed by the policy are regulations that

promote both environmental sustainability and the economy, with neither taking precedence. Chair Bhargava suggested that policy language that promotes sustainable economic development will not pit one against the other.

Chair Bhargava asked what the intent was behind ED-11. Dr. Kate Nesse said the city has taken actions to create connections with other countries in terms of trade, and the city also has some sister cities. Emil King added that the policy was included in the Economic Development Element in the last Comprehensive Plan update. Bellevue is a global city in that it has investors from around the world. The intent of the policy is to show that Bellevue is a global city that desires to foster relationships with other countries. Chair Bhargava said that explanation was clearer than the language of the policy itself.

With regard to ED-15, Chair Bhargava suggested that “capacity building programs” is too loose a term to be in a policy. Dr. Kate Nesse explained that the city supports arts organizations and the arts as an industry in a lot of different ways. One key method is to support the development of cultural organizations in the city. While the city does not develop and operate its own arts organizations, but it does want to make sure there are programs that can foster people in creating such organizations.

Chair Bhargava noted that the language of ED-18 changed from “encourage” to facilitate.” That is a good move but not good enough. A stronger word like “incentivize” would be better. Dr. Kate Nesse said with the agreement of the other Commissioners, staff would take another look at the policy language in relation to the policies in the Housing Element. There was consensus to do so.

A motion to extend the meeting by 15 minutes was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brown and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Bhargava referred generally to policy language that can quickly become dated, including the phrase “state of the art technology.” Language that is more precise and clear should be used instead in ED-38 and ED-39.

Vice Chair Goepple called attention to ED-22 and the phrase “strengthen destination retail” and asked if that is as opposed to other types of retail. Dr. Kate Nesse said there are a lot of great retail destinations in Bellevue besides Bellevue Square. Retail is a significant sector in Bellevue and the intent of the policy is to make sure Bellevue will be a destination for people in the region. Vice Chair Goepple commented that as a resident of the city, retail such as hardware and grocery stores is more important. Much of what is purchased at destination retail shops can also be bought online. Dr. Kate Nesse agreed with the point. The policy is more specifically focused on tourism. There are other policies about the city’s commercial areas, which of course includes local retail establishments.

Commissioner Brown emphasized ED-33 and voiced appreciation for the city in taking a role in actively encouraging workforce development, especially in regard to the trades and apprenticeships. There is a huge demand for it, yet young people continue to have trouble knowing where to go to learn trades and the like.

Emil King walked through the policies that highlighted which ones the Commission had asked staff to review and revise, namely ED-2, ED-5, ED-6, ED-11, ED-15, ED-18, ED-26, ED-38 and ED-39.

Dr. Kate Nesse said the full draft of the policies would be before the Commission again in May.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None
(9:06 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
(9:06 p.m.)

A. January 10, 2024

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Commissioner Brown. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Goepple and the motion carried unanimously.

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(9:08 p.m.)

12. ADJOURNMENT
(9:08 p.m.)

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

Chair Bhargava adjourned the meeting at 9:08 p.m.