



# Wilburton Vision Implementation

## Community Engagement Report

Phase 2: January 2023 – September 2023

October 2023





## Executive Summary

Community input is helping shape the west edge of the Wilburton neighborhood into Bellevue’s next mixed-use, trail- and transit-oriented community. In this current phase of engagement, the planning team heard from over 350 people across different events, workshops, and online engagement tools. Their input is helping the planning team craft and refine policies that will guide successful implementation of the Wilburton Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) area vision. These policies reflect the community’s vision for the area as changes occur, and guide decision-making around new programs, facilities, and regulations.

Engagement throughout the year culminated in an opportunity for the community to share their opinion on major policy moves that will shape future changes in the area. These policy moves build upon earlier work completed by a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) in 2018 which defined the vision, planned investments in Grand Connection and Eastrail, and community input from earlier project phases – organized into the following policy topics:



In sharing these findings across different engagement activities, the planning team has made a concerted effort to hear from voices that have not yet been engaged with, and acknowledges that there are still voices missing from this conversation. This report will ultimately be part of a larger set of inputs, which includes continued stakeholder involvement, to inform policy decisions for the Wilburton TOD area.



## Top 5 Things to Know

1. **Policy moves were generally seen as bringing positive changes to the Wilburton TOD area.** Changes that participants were most excited to see coming out of these policy moves included: 1) new small business & gathering spaces; 2) better connections to parks and open spaces; 3) new parks and amenities; 4) increased walking and cycling through the area; and 5) increased pedestrian amenities.
2. **There were diverging opinions around several policy topics, with the most notable being around future building heights and density.** This was an area where more participants saw the potential for negative changes. Examples include the impact of taller and denser buildings on traffic, natural habitat, and access to sunlight and views.
3. **There were several priorities that the community identified that can be considered as draft policies are refined.** These priorities include the protection and expansion of tree canopy, affordable commercial retail spaces, use of development standards to provide for light, air, and circulation, housing affordability, and local access needs (including parking).
4. **There were many residents across the city interested in the future of the Wilburton TOD area.** While Wilburton residents comprised the largest percentage of Open House and Engaging Bellevue participants, staff heard from residents from many different neighborhoods across the city, including Crossroads, Downtown, Lake Hills, West Bellevue, and Woodridge.
5. **Different forms of engagement have been crucial to broadening the conversation.** Fewer people of color and renters responded to the questionnaire. Other forms of engagement continue to be crucial when expanding opportunities for community members that would like to learn more about and participate in the planning process.

## What's Next?

Community input is vital to upcoming phases of the Wilburton Vision Implementation, and the planning team is committed to continual engagement. The findings from this report will be shared with the Planning Commission in the fall, and they will consider this input when developing recommendations on draft policies and code to transmit to the City Council in 2024. Input from this report informs inter-related work on the Grand Connection, Eastrail Framework Plan implementation, and sustainable district opportunities.

## Introduction

In April of 2022, the Bellevue City Council directed staff to implement the vision for the west edge of the Wilburton neighborhood, also known as the Wilburton Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) area. The vision was developed by a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) during 2018, and it envisioned a trail- and transit-oriented mixed-use community. Council directed staff to update the vision to reflect new citywide growth targets, and new housing, sustainability, equity, and multimodal transportation goals. To date, community input has helped enhance the Wilburton TOD vision, shape different growth alternatives to evaluate, and identify early draft policies and policy moves to support vision implementation.



*The Wilburton TOD area will become “Bellevue’s next urban mixed-use community that enhances livability, promotes healthy living, supports economic vitality, and serves the needs of a diverse and growing population. As Bellevue’s cultural and innovative hub, it serves as a regional and international destination that connects people and fosters community by leveraging its existing assets to define a distinctive sense of place and character.”*

-2018 Citizen Advisory Committee Letter to the Mayor

This vision implementation process continues to incorporate input from a variety of sources across several phases. Sources of input have included environmental analyses, review of existing plans and policies, and input from boards and commissions and community stakeholders. The project is currently in Phase 2. Below is a summary of the different project phases, and input relevant to each phase:

- 1a Onboarding and Re-Engagement (Spring & Summer 2022)**  
Re-engage stakeholders involved in the development of the 2018 Wilburton Commercial Area Study and Eastrail Framework Plan. Expand the list of community members who wish to participate.
- 1b Re-Affirm and Enhance Vision (Summer & Fall 2022)**  
Collect input to refine the 2018 Wilburton CAC vision, considering changed conditions within the area since 2018. Develop and refine growth alternatives for environmental review.
- 2 Evaluate Action Alternatives and Proposed Subarea Plan Updates (2022-2023)**  
Collect input on proposed land use map and subarea plan amendments as part of the formal Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) process. Identify a preferred strategy for growth in the Wilburton TOD area.
- 3 Evaluate Proposed Zoning, Development Standards, and Design Guidelines (2023-2024)**  
Collect input on draft zoning, development standards, and design guidelines as part of the formal Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA) process.

## About the Wilburton TOD Area

The Wilburton TOD area is located east of I-405 across from Downtown Bellevue. It is part of the larger Wilburton Neighborhood Area. Specifically, it is the 300-acre area bounded by NE 12<sup>th</sup> Street to the north, the Lake Hills Connector to the south, I-405 to the west, and 124<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE / 118<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE to the east. The TOD area is next to some of largest and most popular parks in the city, including the Bellevue Botanical Garden and Wilburton Hill Park. Very little housing exists in the Wilburton TOD area today, while there is a wide range of commercial uses, including hotels, auto dealerships, medical facilities, grocery stores, restaurants, and professional offices. The Wilburton light rail station, Eastrail multi-use corridor, and Grand Connection will attract and support new housing (including affordable housing), economic development, multimodal transportation projects, cultural amenities, and sustainability opportunities. Updates to existing policies and codes will help facilitate redevelopment in the Wilburton TOD area and meet these emerging needs.



Map of the Wilburton TOD area

## Overview of Engagement Activities

Phase 2 of community engagement began in January of 2023 and continued through September of 2023. Engagement goals for this phase included informing the public of opportunities to participate in the formal Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) and Environmental Review processes; and gathering input to help craft and refine policies that guide successful implementation of the Wilburton study area vision. As part of the Phase 1 and 1b engagement report, staff also identified the opportunity for more focused outreach to minority-owned businesses, current residents living within the study area, and youth.

### Public Engagement

In the fall of 2022, the planning team developed three alternatives for adding housing and job capacity to Wilburton. As part of the [environmental review](#) process, those alternatives underwent a thorough analysis to understand the potential environmental impacts and suggested ways to mitigate them. The [Draft Environmental Impact Statement](#) (DEIS) was released on April 27, 2023 and the comment period lasted 45 days. All comments submitted will be addressed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The analysis will inform policies and regulations aligned with the city's preferred plan for growth for Wilburton.

The planning team wanted to provide additional opportunities for the public to weigh in on the priorities that could be achieved through the Wilburton Vision Implementation. In March of 2023, approximately 900 mailers were distributed to residents and businesses within the Wilburton TOD area to inform them of opportunities to get involved. The planning team organized several events to get feedback and to respond to questions from community:

- **Virtual Information Session.** On April 11, 2023, the planning team presented the vision and growth options being studied in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.
- **In-Person Open House.** On August 15, 2023, the planning team shared information on key policy moves for implementing the Wilburton TOD vision and solicited feedback to inform updated policies for the area.



*The planning team held an in-person Open House at the Bellevue Botanical Garden that was attended by over 85 community members.*

### Board Updates

The planning team provided engagement and policy updates with different boards, such as:

- **Youth Link Board.** Youth Link Board members invited the planning team to participate in their biannual Youth Involvement Conference, and co-lead conference workshops that engaged youth on planning ideas for the Wilburton TOD area.

- **Bellevue Network on Aging (BNOA).** BNOA members provided input on policy development considerations specifically for older adults and senior groups.
- **Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network (BDAN).** BDAN members provided input on equity considerations and engagement ideas that could inform policy development.
- **Parks and Community Services Board.** Board members provided input on draft Parks, Recreation & Open Space policies.

As part of the formal Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) process, the planning team also presented to the Transportation Commission and Planning Commission to get their direction on draft policy recommendations.

### Community Conversations, Presentations & Tabling

The planning team utilized targeted outreach with a variety of groups and organizations:

- **Uwajimaya.** The planning team tabled at Uwajimaya to share project information.
- **Overlake Medical Center.** The planning team connected with Overlake Medical Center to share project information with medical staff.
- **CIRC Living.** The planning team connected with CIRC to share information with staff on how to get involved.
- **Youth Link.** The planning team shared information with middle and high school students about planning and invited them to share their priorities for the future and envision possible futures for Wilburton.
- **Bellevue School District.** The planning team met with Bellevue School District teachers implementing a 4<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum on planning and met with students who presented their ideas for Wilburton's future.
- **Wilburton Community Association.** The planning team shared WCA information at the Open House and tabled at their annual picnic.
- **Eastside Welcoming Week.** The planning team tabled during the Welcoming Week Resource Fair and invited participants to share their input on key policy moves.



*The planning team tabled at locations within the community, such as Uwajimaya grocery store.*



*The planning team did interactive workshops with youth to understand their priorities for planning the future of the Wilburton TOD area.*



*The planning team attended a presentation at Medina Elementary School to listen to and provide feedback on 4<sup>th</sup> graders' ideas for a future vision for the Wilburton TOD area.*

## Overview of Participation

The planning team provided a range of opportunities for people to provide input including evening events, weekend tabling, online engagement, drop-in opportunities, and workshops. Over 350 people were heard from during this engagement period, including:

- Approximately **50 people** attended an online information session in April and included a request for language interpretation and translation.
- Approximately **30 youth** attended a workshop facilitated by the planning team to engage youth around planning for Wilburton.
- **87 people** attended an in-person open house in August.
- Approximately **30 people** dropped by at various tabling events.
- **169 people** provided input via our online platform [www.engagingbellevue.com](http://www.engagingbellevue.com)

## Summary of Input

### April Information Session

The April Information Session provided an interactive setting for participants to learn more about the Wilburton TOD vision elements, growth options being studied in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and how community input would inform updated policies for the TOD area. The planning team used Mentimeter to ask attendees what opportunities and challenges they saw in implementing the vision. People expressed interest in the following opportunities, including:

- More places to spend time and connect with community, such as restaurants, small businesses, parks and trails.
- More areas for family-friendly gatherings and recreation.
- Accommodating more density around transit stations.
- Greater affordability.
- Recognition of Japanese history and heritage in the area.



Example of Mentimeter prompts that allowed attendees to submit and read other attendees' responses in real time.



People expressed the following challenges to implementing the vision, including:

- Safety concerns.
- Traffic impacts.
- Balancing different community needs with competing values for what they want to see in the Wilburton TOD (i.e. density, transportation options, desire for change, etc.).
- Timing of Wilburton vision implementation alongside other investments, including Eastrail and Grand Connection.
- Development feasibility.
- Achieving appropriate scale of development.

### Youth Involvement Conference

As part of the Youth Involvement Conference workshop, youth were asked to envision implementing the Wilburton vision by locating different amenities and land uses across the TOD area. Observations from youth emphasized **focusing opportunities around Wilburton Station and Eastrail**, as well as considering **equity** and **climate change**.

### Boards

Throughout the spring, the planning team presented to different boards and asked for input on how to best engage different communities around the development of policies for the Wilburton TOD, and on key policy considerations.

Bellevue Network on Aging (BNOA) members expressed the need for more focused discussions with older adults within the community and encouraged the planning team to consider **universal design in the development of future housing**.

Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network (BDAN) members were divided into breakout groups to identify equity considerations across different policy topic areas. Housing was identified as an important policy topic, with a desire for **stronger affordable housing tools and strategies that ensure affordable units are built in the study area**. Parks, recreation & open space was also an important policy topic, with a desire for **actively used greenspace that is next to housing, well-connected to surrounding areas, and inviting a wide range of people**. The different groups also shared the need for engagement with local neighborhoods both within and bordering the Wilburton TOD area.

The Parks & Community Service Board had the opportunity to weigh in on preliminary vision and policy goals in the early winter, and subsequently draft parks, recreation, and open space policy amendments in the late spring. Input on draft policies included:



*Youth used different colored lego pieces, markers, stickers, and construction paper to represent different land use and placemaking ideas.*

- Consideration of parks and open space connections within and outside the Wilburton TOD area, including the Bellevue Botanical Garden and the Spring District.
- Desire for more specificity on open space and natural enhancement opportunities (described much more broadly in policy).
- Emphasis on Eastrail corridor’s role as a linear park space.
- Emphasis on public access opportunities around Lake Bellevue.

### Eastside Welcoming Week Resource Fair

The planning team engaged the public at the Eastside Welcoming Week Resource Fair in September, which provided an opportunity for local agencies, organizations, businesses, and community partners to share resources and services with immigrants and residents alike. Attendees were asked to share what they hoped to see in Wilburton to make it a more inviting place to be. Observations from attendees emphasized making Wilburton an **inclusive place for families and seniors, including housing affordable to retired seniors, covered spaces for community events and socializing, and more transportation options to neighborhood services.**



*Community members had an opportunity to learn and weigh in on the big policy ideas that would make the Wilburton TOD area an inviting place to be.*

### August Open House & Engaging Bellevue Questionnaire

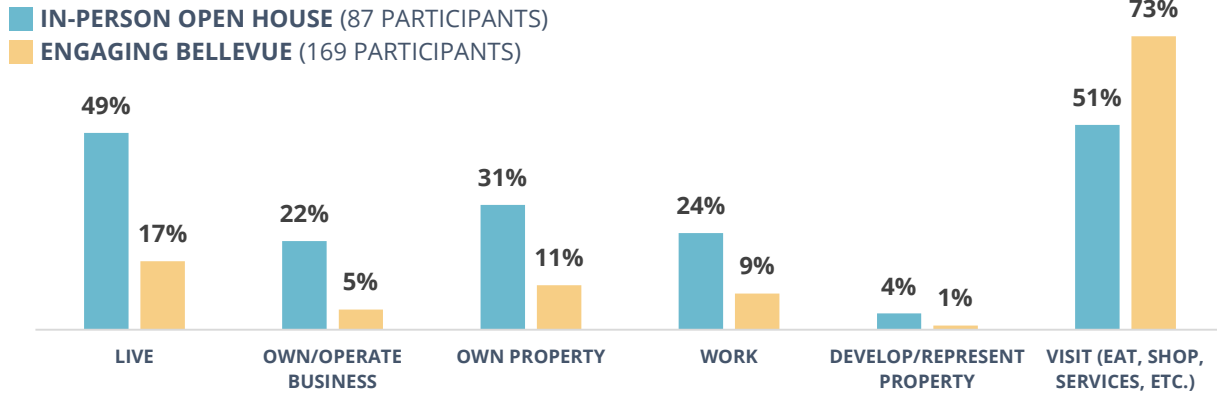
87 people attended the in-person open house in August at the Bellevue Botanical Gardens. In addition to mailing lists and social media, targeted outreach was done to multi-family properties in the Wilburton TOD area, affordable housing providers, and advocacy organizations to raise awareness of the event. Participants were given a worksheet to fill out as they reviewed information on different key policy moves and were asked to submit their worksheets so that staff could summarize their input. 45 worksheets were submitted.

Open house participants were invited to answer the following questions on their worksheet:

- What is your relationship to the Wilburton TOD?
- What changes do you think will result from these policy moves?
- Are there other priorities beyond these policy moves that you feel are missing?

A companion online questionnaire on Engaging Bellevue with similar prompts was made available to those unable to attend the open house or who wished to provide additional input on key policy moves. Additional outreach through mailing lists, social media, and community events was done to expand the reach of this questionnaire. The questionnaire was live between August 16 and September 18, and 169 responses were received.

Approximately half of Open House attendees identified as living in the Wilburton TOD area and/or visiting the area for dining, shopping, services, etc. Meanwhile, the Engaging Bellevue questionnaire largely drew from people who visited the Wilburton TOD area.



Engaging Bellevue provided an opportunity to collect demographics on those who opted to provide this information. A more detailed breakdown is included in *Appendix A*. This information helps planning staff better understand how populations reached through Engaging Bellevue aligns with city-wide demographics. Staff strives for broad representation yet recognizes that there are voices missing when considering the input received. Demographic comparisons below show a gap in participation of people of color and from renters, and participation from younger people generally similar to city-wide demographics.

### RACE/ETHNICITY

**61%** OF BELLEVUE ARE PEOPLE OF COLOR

**20%** OF RESPONDENTS WERE PEOPLE OF COLOR

### AGE

18 - 24 25 - 34 35 - 44 **41%** OF BELLEVUE ARE AGES 18 THROUGH 44

**41%** OF RESPONDENTS WERE AGES 18 THROUGH 44

### OWNERSHIP STATUS

**47%** OF BELLEVUE ARE RENTERS

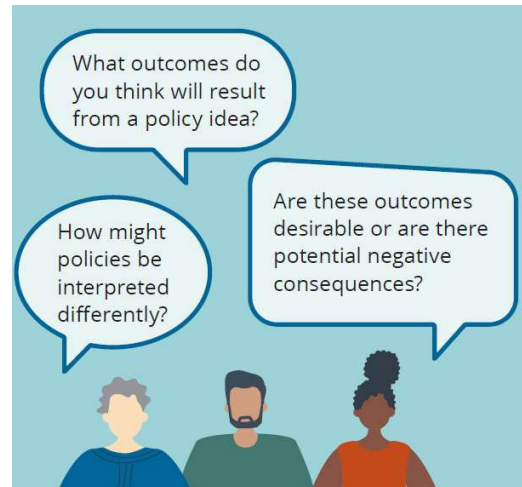
**22%** OF RESPONDENTS WERE RENTERS

## Major Themes for Key Policy Moves

This section summarizes major themes for nine different policy topic areas shared at the Open House event and Engaging Bellevue questionnaire: 1) Environment; 2) Parks, Recreation & Open space; 3) Economic Development; 4) Arts & Culture; 5) Urban Design; 6) Transportation; 7) Land Use; 8) Housing; and 9) Implementation.

The themes below highlight positive and negative changes respondents expected to see if policy moves were implemented, areas of divergence where opinions differed, and other priorities to address as part of future policy.

Note that not every opportunity is appropriately addressed through policy. A policy describes *what* the city wants to achieve, but it does not spell out exactly *how* to do it. A good policy balances clear direction with enough flexibility to respond to changing conditions, new technologies, or unforeseen events. Staff will consider different types of input, including input from community engagement activities described in this report, to advance policy refinements that achieve a balance of both direction and flexibility in its implementation, while aligning with the community's vision and shared values for the Wilburton TOD area.



*Key considerations for providing meaningful input on policies that was shared with community members during the in-person Open House event and online Engaging Bellevue questionnaire.*

### ENVIRONMENT

The most prevalent themes pertained to **tree canopy & habitat, community greenspaces, and carbon footprint.**

- Area of divergence around tree canopy:
  - Respondents expect more trees to be planted, and prioritization of tree canopy in future development and open spaces.
  - Other respondents are concerned changes will result in tree removal.
- Respondents expect more community greenspace throughout. Examples include community gardens within future development.
- Respondents expect to see a reduction in carbon emissions through green building design, renewable energy infrastructure, and increased walking and cycling.
- Desire for more specific regulations and/or requirements around green buildings.



*Example image used during engagement to highlight policy moves around green stormwater infrastructure and vegetation in the TOD area.*

## PARKS, RECREATION & OPEN SPACE

The most prevalent themes pertained to **access to parks** and the **creation of new parks and amenities**.

- Respondents expect to see more people walking and cycling to parks, with supporting infrastructure to facilitate access.
- Respondents expect to see more family-oriented opportunities for gathering and recreation.
- Some respondents are concerned about traffic generation and parking on neighborhood streets for those accessing parks by car.
- Some respondents are concerned about the size of new parks and would like parks large enough to serve expected future densities.
- Desire for park features that are inclusive to those aging or mobility impaired.



*Example image used during engagement to highlight policy moves around new park amenities, including those provided along the Eastrail corridor.*

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The most prevalent themes pertained to **small businesses & gathering spaces, large-format retail & auto**, and **access to businesses**.

- Area of divergence around the success of small businesses:
  - Respondents expect to see a greater variety of local businesses such as food and beverage, particularly in mixed-use development.
  - Other respondents are concerned that small businesses will not be able to afford rent in mixed-use building types.
- Desire for programs and incentives that help small businesses thrive.
- Desire for adequate parking provided for businesses in the area.
- Respondents identified the need for existing larger-scale retail in the area (grocery stores, hardware stores, auto dealerships), yet see an opportunity for such uses to continue existing in a different format.



*Example image used during engagement to highlight policy moves around small-scale retail opportunities, such as cafes, in the TOD area.*

## ARTS & CULTURE

The most prevalent themes pertained to **cultural activities, public art, and history & heritage.**

- Area of divergence around the role of public art:
  - Respondents expect to see more public art opportunities driven by the community and embedded in new development.
  - Other respondents are concerned about over-investment in public art, and that new art will be unattractive or politicized.
  - Some respondents feel that arts and cultural opportunities should not be focused on specific groups.
- Respondents expect to see more spaces and facilities that celebrate, attract, and allow others to experience different cultures and learn different histories.



*Example image used during engagement to highlight policy moves around art opportunities integrated into infrastructure.*

## URBAN DESIGN

The most prevalent themes pertained to **pedestrian experience, public amenities and building scale.**

- Respondents expect to see elements that create a walkable pedestrian environment, including weather protection, landscaping, furnishings, and traffic calming.
- Some respondents are concerned about taller buildings blocking views, impacting traffic, and making the area feel enclosed.
- Area of divergence around the pedestrian activities on the sidewalk:
  - Respondents expect to see more people walking around, contributing to a sense of vibrancy and increased public safety.
  - Other respondents are concerned about overcrowded sidewalks, and the spillover of business activities onto the sidewalk.
- Desire for strong development standards, such as setbacks, for adequate light, air, and pedestrian circulation in public places.



*Example image used during engagement to highlight policy moves around supporting development standards that provide for more pedestrian-friendly activity.*

## TRANSPORTATION

The most prevalent themes pertained to **walking, cycling, and vehicular travel.**

- Respondents expect to see improvements that result in safer, well-connected facilities.
- Area of divergence around a future multimodal design of 116<sup>th</sup> Ave NE:
  - Respondents expect a street design that protects cyclists from vehicles.
  - Other respondents expect to see increased traffic along 116<sup>th</sup> Ave NE caused by reduced vehicular lanes and increased cycling infrastructure.
- Area of divergence around how people will travel to the Wilburton TOD area:
  - Respondents believe that people will visit the area using other modes of travel if given the option to leave their cars elsewhere.
  - Other respondents believe that people will not visit the area because future development will make it inconvenient for those accessing the area by car.
- Desire to address accessibility for those that rely on parking for daily needs.



*Example image used during engagement to highlight policy moves around future access corridors that include active transportation components and support future development needs.*

## LAND USE

The most prevalent themes pertained to **building heights and density, parking, and land use mix.**

- Area of divergence around the appropriate amount of density to support livability:
  - Respondents expect to see greater opportunity for density around transit and Lake Bellevue.
  - Some respondents see decreased livability because of greater traffic congestion and aesthetic impacts.
- Area of divergence around who is served by future land uses:
  - Respondents expect to see more mixed use and “missing middle” housing as part of the future land use mix.
  - Other respondents expect to see uses catered toward wealthier communities.
- Desire for appropriate parking approaches, including shared parking, no parking minimums, and increased access options.
- Desire for building standards that do not fully maximize the building envelope, and instead provide opportunities for light, air, and public views.



*Example image used during engagement to highlight policy moves around building densities that include a range of high-rise and mid-rise development that transitions to residential areas to the east.*

## HOUSING

The most prevalent themes pertained to **affordability, unit types, and households served.**

- Area of divergence around affordability:
  - Respondents expect to see housing affordable for different income levels, especially for those working in the area.
  - Other respondents expect to see housing unaffordable for professions such as teachers, service workers, etc.
- Area of divergence around future housing's relation to nearby residential areas:
  - Respondents expect to see a greater mix of higher-density unit types.
  - Other respondents expect to see negative impacts on single-family residential.
- Desire for unit types that accommodate the needs of seniors and families.
- Desire for tools that ensure that truly affordable housing is built.



*Example image used during engagement to highlight policy moves around diversity of residential unit types, including those that are facing the street.*

## IMPLEMENTATION

The most prevalent theme pertained to **public benefits delivered through implementation.**

- Area of divergence around who benefits from future investments:
  - Respondents expect to see increased density providing for public benefits that expand walking and cycling, as well as create open spaces.
  - Other respondents expect that only the development community will benefit from the increased density, and not the public.
- Desire for greater transparency in the implementation process (in terms of financial strategies, timing, etc.)



*Example image used during engagement to highlight policy moves around implementation of future investments, including the Grand Connection across I-405.*



## Next Steps

Information from community engagement during [Phase 1 & 1b](#) informed the structure and content of engagement activities during this current phase, Phase 2, and the development of alternatives being studied through the EIS.

Phase 2 engagement will inform refinements to recommended draft policy amendments for the Wilburton TOD area by considering priority areas that community members identified when thinking about the future of the Wilburton TOD area. Community feedback will be discussed with the Planning Commission in the fall, and this feedback is considered an important input for the Planning Commission’s recommendation on Comprehensive Plan policies to the City Council in early 2024. After the preferred alternative for the Wilburton TOD area has been studied in the FEIS, the Planning Commission will provide their recommendation on policy amendments for the area based on information coming out of the FEIS analysis, including future land use and affordable housing. These policy amendments will subsequently provide the direction for the development of draft land use regulations through the Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA) process that will be presented alongside recommended policy amendments.