



Bellevue Planning Commission

July 9, 2025

PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING ITEM

SUBJECT

Final Review Public Hearing on the Downtown Center Redesignation – Downtown Subarea Plan

STAFF CONTACT(S)

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POLICY ISSUES

Comprehensive Plan Policy LU-19 directs the city to, “Sustain Downtown’s designation as a Regional Growth Center.” PSRC established the Regional Centers Framework in 2018 to guide regional growth. The Regional Centers are priority areas for federal transportation funding. Downtown Bellevue was originally designated a Regional Growth Center in 1995. Following the establishment of the Regional Centers Framework, Bellevue was recognized as a Metropolitan Regional Growth Center in 2020. In 2024, PSRC launched a Monitoring and Redesignation process for existing regional centers to ensure that the Regional Growth Centers continue to comply with PSRC’s regional Vision, recently updated to Vision 2050. The redesignation of Downtown as a Metropolitan Regional Growth Center will allow Bellevue to continue to be eligible for federal transportation funding. Bellevue has submitted the application to retain the Regional Growth Center designation for Downtown based on this update.

The Downtown Subarea Plan is part of Volume 2 of the Comprehensive Plan. Council launched the update to the subarea plan on January 14. The update to the Downtown Subarea Plan will be included as one of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Amendments.

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION



DIRECTION



INFORMATION ONLY



Request	Summary Guidance
1. Conduct a Final Review public hearing for the proposed amendment	Direct staff to first review and present the staff recommendation, then open the public hearing and accept public testimony. Close the public hearing.
2. Conduct a study session following the public hearing to make a recommendation	Review the staff recommendation, public record, and consider the public testimony. Ask questions of staff; review the proposed resolution.
3. Take action on a recommendation	The Commission uses a resolution to the City Council for the recommendation action. Take action to provide Planning Commission recommendation by resolution.

The Downtown Subarea Plan amendments are proposed as part of the annual Comprehensive Plan Amendments. Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendment proposals are reviewed by the Planning Commission and acted upon by the City Council through the Final Review process set forth in the Land Use Code at [LUC 20.30I](#). Final Review evaluates the merits of proposed amendments included in the

annual Comprehensive Plan Amendment work program. Final Review evaluation and decision includes staff review, a Planning Commission public hearing and recommendation by resolution, and City Council action by ordinance. The Planning Commission holds Final Review public hearings and makes recommendations. The City Council's subsequent action on Planning Commission recommendations is the final City action to amend the Comprehensive Plan.

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Staff recommend approving this proposed amendment because the application satisfies Land Use Code decision criteria for Final Review of a City Council-initiated Comprehensive Plan Amendment (LUC 20.30I.150) amending the Comprehensive Plan with the Downtown Subarea Plan. (The staff report, Attachment A, details how this amendment satisfies the decision criteria).

Summary of Recommendation

The proposed revisions to the Downtown Subarea Plan are focused on meeting updated requirements for redesignation of Downtown as a Metropolitan Regional Growth Center. The updates to the narrative are focused on bringing the descriptions up to date by,

- Updating the growth targets to the 2044 horizon as described in the Comprehensive Plan, Volume 1,
- Updating data to be current and align with the planning period,
- Changing the descriptions of projects that have progressed such as the Grand Connection and Eastrail,
- More completely describing the role of the Downtown in the Regional Growth Center framework.

In addition, proposed revisions to policies are focused on the primary changes to Vision 2050 and the requirements for Regional Growth Centers,

- Mitigation of residential and commercial displacement,
- Planning for people of color, people with low incomes, and historically marginalized populations, and
- Reducing the impact on the environment and planning for climate change.

Attachment A, the Staff Report, details the proposed changes and includes the proposed revisions to both the narrative and the policies. Minor changes are also proposed to correct typos and update figure and map references. All maps and figures have been updated to meet current guidelines for accessibility (note that there have been minor updates to the maps and graphics since the publication of the Public Hearing Draft. The revised maps and graphics are in Attachment B).

Summary of Public Comment

The public was informed of the Downtown Sub-Area Comprehensive Plan and Downtown Center Redesignation update via public notice posted on February 21, 2025. The Notice of Application was posted on March 6, 2025. The notice for this upcoming hearing was posted on June 18, 2025. Two public comments were received. One asked the Planning Commission not to include the new policy addressing commercial displacement. The other mentioned this as well as the description of Bellevue Square and proposed new language relating to Downtown transportation policies.

Summary of Planning Commission Input

This public hearing is the third time this CPA has come before the Planning Commission. The first two study sessions are described below.

- **May 28, 2025** Provided commission an initial briefing and overview of the update process.
- **June 11, 2025** Reviewed the proposed policy changes in greater detail and addressed the public input received. Planning Commissioners provided feedback on specific policies described below.

The comments from the Planning Commissioners at the June 11 meeting (left column) and the staff recommendation for addressing the issues raised (right column) are listed in the table below. The portion highlighted in yellow is the portion that was changed in response to the Commissioners' feedback (the complete list of policy changes are part of the Staff Report – Attachment A).

Commission Comment Summary	Staff Recommendation
<p>Proposed policy S-DT-23: Avoid language that could lead to requirements for developers to subsidize commercial space for small businesses through development.</p>	<p>Increase access to <u>affordable commercial space that is appropriate to grow and retain small and independent businesses in Downtown.</u></p> <p>Reworded to broaden the policy to include all of the ways commercial space can be tailored to small and independent businesses.</p>
<p>S-DT-29: Avoid language that would lead to a mandatory affordable housing program in Downtown since Council has not given direction on that yet. In addition, the policy should be broad enough to allow for office to residential conversion and co-living spaces.</p>	<p>Proposed policy S-DT-29: <u>Meet the needs of a variety of household sizes in diverse economic circumstances with</u> Provide for a range of Downtown urban residential types and densities, <u>using a variety of tools including affordable housing.</u></p> <p>Added a clause that clarifies that affordable housing is one among many ways to meet housing needs downtown.</p>
<p>S-DT-39: Use language that indicates an action.</p>	<p>Proposed policy S-DT-39: <u>Look for opportunities to expand Encourage the expansion of sustainable stormwater infrastructure, tree canopy, and landscaping that enhances ecological functions and urban wildlife habitat connectivity.</u></p> <p>The revision is more directive for the City to encourage the expansion, not just identify opportunities to do expand these environmental infrastructure elements.</p>
<p>S-DT-116: Make sure this policy includes a wide variety of groups, including those from underserved communities.</p>	<p>Proposed policy S-DT-116: Provide an equitable distribution of neighborhood-serving parks and open spaces throughout Downtown. These amenities should include a mix of passive, green open space along with more formalized hardscape areas <u>address the needs of a wide variety of park users, including people who live, work and visit Downtown, and those from underserved communities.</u></p> <p>The addition of the final clause recognizes that parks in Downtown serve not only the local community but visitors of all kinds to the neighborhood.</p>

AMENDMENT NOTICE

Notice of the application was published in the [Weekly Permit Bulletin](#) on March 6 and mailed and posted as required by [LUC 20.35.420](#). Notice of Intent to adopt amendments as required by RCW 36.70A.106 will be submitted to the Washington State Department of Commerce 60 days prior to the anticipated adoption date. Notice of the Final Review Public Hearing before the Planning Commission was published in the [Weekly Permit Bulletin](#) on June 18 and the Seattle Times and included notice sent to parties of record.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Staff Report with attachments
- B. Maps and Graphics
- C. Resolution to Recommend the Downtown Subarea Plan Amendment